DEVIANCE IN CLASSROOMS

David H. Hargreaves, Stephen K. Hester and Frank J. Mellor

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Deviance in classrooms

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Appreciating a phenomenon is a fateful decision, for it eventually entails a commitment—to the phenomenon and to those exemplifying it—to render it with fidelity and without violating its integrity. Entering the world of the phenomenon is a radical and drastic method of appreciation.

David Matza, *Becoming Deviant*

A new look at teaching, if there is to be one, seems to require us to move up close to the phenomena of the teacher's world. But such a move, though long overdue, is just the beginning.

Philip Jackson, *Life in Classrooms*

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Preface

This book was written with two kinds of reader in mind—social scientists and teachers. This double audience has influenced the style in which we have written it, for these two groups have somewhat different working vocabularies. We have tried to write in a way that will make our research and our theory readily comprehensible to both. Social scientists will judge the book by the quality of the social science it contains. We have sought to make a contribution to the theory of deviance and to give insight into our own research procedures and the ways in which we generated theory. Teachers or student teachers will perhaps look at our work in a different way, for they are more interested in the practical applications of theory than in theory in its relation to the social scientific enterprise. They will perhaps expect to be surprised by what they read, for they may be of the view that social scientists should unearth something new, something previously unknown. We have made no great 'discoveries' about classroom deviance. Our object was to attempt to *understand* classroom deviance, and that is an interest shared by both social scientists and teachers. For social scientists, we have sought to generate a more adequate conceptual framework and contribute to the theory of deviance; for teachers, we have sought to elucidate what (in one sense) they already know, and thereby lay some foundations for the development of practical insights into their everyday problems. As Kurt Lewin insisted, a good theory is a practical theory.

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1 A critical introduction to labelling theory

Since the 1960s social scientists have been involved in a fundamental and often heated debate about the appropriateness of 'paradigms'[1] for the social sciences. Essentially these paradigms are about the scientific models operated by social scientists and the models of man that are implicit in these scientific models. A paradigm consists of a set of assumptions. Every social scientist works within a paradigm and it is from the assumptions within it that he is able to define certain issues as 'problems', ask certain questions rather than others, adopt certain research methods rather than others, and show a preference for certain kinds of analysis, explanation and theory. The debate, of course, is an exceedingly old one which has been maintained as long as social science itself. The contemporary debate is different in terms of its dominance in the thinking and writing of social scientists and the strength of views of the proponents of different paradigms; the debate is no longer a subterranean specialism of interest to a minority of social scientists and to philosophers of science. All social scientists are, in some way, being affected by the debate.

In an oversimplified form the debate can be characterized as a battle between the more traditional social scientists of this century, who are grouped together under the general label of 'positivists', and the growing supporters of the alternative paradigm, who are grouped together under the general label of 'phenomenologists'. Such labels are inevitably crude since each contains a host of different perspectives, positions or 'schools' in psychology, social psychology and sociology. At its root the debate is between those ('positivists') who believe that social science must be closely modelled upon the natural sciences and those ('phenomenologists') who believe that it should not.

Nowhere has this debate been more sharply felt than in that area of social science, at both the psychological and the sociological level, which is traditionally referred to as deviance. In this book on deviance we have selected certain problems for study; we have drawn on and developed certain theoretical concerns and concepts; we

have employed a preferred methodology. In so doing we are working within the 'phenomenological' rather than the 'positivistic' paradigm. It is therefore right and proper that we should explain the differences between paradigms within studies of deviance. Only then can a reader judge what we are trying to do and why we are trying to do it. Only then can the strengths as well as the limitations of our contribution be estimated.

Some years ago the broad differences within deviance studies were analysed by Rubington and Weinberg (1968) in an introduction to their own 'interactionist' approach. They did this by showing the differences in the kinds of question that proponents of conflicting paradigms address themselves to. The more traditional, positivistic-oriented social scientist asked:

Who is deviant?
How did he become a deviant?
Why does he continue in deviance despite controls brought to bear on him?
What socio-cultural conditions are most likely to produce deviants?
How may deviants be best controlled?

From this position, which Rubington and Weinberg described as 'deviance as the given object', we can detect some important assumptions. Deviant acts are treated as relatively unproblematic; we all know what deviance is. The problem is to find those who are deviants, who are then taken to be quite different from 'normal' or non-deviant persons, and explain how they come to be what they are. Given that we have statistics about deviants (records of criminals, records of admission to mental hospitals, etc.), the aim is to provide a causal analysis which will explain how these persons came to be deviant and why they persist in their deviance. This causal analysis would then provide a basis on which we could develop prescriptive policies aimed at the reduction or elimination of deviance. The perspective is, in David Matza's (1969) term, correctional.

The alternative position, which Rubington and Weinberg describe as 'deviance as subjectively problematic', makes very different assumptions. The search is no longer for a strictly causal analysis, for that presupposes a determinism. Instead it is assumed that persons make choices, even though these choices may be constrained by various psychological or sociological factors. The statistics on deviance are no longer 'facts' to be explained; instead the statistics are themselves in need of explanation, for they are seen to represent social constructions, not 'facts'.[2] The deviant person is not seen as inherently different from 'normals': the main difference is that deviant persons have been apprehended and processed (by courts,

hospitals, etc.) as deviant, whereas so-called normals have not, in spite of having committed similar deviant acts in many cases. Deviants have been labelled or defined by others. There is less emphasis on providing correctional prescriptions. Rather the aim is, again in Matza's words, to be 'appreciative', that is to understand the experience of being deviant. As much attention must be paid to those who label as to those who are labelled. These different assumptions reveal themselves in the questions posed by those social scientists who share this position.

> What are the circumstances under which a person gets set apart, henceforth to be considered a deviant?
> How is the person cast in that social role?
> What actions do others take on the basis of this redefinition of the person?
> What value, positive or negative, do they place on the facts of deviance?
> How does a person judged to be deviant react to this designation?
> How does he adopt the deviant role that is set aside for him?
> What changes in his group membership result?
> To what extent does he realign his self-conception to accord with the deviant role assigned him?

The social scientists who adopt this second position have come to be known as 'labelling theorists', though because of the misleading implications of this title (label?) many prefer the term 'the interactionist approach' to deviance. Two features stand out in this perspective. First, deviance is seen as a question of social definition. Deviance does not arise when a person commits certain kinds of act. Rather, deviance arises when some other person(s) defines that act as deviant. Second, deviance is seen as a relative phenomenon. If a deviant act is an act that breaks some rule, then since rules vary between different cultures, subcultures and groups, acts which are deviant (i.e. which break rules) in one culture, subculture or group may not be deviant in another culture, subculture or group. It is this which allows Becker (1963) to say, 'Deviance . . . is created by society . . . social groups create deviance by making rules whose infraction constitutes deviance', which at first sight seems to defy our common sense. Yet if we abolish rules we also abolish the deviant acts that break those rules. If we abolished the rules against driving over 30 mph in residential areas people would no doubt continue to drive at higher speeds but such acts would no longer be deviant (criminal) acts. We can now see why these writers are called labelling theorists or interactionists. Deviance arises not when persons commit certain

kinds of act; it arises when a person commits an act which becomes known to some other person(s) who then defines (or labels) that act as deviant. On this view deviance is a social, interactional phenomenon.

These ideas were pushed into the mainstream of sociological work in the 1960s—they had been born much earlier—by the writing of Howard Becker (1963). This book is a highly readable account of labelling theory, and it is perhaps this feature, combined with its 'quotability' for students and their examiners, which made this such a popular presentation.

> The person making the judgment of deviance, the process by which the judgment is arrived at, and the situation in which it is made may all be intimately involved in the phenomenon of deviance. . . . Deviance is *not* a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label. . . . Whether an act is deviant depends on how other people react to it. . . . Deviance is not a quality that lies in the behaviour itself, but in the interaction between the person who commits an act and those who respond to it.

A year before John Kitsuse (1962) was making the same point, when he proposed that

> deviance may be conceived as a process by which the members of a group, community, or society (1) interpret behaviour as deviant, (2) define persons who so behave as a certain kind of deviant, and (3) accord them the treatment considered appropriate to such deviants.

Erikson (1962), also writing at this same period, takes the same view:

> Deviance is not a property *inherent in* certain forms of behaviour; it is a property *conferred upon* these forms by the audiences which directly or indirectly witness them. The critical variable in the study of deviance, then, is the social audience rather than the individual actor, since it is the audience which eventually determines whether or not any episode of behaviour or any class of episodes is labelled deviant.

All three writers emphasize the 'societal reaction' to the act rather than the act itself in the generation of deviance.

There is an elegant simplicity about the basic ideas of labelling theory. The danger of such simplicity, which is perhaps relatively

rare in social science, is that it is easily oversimplified. Such has been true of labelling theory, when it is argued popularly that labelling theory is merely asserting that people or acts are deviant when somebody defines them as deviant. This is not so. We cannot here make an exposition of all the subtle features of labelling theory, but we shall confine ourselves to noting one important concept which we shall ourselves use later in the book. This is the concept of 'secondary deviation' proposed by one of the most original of the labelling theorists, Edwin Lemert (1951, 1967). He noted that:

> There is a large turn away from the older sociology which tended to rest heavily upon the idea that deviance leads to social control. I have come to believe the reverse idea, i.e., social control leads to deviance, is equally tenable and the potentially richer premise for studying deviance in modern society.

It was as a logical extension of this idea that he developed the concept of secondary deviation. He assumes that very large numbers of persons commit various deviant acts, and that they do so in many varied contexts for many varied motives. But the commission of these deviant acts has only 'marginal implications' for the person committing the act, especially when the acts are undetected, or unreported, or are able to be 'normalized' by the offender. This Lemert calls primary deviation. In contrast, secondary deviation arises in certain circumstances when there is a social reaction to the deviance. That is, the social reaction (the labelling) may create a problem for the person who committed the act.

> Secondary deviation is deviant behaviour, or social roles based upon it, which becomes a means of defence, attack, or adaptation to the overt and covert problems created by the societal reaction to primary deviation. In effect, the original 'causes' of the deviation recede and give way to the central importance of the disapproving, degradational, and isolating reactions of society. . . . Secondary deviation refers to a special class of socially defined responses which people make to problems created by the societal reaction to their deviance. These problems . . . become central facts of existence for those experiencing them, altering psychic structure, producing specialized organization of social roles and self-regarding attitudes. . . . The secondary deviant . . . is a person whose life and identity are organized around the facts of deviance.

In other words, the social reaction to deviance (the labelling) creates, under certain conditions, problems for the person who committed the deviant act which can be resolved by the commission of yet

further deviant acts and by a self-designation as a deviant person.
The paradox is that the social reaction which was intended to control,
punish or eliminate the deviant act has come to shape, stabilize and
exacerbate the deviance.

This sensitivity to the possibility that social control can in certain
circumstances lead to the amplification of deviance has, however,
led to an underemphasizing of the idea that social control can lead
to the elimination or attenuation of deviance—perhaps because this
is the common-sense assumption about the relationship between
social control and deviance which was adopted in an unquestioned
manner by earlier sociological theories. Nevertheless, there have been
far too few studies which demonstrate the attenuative rather than the
amplificatory impact of social control.[3]

No one, however, would question that labelling theory has been
highly productive in promoting a wide range of empirical research
in the USA (e.g. many contributions to Rubington and Weinberg,
1968, 1973) as well as in Britain (e.g. the work of the National
Deviancy Conference reported in Cohen, 1971; Taylor and Taylor,
1973; Bailey and Young, 1973). At the same time labelling theory
has been the subject of considerable critical controversy. Some of
this criticism has been concerned with the scope or range of labelling
theory. The question at issue here is the capacity of labelling theory
to comprehend and take account of problems, concepts, findings and
phenomena that play an important role in other theoretical formula-
tions of deviance, such as functionalist, subcultural, conflict and
Marxist perspectives. Essentially this argument centres on the com-
petition between theories. Although some attempts have been made
to integrate different theories (notably Erikson, 1962, 1966), an
important and often unrecognized obstacle to such theoretical
convergence is that different theories stem from different paradigms
whose basic assumptions are often incompatible. For instance, it is
often alleged that labelling theory fails to give an adequate causal
analysis of deviant behaviour.[4] It is certainly true that some accounts
by labelling theorists, especially Becker, are notoriously unclear
about whether or not a causal explanation is being offered. A
positivist critic expects a 'good' theory to provide a causal analysis
and a theoretical formulation in a hypothetico-deductive form. A
phenomenological theorist, however, would maintain quite different
criteria of a 'good' theory and would not expect to create theory in
a hypothetico-deductive form or to offer a causal analysis. Since
different theorists are in effect speaking different social scientific
languages, the ensuing debate is often replete with misunderstand-
ings, misinterpretations, unproductive accusations and the posing
of what are (to the other side) rhetorical questions. Some labelling

theorists have brought this trouble upon themselves since they—like some of the functionalists before them—have stood in the mid-ground between positivism and phenomenology with the result that the causal status of some of their concepts is left ambiguous. A good example is Lemert's concept of secondary deviation. Clearly a full analysis of this competition between different theories is beyond the scope of a brief introduction to our own work and in any case has been treated extensively elsewhere (Schur, 1971 and 1973; Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973).

Of more relevance to our purposes are what we might call the 'internal criticisms' of labelling theory, that is, those criticisms which are offered from within the same paradigm and which are directed towards the elucidation and extension of labelling theory. The early formulations of labelling theory inevitably suffered from inconsistencies and inadequacies which these criticisms have helped to clarify and overcome. We shall examine selected examples of these 'internal criticisms' rather than offer a systematic survey of them, since our purpose is to convey to the reader—especially to one who is relatively unfamiliar with labelling theory—some insight into the range and subtlety of labelling theory as well as into its continuing evolution.

Labelling theory stands within the 'phenomenological' paradigm. In making this assertion we are using the term phenomenology in a very broad, even simplistic, way to embrace several distinctive perspectives (Natanson, 1963), including symbolic interactionism, the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz, and the ethnomethodological approach stemming from the work of Aaron Cicourel and Harold Garfinkel. (In so doing we are temporarily emphasizing the common ground between these perspectives and ignoring the significant differences between them.) The early formulations of labelling theory are unquestionably rooted in symbolic interactionism and the interactionist social psychology of George Herbert Mead. Strangely, these origins are acknowledged only once—and in a footnote—in Becker's (1963) exposition. Other writers have been more self-conscious of their roots (e.g. Lemert, 1967; Erikson, 1962; Schur, 1971; Schervish, 1973; Denzin, 1974) or have built upon the ramifications of symbolic interactionism at the theoretical level (e.g. Lofland, 1969; Matza, 1969) or at the substantive level (e.g. Humphreys, 1970). Those who have worked in the phenomenological-ethnomethodological tradition have offered very different analyses to the symbolic interactionists, as is shown in the development of Cicourel's work (1963a, 1963b, 1964, 1968, 1973a, 1973b) as well as in the contributions of Garfinkel (1967), Douglas (1967) and Coulter (1973). At the same time it must be recognized that many writers, such as Williams and Weinberg (1971) and Emerson (1969), have drawn

upon both perspectives. Inevitably our distinction between these two perspectives is, in the absence of a deeper analysis, somewhat simplistic. But, since our own work also draws upon both perspectives, it does provide us with a useful heuristic device with which we can organize the differences in the problems and questions raised by these different perspectives.

We shall deal first with those criticisms which for convenience can be described as symbolic interactionist. Many critics—not all of them symbolic interactionists—have pointed out a serious logical flaw in Becker's (1963) analysis.[5] Becker accepts the general proposition that an act is deviant when it is reacted to by some audience who perceives that act as rule-breaking. Yet he develops the concept of 'secret deviance' which arises when 'an improper act is committed, yet no one notices it or reacts to it as a violation of the rules'. Clearly if the deviant nature of an act depends upon the social reaction to it, then if the reaction is lacking in the case of a given act, that act cannot by definition be deviant. The concept of the secret deviant is thus an illogical one in Becker's formulation. Had Becker been more sensitive to the symbolic interactionist roots of labelling theory, he would have found the solution to the problem in Mead's conceptualization of the self as reflexive, which is perhaps the most fundamental of the symbolic interactionist tenets. In proposing that the self is reflexive Mead argued that a person is able to treat himself as an object, that is, he can become an internal audience to his own actions. A person's act can become deviant in spite of the lack of a social reaction on the part of other persons provided that the actor reacts to his own act as deviant. In other words, through Mead's conceptualization of the self as social, self-labelling becomes an essential feature of labelling theory, as was fully realized by some subsequent writers.[6]

Some critics have argued that labelling theory offers an unacceptable characterization of the deviant. Gouldner (1968), in a skilful and highly entertaining critique of Becker, argues that labelling theory is excessively concerned with the 'underdog' who is represented as a passive victim of the agents of societal reaction. In Gouldner's view, labelling theory

> conceives of the underdog as a *victim*. In some part, this is
> inherent in the very conception of the processes by means of
> which deviance is conceived of as being generated. For the
> emphasis in Becker's theory is on the deviant as the product of
> society rather than as the rebel against it. If this is a liberal
> conception of deviance that wins sympathy and tolerance for the
> deviant, it has the paradoxical consequence of inviting us to

view the deviant as a passive nonentity who is responsible neither for his suffering nor its alleviation—who is more 'sinned against than sinning'. . . . It is not man-fighting-back that wins Becker's sympathy, but rather man-on-his-back that piques his curiosity.

Similarly, Taylor, Walton and Young (1973) have been critical of labelling theory partly on the grounds that it is not consistent with their desire 'to argue that many people commit deviant acts as a result of making choices'. The criticism is not ill-founded in the case of some labelling theorists, but this weakness arises because of a neglect by some writers of one of the central tenets of symbolic inter-actionism, and not because it constitutes an inherent inadequacy of labelling theory which these critics mistake it for. The point is made by Schervish (1973), writing from within the symbolic interactionist framework, when he notes that

> With such an emphasis upon the creative yet social character of man, it is strikingly ironic that labeling theorists often neglect their Meadian heritage by speaking of man in a rhetoric more evocative of the determinism Mead sought to deny . . . [who] instead of expanding the scope of interactionist analysis to study the negotiation of labels by aggressive groups, [have] merely repeated documentation of the successful labeling of helpless individuals.

Indeed, it is the negotiative character of deviant acts, and the motives for those acts, which has been such an outstanding achievement of labelling theory as compared with other theories of deviance. To the labelling theorist there are no 'objective facts' of deviance outside the perception and reactions of the actor and his audience. It is *their* perceptions and reactions, not those of the sociologist, which define deviance. It is this which allows the labelling theorist to recognize— and investigate—the ambiguity and negotiative character of deviance, because he does not impose his own definition of deviance upon the world but derives his definition from the definitional work of the members themselves. It was Becker's failure to recognize this which led him to devise his mistaken conception of 'secret deviance', which cannot be a viable concept because it presupposes that Becker as sociologist has some 'objective' means of knowing that the rule-breaking took place which is independent of the members' own knowledge.

Gouldner has further argued that labelling theorists are guilty of what he calls 'a kind of *underdog* identification', by which he means that the 'appreciative' stance of labelling theorists has been exces-sively and myopically concentrated upon the deviant's point of view

at the expense of the agents of social control (the labellers). The accusation is that labelling theorists are one-sided in their analysis. This must be conceded, as Becker (1974) himself has recently con- ceded, where he rightly notes that it is a basic injunction of inter- actionists 'to study *all* the parties to a situation and their relation- ships' (our italics). Once again, the objection does not identify an inherent weakness of labelling theory, but rather highlights an undue specialized research focus in the practices of labelling theorists. This bias, however, is not entirely unjustified since hitherto the deviants' point of view has too often received only cursory attention from social scientists. It is commendable that labelling theorists should help to 'elevate into public view certain underprivileged aspects of reality. These are aspects of social reality that tend to be com- paratively unknown or publicly neglected because they are dissonant with conceptions of reality held by the powerful and respectable' (Gouldner, 1968). On the other hand Gouldner is correct in his view that labelling theory has shown its limitations in failing to provide an adequate analysis of the wider structural and political context in which both labeller and labelled are enmeshed.[7]

The most characteristic feature of the perspective of symbolic interactionism is its emphasis on the subjective meaning of action of persons ('actors' or 'members') and the methodological corollary of this. In the well-known words of Herbert Blumer (1966):

> On the methodological or research side the study of action would have to be made from the position of the actor. Since action is forged by the actor out of what he perceives, interprets and judges, one would have to see the operating situation as the actor sees it, perceive objects as the actor perceives them, ascertain their meaning in terms of the meaning that they have for the actor, and follow the actor's line of conduct as the actor organizes it—in short, one would have to take the role of the actor and see his world from his standpoint. This methodological approach stands in contrast to the so-called 'objective' approach [of positivism] so dominant today, namely, that of viewing the actor from the perspective of an outside detached observer. The 'objective' approach holds the danger of the observer substituting his view of the field of action for the view held by the actor.

This emphasis is to a large degree shared by those social scientists working in the phenomenological-ethnomethodological tradition, but they extend, refine and transform the issues. Whilst the symbolic interactionists criticized the positivists for ignoring, rejecting or taking for granted the actors' meanings, the phenomenologists (and

we are now using this term in a narrow sense rather than in the broad sense we used at the beginning of the chapter when contrasting paradigms) took to task the symbolic interactionists for what they in their turn took for granted or ignored.[8] In particular, the pheno-menologists are concerned with the relationship between the mean-ings of the actors (what Alfred Schutz calls the 'first-order constructs') and the meanings of the social scientist (the 'second-order constructs') and the way in which the social scientist relates the one to the other. In other words they are concerned with the relationship between 'natural language' and 'social scientific language' or the way in which social scientists make sense of the ways in which the members them-selves make sense of their world. On this view the interpretive work of the social scientist by which he assigns and organizes meaning itself becomes the object of sociological scrutiny.

With regard to the labelling theory approach to deviance, the phenomenologists treat as problematic (that is, in need of explication) the ways in which the labelling theorist himself forges a link between the first-order constructs and the interpretive work of the members and his own second-order constructs such as 'deviance', 'rules', 'labels' and 'social reaction'. Too frequently the symbolic interactionists saw their task as identifying the actions of members as exemplifications of the concepts of 'rule-breaking' or 'labelling' without specifying how they knew this. We shall consider an example of this, and it is an illustration which potentially strikes at the very roots of the field we traditionally refer to as 'deviance'. Labelling theorists, having pre-decided that certain social phenomena, such as blindness, are deviant phenomena, then proceed to analyse them without specifying the grounds on which they made such a decision. Since, to the labelling theorists, deviance is about the perception of rule-breaking, they are obliged to specify the members' first-order rules that are allegedly broken by blind persons. Some labelling theorists have recognized that it is very difficult to specify the rules here—and also in many other cases of 'physical disability' that have traditionally been included in deviance studies—but instead of taking advantage of this difficulty to clarify or examine the relationship between members' and socio-logists' conception of rules, they 'bent' the definition of deviance rather than risk an analysis of the difficulty which might force them to exclude physical disability from the domain of labelling theory. Schur (1971) writes:

> Indeed it is questionable that the notion of rules itself is broad
> enough to describe deviation. This point is clearest in the instance
> of physical disability . . . there are several good reasons for
> wanting to define deviance to include reactions to certain

personal conditions and disabilities which really involve no rule
violation (except perhaps the extremely nebulous 'rule' that one
should not be disabled). From this point of view, reference to
departures from expectations may be more useful than is
reference to violations of rules.

How this transition from 'rules' to 'expectations' is made remains
unclear, for Schur explains neither term. Nor does he assess the
implications for labelling theory. However, it does allow Schur to
make extensive use of studies of physical disability to illustrate
labelling theory, which is presumably what he wanted to do.

Other theorists, who similarly wish to retain physical disability
within the auspices of labelling theory, find other solutions. Mankoff
(1971) devises a distinction between what he terms ascribed and
achieved rule-breaking.

> *Ascribed* rule-breaking occurs if the rule-breaker is characterized
> in terms of a particular physical or visible 'impairment'. He does
> not necessarily have to act in order to be a rule-breaker;
> he acquires that status regardless of his behaviour or wishes.
> Thus, the very beautiful and the very ugly can be considered
> ascriptive rule-breakers.

This is an extraordinary statement in the light of Becker's (1963)
attempt to demarcate labelling theory.

> The simplest view of deviance is essentially statistical, defining
> as deviant anything that varies too widely from the average.
> When a statistician analyses the results of an agricultural
> experiment, he describes the stalk of corn that is exceptionally
> tall and the stalk that is exceptionally short as deviations from
> the mean or average. Similarly one can describe anything that
> differs from what is most common as a deviation. In this view,
> to be left-handed or redheaded is deviant, because most people
> are right-handed and brunette. . . . But it is too simple a
> solution. Hunting with such a definition, we return with a mixed
> bag—people who are excessively fat or thin, murderers, redheads,
> homosexuals and traffic violators. The mixture contains some
> ordinarily thought of as deviants and others who have broken
> no rule at all. The statistical definition of deviance, in short,
> is too far removed from the concern with rule-breaking which
> prompts scientific study of outsiders.

Those acts or persons which Becker excludes because they do not
meet the definition of rule-breaking, Mankoff seeks to include once
again by his device of the 'ascriptive rule'. Unfortunately, this then
provokes definitional problems, which Mankoff does not solve, and

it classifies as 'deviant' many acts and persons that most deviance theorists have ignored.

The clue to the issue lies in Becker's sentence, '. . . we return with a mixed bag *ordinarily thought of* as deviants . . .'. Is this referring to the conceptions of social scientists, or the everyday conceptions of ordinary people, or both? It is this confusion which is endemic in the symbolic interactionist account, and which has been examined in a most important paper by Pollner (1974), who shows that Becker so confuses the members' model of deviance with the socio-logist's model of deviance that in the end neither is adequately conceptualized. Since it is the relationship between these two models that the phenomenologists are anxious to specify, we shall show that the topic of 'physical disability' requires us to provide such a specification—which Pollner does not provide—and that the label-ling theorists of the symbolic interactionist school are limiting the theory by their reluctance to do so.

Since hitherto it is not clear at the members' level what rules the blind and the physically disabled imputedly break, the inclusion of such groups within labelling theory's conception of deviance seems to be unjustified. The only other means of including them is for the sociologist to 'invent' a rule which they allegedly break, e.g. Mankoff's 'ascriptive rule'. But we do not know the sources of such a rule—even though we may suspect the motive for its invention—and the relationship between this rule and the members' conduct towards the disabled is, to say the very least, highly problematic. In short, they would be excluded from labelling theory for the present. This would not, of course, involve a denial that the physically dis-abled share some common problems with those deviants who are included in labelling theory, such as 'stigmatization' or 'exclusion'. But these two groups can be brought together within a different conceptual area—e.g. stigma—which would cross-cut, but not be subsumed by, the conceptual area of deviance.

The classic case of a person who falls within the scope of labelling theory is the criminal, for in this case it is assumed by both socio-logists and members that he has broken a rule; that generally speaking he knew about that rule; that generally speaking he in-tended and chose to break that rule (McHugh, 1970). At this level the members' and the sociologists' models of deviance coincide. But between the criminal (who is clearly within the scope of labelling theory) and the disabled (who in our view are outside the scope of labelling theory) stand the alcoholic and the homosexual. Both have traditionally been included as deviants by the sociologist, long before the birth of labelling theory, presumably on the basis of some common-sense knowledge that 'everybody knows' that they are

'deviants' and 'present problems' for members of society. But if
they are to be included within labelling theory it is essential to show
that they meet the criterion of being perceived rule-breakers which
rests upon the members' knowledge that they broke some rule; that
generally speaking they knew about that rule; that they intended
and chose to break that rule. Yet some members (and some social
scientists) would argue that alcoholics and homosexuals did not have
any choice, or had little choice, in breaking the rules; or that they
did not break the rules; or that, if they did break someone else's rules
they did not break the rules approved by some members. That some
members do not define alcoholics and homosexuals as breaking their
rules is readily accommodated by traditional labelling theory, which
has always assumed the relativity of deviance, i.e. what is rule-
breaking to one person or group is not necessarily rule-breaking to
another group. But the other two points create more serious problems
for labelling theory. For if some members believe that alcoholics do
not break any rules (e.g. laws), then although such members may
disapprove of the conduct of alcoholics and homosexuals, or object
to them, or shun them, they cannot be said to be defining or labelling
them as deviants. To such members, alcoholics and homosexuals are
being defined as 'abnormals', i.e. as statistical freaks or oddities in a
biological or social sense. On this common-sense members' model,
alcoholics and homosexuals are being placed in the same conceptual
category as the physically disabled. A similar argument applies to
those members who believe that alcoholics and homosexuals had no
choice in breaking the rules. The rules are perceived to be broken,
but it is claimed that the offenders were driven by physiological or
biological forces to such acts—which is, of course, the argument
used by alcoholics and homosexuals to 'neutralize' the imputations
of deviance that are sometimes made against them. At the same time
there are some members who believe that there is no distinction to
be made between the criminal, the alcoholic and the homosexual.

From this brief analysis we can appreciate that there is not one
model of deviance operated by all members of society. Rather, there
are multiple models of deviance (and 'abnormality') operated within
the common sense of members. It is imperative that the labelling
theorist recognize and analyse these multiple models and relate each
of them to his own sociological model of deviance. In so doing, he
will inevitably have to pay close attention to questions such as the
imputation of intent and the imputation of responsibility,[9] for these
are an essential part of members' common-sense models of deviance.
It is these issues to which the phenomenologists have been most
sensitive, whereas the symbolic interactionists have tended to ignore
them except in so far as they came to light as part of their examina-

tion of the negotiative work between labeller and labelled.[10] Even then the symbolic interactionists have not been willing to recognize the implications of these features of members' practices for the revision of the sociological model of deviance.

The phenomenological approach to deviance draws our attention to the problematic and ambiguous nature of the members' models of deviance and the interpretive work which is undertaken by members in defining acts as deviant. More than this, the labelling theorist's very formulations of members as doing what the sociologist calls 'defining acts as deviant' or 'imputing rule-breaking' or 'making a reaction' themselves become problematic. This is so because the labelling theorist has not explicated his own interpretive work by which he knows that members are performing acts which he calls 'defining as deviant' or 'imputing rule-breaking', etc. In this sense the phenomenologist makes a notable advance on the symbolic interactionist because he is much more self-conscious in creating and specifying the relationships between sociological, second-order constructs (the sociological theory) and the members' first-order constructs (the members' 'practical' theory). Not only does the phenomenologist examine the common-sense knowledge of deviance which organizes the actions of members, but he is also concerned with his own common-sense knowledge as a social scientist and the ways in which his social scientific work draws upon the common-sense knowledge of the members. For as we saw above, Becker makes use of his common-sense knowledge ('ordinarily thought of as deviant') but fails to analyse it, thus leading to confusion between the sociological model and the members' model.

Since the phenomenologist treats concepts used by labelling theorists as problematic, the concept of 'deviance' itself is problematic in the same way. He cannot accept the implicit position of the symbolic interactionist that 'all social scientists know what we mean by deviance'. The phenomenologist demands, in the words of Phillipson and Roche (1974) in their lucid and incisive essay,

> the clarification of the concept of social deviance itself.
> A clarification would require a statement of the interpretive
> rules according to which sociologists and the members they
> study designate an act, event, or member, as deviant. How do
> members and sociologists decide that an event falls in the
> category which sociologists call social deviance?

The implications of asking such a question are daunting.

> In fact a shared but tacit assumption among sociologists about
> what social deviance is allows discourse to proceed unhindered,

even though the rules for deciding on the conformity or non-conformity of an act are unknown. When the work of those authors writing under the deviance rubric is examined, no clarified, held-in-common observers' or members' rules for deciding the occurrence of deviance and control are found; observers' definitions and depiction of deviance rest on meanings which are presumed to be common-sense and known in common by sociologists. The concepts 'social deviance' and 'social control' then become sociological short-hand terms for grouping together 'what everyone knows' to be rule-breaking and rule-enforcement. But what is lacking is an attempt to specify the interpretive procedures used by members and sociologists in deciding what events are to be included and what are to be excluded from the field of investigation; there are no rules specifying how the sociological concepts relate to members' typifications of the events studied. Until we can describe how members typify some events as deviant and how sociologists jump from their own constructions, then we have no means of choosing between alternative descriptions of the same phenomenon. One account is as good as another as they all (members' and sociologists') rest on unclarified common-sense typifications. This requires the sociologist to inquire into members' and sociologists' rules for imputing deviance to an event.

On this view the dominant, symbolic interactionist version of labelling theory rests on unexamined and unexplicated foundations. They may be sand.

2 *Deviance and education*

The study of deviance in school has hitherto been the province of
the psychologist rather than the sociologist. Educational psycho-
logists, whether as officials employed by local authorities or as
academics in universities and colleges, belong to a well-established
and numerous profession against which the sociologists and social
psychologists of education are a relatively small group of newcomers.
The dominant perspective among educational psychologists has been
clinical and psychometric, and it has also tended to dominate the
thinking of the members of the profession of school counsellors,
whose training has largely been in the hands of educational psycho-
logists. This perspective has generated a vast body of theory and
research as well as many preventive or ameliorative applications.[1]
The fertility of the clinical and psychometric approach is revealed
in the array of psychological tools (e.g. test batteries and test
manuals) and in the popularity of certain conceptual categories
(e.g. 'maladjustment' and 'school phobia').

In comparison, the sociological literature is very small. Here the
major interest, which reflects only one of the interests of the psycho-
logists, has been the relationship between school experience and
juvenile delinquency (Johnson, 1942; Clegg, 1962; Gold, 1963;
Stinchcombe, 1964; Webb, 1962; Downes, 1966; Hargreaves, 1967,
1971; Power, 1967; Schafter and Polk, 1967; Belson, 1968;
McDonald, 1969; Cannon, 1971; Phillipson, 1971). The sociologists
(like the psychologists) have tended to relate their work to the more
mainstream literature of their own discipline, notably the theories of
juvenile delinquency of Cohen (1955) and Cloward and Ohlin (1960),
both of which referred to the role of school experience.

Neither the psychological nor the sociological literature is closely
relevant to the research presented in this book which is concerned
with the application of a particular perspective on deviance, label-
ling theory, to schools, but which is not concerned with the relation-
ship between deviance in school and juvenile delinquency. To our
knowledge there is no major empirical study which applies labelling
theory to the study of deviance in school.[2] We shall not attempt to

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