

THE EFFECT OF LABELING UPON YOUTHS IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM: A REVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE

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The avoidance of the stigma accompanying court appearance was one of the reasons for the development of a specialized court for children. Treatment-oriented reformers had been concerned for many years about the potentially harmful effects upon individuals of arrest, court appearance, and incarceration. As a result, they made efforts in the juvenile court to minimize stigmatization by having informal procedures, hearings closed to the public and press, and limited access to court records. More recently the avoidance of stigma has been used to rationalize the diversion of youths away from the juvenile justice system before they have any contact with it. This heightened concern about stigmatization through juvenile court experience flows in part from a growing interest in labeling theory among social scientists.

The common sense notion that stigma results from court contact has been legitimated by its transformation into a "theory." The term "labeling theory" is used frequently among practitioners in the juvenile justice system to justify any effort to minimize court intervention into the lives of children. But, in spite of such general usage, there has been little systematic explication of the applicability of the theory to the juvenile justice system, and little examination of its empirical support. It has been described as "our most widely accepted, untested formulation" (Klein, 1972: 7).

This article attempts to pull together existing empirical evidence about the effects of police and court labeling upon juveniles. Section I is a brief outline of labeling as a theoretical

perspective on the etiology of deviant behavior. Section II is a discussion of some of the problems we encounter when we attempt to view the juvenile justice system as a labeling agent. Section III, the main body of the article, is a summary and critical discussion of relevant research on the effects of labeling upon juveniles.

I. LABELING AS A CAUSE OF DEVIANT BEHAVIOR

Until recently, thinking about juvenile delinquency and other deviant behavior focused primarily upon characteristics of the individual deviant or upon his environment (Schur, 1973: 22). Juvenile delinquents, for example, were viewed as children whose problems must be diagnosed and treated, as children whose misbehavior must be punished, or as primarily the products (and thus the victims) of poverty and discrimination. Now, many social scientists are turning their attention to a different aspect of deviance — societal response. Adherents to the societal response (or labeling) perspective are attempting to understand the process through which the response to behavior by community members creates deviance. A deviant is defined by labeling theorists as “one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label” (Becker, 1963: 9). Adherents to the labeling perspective maintain that the processes of social control, themselves, work to define and produce deviance (Lemert, 1951; Kitsuse, 1964; Tannenbaum, 1938; Scheff, 1970). Community members not only define certain acts as deviant, they stigmatize and negatively sanction a person who is believed to have committed such an act. Social responses to a person who has been labeled may change because of the label, and he or she may become increasingly isolated from other members of the community. As this occurs, the labeled person begins to employ deviant behavior or a role based upon it as a means of defense, attack, or adjustment to the overt or covert problems created by the societal reaction to his behavior. He moves into what Lemert (1951) calls “secondary deviation.” The labeled person comes to see himself as outside the community; he becomes committed to deviant activities and peers; he comes to see himself as a “deviant.”

Under a somewhat simplified version of labeling theory, the process of creating a juvenile delinquent might proceed like this. A youth commits an act, perhaps on a whim or as a reaction to a particular set of circumstances, such as peer pressure or boredom. If the act is not noticed or reacted to by others,

it may be denied by the youth as not being part of his usual mode of behavior and not repeated. If he is not labeled, the youth may "grow out" of his delinquent behavior. However, if individuals or institutions in the community respond to his behavior as "bad," the youth may come to define it and eventually himself as "bad." There is a legal and social tendency to define a youth in terms of his acts. Thus a juvenile who is found to have committed delinquent acts is declared by the court to be a "juvenile delinquent." As the labeling process continues, the avenues to law-abiding behavior begin to close for the youth as he is pushed toward the outer boundaries of the "acceptable" community. An official reaction such as court appearance may function as a "degradation ceremony," in which the youth "becomes in the eyes of the witnesses a different person" (Goffman, 1956). As the youth's present behavior is labeled negatively, his *previous* behavior, also, is reviewed through a process of retrospection and redefined negatively to fit his new identity. There is a persistent demand for consistency in character, so the delinquent is defined as bad and is not believed if he is good (Tannenbaum, 1938: ch. 1). Through a process of response and counter-response, the youth moves into a delinquent career.¹

Such a formulation puts a large part of the responsibility for the development of an individual's deviant career upon the agents of social control who first respond to his initial norm-violating behavior. Thus, the actions of agencies which are attempting to help a youth who has committed an offense may contribute to the development of his deviant identity and to his committing further deviant acts.

Although most labeling theorists would hesitate to attribute all deviance to the effects of labeling (Becker, 1973: 42), it is important to note where the labeling perspective takes us if it is pushed to its logical conclusion. It implies that a youth will stop behaving in a deviant way if he is left alone and not labeled by intervention agencies. In other words, if we ignore delinquency, it will decrease by itself. The delinquent youth is seen in this theory, as in other theories of the etiology of deviant behavior, as an essentially passive participant in the process. Instead of being moved toward deviant acts by socio-economic conditions, psychological forces, or peer pressures, he is pushed outside the law-abiding community by the labeling of the very people who are trying to help him. Labeling theorists do talk about the negotiation process in labeling and about the elements of bar-

gaining and power relations (Schur, 1971: 56-58). Nevertheless, the deviant seems always to be in a "no-win" situation. In criminal court, for example, he can plead guilty to a lesser charge and improve his chances for a suspended sentence, or go to trial and take the increased risk of getting a jail sentence if found guilty. The deviant's bargaining, when it occurs, seems to revolve around the *degree* to which he will be defined as deviant rather than around a fight for a total rejection of the label.

An important question is whether a person, once labeled, can be "delabeled." Theorists usually note that, just as the interaction process leads to a deviant identity, so also can it be reversed and lead to a non-deviant identity. However, there is almost no discussion about the circumstances under which this occurs and the kind of special re-entry problems that might be encountered by an "outsider" coming back in. The lack of discussion about delabeling suggests that the labeled person rarely returns to non-deviant status.²

In order to show empirically that the official labeling of a youth increases his delinquent behavior, it is necessary to establish a chain of relationship between official response to a youth's delinquent behavior, his awareness of and reaction to the official label, and modification of his subsequent behavior in the direction of greater delinquency. In accordance with this formulation, we can advance the following propositions: (1) a juvenile who commits an offense and is apprehended is more likely to commit further offenses than a juvenile who commits an offense and is not apprehended. If we assume that the further a youth goes into the juvenile justice system the more seriously the label is taken, then it also follows that (2) the more severe a youth's disposition in the court, the more likely he is to commit additional offenses. If labeling works as hypothesized in the case of the child in juvenile court, the act of labeling (apprehension and/or processing as a juvenile offender) leads to modification of behavior (the commission of increased or more serious offenses). The reaction to the labeling act by (1) the labeled individual, and (2) others who respond to the label, represents two intervening variables which can modify the relationship between the act of labeling and the modification of behavior.

II. THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM AS A LABELING AGENT — SOME PROBLEMS

There is a considerable body of literature on labeling theory,

but very little deals specifically with juvenile justice. The attempt to apply labeling theory to a particular substantive area such as juvenile delinquency points up many of the problems with the theory and highlights some of the complexities inherent in acts of labeling.

Throughout this review an attempt is made to focus upon the effect on a youth of being labeled by the juvenile justice system. It is difficult to maintain this focus for several reasons. First, it is difficult to isolate the role of the juvenile justice system as a labeling agent; second, it is hard to separate the effects of labeling from the effects of changes in a youth's life circumstances caused by court action; and, third, it is hard to ascertain the subjective meaning of labeling experiences to the youths who are being labeled.

The term "juvenile justice system," as it is used in this review, refers to the entire process of response by police and court to juvenile misbehavior — both status offenses and criminal offenses. It includes responses which range from an unrecorded contact with a police officer through incarceration in an institution.³

A. The Role of the Juvenile Justice System as a Labeling Agent

Labeling can be approached on the level of interpersonal interaction or on the level of official decision-making (Bordua, 1967: 151). Most of the commentary and research on stigmatization of juvenile offenders has focused upon official decision-making by courts and police. Wheeler and Cottrell (1967) and Lemert (1967) articulate their concern about police and court actions in their papers for the *Task Force Report: Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime*. They stress that stigma can be one of the consequences of wardship, placement, or commitment to a correctional institution. The official labeling of a misbehaving youth as a "delinquent" clearly places him in a category, and responses to him may be different than they would have been if he had not been so categorized. In this sense, the juvenile court may become a connecting link of a vicious circle in which delinquency causes delinquency. However, in addition to the stigma which may accompany official decisions, a youth may experience stigmatization during interpersonal interactions with peers, guards, judges, lawyers, or social workers as he goes through the juvenile justice system. His contact with the system subjects him to the potential effects of labeling at both the interpersonal and the official level. It is difficult to ascertain

whether the effects of labeling, if any appear, come primarily from one level or the other.

A second question regarding the court's role as a labeling agent is whether it initiates labels or rubber-stamps labels previously attached to youths by family, peers, and school officials. Scheff (1964) and Mechanic (1962) found that psychiatric examinations to determine whether an individual should be committed to a mental hospital were often perfunctory, and conducted in a manner clearly indicating that the decision preceded the examination. Emerson (1969: 275) maintains that a similar process operates in the juvenile court. The court "produces delinquents by validating the prior judgments and demands for action of local institutions encountering problems from troublesome youths." The crucial labeling experiences for a juvenile may occur long before he finds his way to court. The court's label represents the end product of a series of institutional reactions to a youth.⁴ Whether the court legitimates labels or creates them, its official decision has one uniquely important aspect. The court alone has the power to unleash powerful forces for community interference into a youth's life. The labeling of a youth as "someone whose life the community can tamper with" may be the key labeling act of the juvenile justice system.

B. Separation of Labeling Effects from Other Effects

Labeling itself may lead to changes in behavior, or it may simply accompany other experiences which lead to changes in behavior. Apprehension and processing of a youth by the court not only constitute a series of acts of labeling, but also result in some very real changes in a youth's life. He may be held for hours or months in a detention prison, or removed from his own home and family and placed in a foster home. He may be institutionalized for long periods of time. In the course of his processing through courts and prisons he comes in contact with a wide range of adults and juveniles and has new experiences. These contacts may change him, entirely apart from any effects of labeling.

Nice kids with good work habits, diligence, and high academic achievement rarely acquire a juvenile court record. Youths who do build up a record usually have a lot of problems — family difficulties, school and learning problems, economic hardship. There are a lot of reasons why they might be singled out for juvenile court intervention and a lot of reasons why

they might have trouble getting a job, apart from their juvenile court experience. Does an employer refuse to hire a youth because he has a juvenile court record, or does he refuse to hire him because he cannot read, dropped out of school, and is insolent? Does he refuse to hire him because the last three fellows with similar backgrounds whom he hired broke a lot of dishes, and quit after the first day? It's hard to know.

C. Subjective Meaning of the Labeling Experience

Although labeling theory has been used almost exclusively to describe negative experiences, examples of positive labeling abound — graduation ceremonies, weddings, citations for bravery, promotions.⁵ Even labeling as a deviant may have positive effects and result in the deterrence of further deviant behavior, as suggested by Thorsell and Klemke (1972: 394). They note that labeling theorists have failed to consider the possibility that the impact of the labeling process may not be uniform in all social settings and across all forms of deviant behavior. Labeling seems to work as a deterrent to deviance in some primary groups where the labeling of deviants creates pressures to bring their behavior back into conformity with group norms.⁶

Court experience might be perceived positively by youths in several different ways. A youth might view his court experience — especially if he is released — as an affirmation of the judge's faith in his basically good nature and his ability to stay out of trouble in the future. Such a view would be in keeping with the rehabilitative, nonthreatening court that many of the early reformers hoped for. Court labeling might be perceived positively for other reasons. Someone who has never received any attention or distinguished himself in any setting before may enjoy the many opportunities provided by the court to enumerate the circumstances of his offenses — real or imagined. For such a youth, the experience may be a positive one, whether the label is or not. Such positive reinforcement of past offenses may result in the committing of further offenses which lead to apprehension and more opportunities for attention.

The court experience may be "positive" for yet another kind of youth. A youth aspiring to membership in a delinquent peer group might view his contact with the court as positive, because to him apprehension and appearance before the court is a symbol of prestige and enhances his status among his peers. If court appearance does give status to a juvenile offender, it may be so only at a certain point in the formation of his delin-

quent identity — after the labeling process is under way, but before he has acquired full delinquent identity. For a youth in this in-between position, labeling by the court may be extremely damaging and may lead to the changes in behavior hypothesized by labeling theorists.

A common assumption among professionals concerned about juvenile justice is that youths will react positively to a proceeding which is fair. They argue that the youth who is adjudicated delinquent in a proceeding in which his rights have been protected will perceive that he has been treated justly, will feel more positive about the experience, and therefore will be more amenable to rehabilitation. One wonders if anyone who is sentenced to an institution ever *really* believes that his sentence is fair. Justice and fairness look different from in front of the bench than they do from behind the bench. But even if we assume that a youth does believe that the procedure has been fair, does this knowledge have a positive effect upon him? Advocates of the labeling perspective, with their emphasis upon the overriding impact of the label itself, might argue that it does not matter whether we label someone in a fair or unfair manner. What matters is that we label him.

The very fact that a person is labeled by a procedure that he considers legitimate may have an even greater negative impact on him than it would have had if he had perceived it as illegitimate. A label fairly affixed may be taken more seriously than one attached in a clearly unfair way. An unfair label is easier to deny psychologically. A community that believes its juvenile court is fair is likely to take its judgments seriously. Thus, probably one of the worst things we can do, if we are really concerned about the effects of labeling, is to develop a court that community members and defendants believe is really fair. A just procedure is highly desirable for other reasons, but it will not necessarily decrease the negative effects of labeling.

III. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

A small but growing body of empirical research on the labeling of juveniles provides some perspective on the theory and the factors we have been discussing. I shall describe and discuss some of the most relevant empirical work on the labeling of juveniles by the juvenile justice system. Relatively few studies are described here because few were found.⁷ They all suffer from methodological problems because this is a very

hard area in which to conduct precise research. Labeling theory, as it is formulated, gives little guidance to the researcher who wants to test its propositions. Although data on labeled offenders is abundant and relatively easy to find, control data on comparable unlabeled offenders is expensive and difficult to obtain. It is very hard to find similar youths who have committed similar offenses — some of whom have been labeled and some of whom have not. Furthermore, it is hard to find comparable youths who have had different dispositions and thus different degrees of labeling.⁸

The empirical work may be divided into three categories: studies which show the effect of labeling by the juvenile justice system upon a youth's subsequent behavior; studies which show the effect of community and family reaction to a youth's contact with the juvenile justice system and studies which show the effect of labeling upon a youth's self-concept.

A. The Effect of Labeling upon Subsequent Delinquent Behavior

Gold-Williams Study. Gold and Williams (1969) attempt to test the proposition that a youth who is apprehended for an offense will commit more subsequent offenses than a comparable youth who is not apprehended. Data are utilized from a 1967 representative national sample of 847 thirteen to sixteen year old boys and girls who were interviewed as a part of a study of adolescent life. One set of questions in the interview focused on illegal behavior in which the youths had engaged during the three years preceding the study. Interviews recorded information about each offense reported by the youth — its nature, when it was committed, whether it resulted in apprehension, and if so, the disposition of the case. A large majority, 88% of the 847, reported that they had committed illegal acts (Williams and Gold, 1972: 213). A very small number of these youths reported that they were ever apprehended for an act. All the youths who reported a total of four or more offenses and who had ever been apprehended (a total of 74) were selected for the particular study described here. A control group was specified by matching each apprehended offender with an unapprehended offender of the same sex and race, whose age was within six months of the apprehended offender, who had reported an offense within six months of the offense at which his apprehended match had been caught, and who had committed about the same number of offenses prior to the act. With these criteria it was possible to match only 35 of the 74 apprehended youths.

The study results are based upon these 35 pairs of matched offenders.

Each pair was compared in terms of the number of offenses committed after the time one youth was apprehended. In 20 of the pairs, the apprehended member committed more offenses than the unapprehended member; in 10 of the pairs, the apprehended offender committed fewer offenses; and in 5 of the pairs, the two youths committed an equal number of offenses.

The authors see their study as providing support for the hypothesis of labeling theorists that apprehension (*i.e.*, official community response to the act) causes further delinquent behavior. However, the study cannot provide very strong support for the hypothesis because of methodological weaknesses. One particular problem is the lack of any control for the seriousness of the reported offenses. Assault, drinking beer at a girl friend's home, and destroying public property are all classified equally. The authors describe no attempt to take into account the seriousness of the offense in the matching of apprehended and unapprehended offenders. Two members of a "matched" pair could thus have very different kinds of offenses. A second problem with the study is the small number of matched pairs. Even though several factors have been controlled through matching, it is difficult to draw conclusions from a sample of 35, especially where the results are 20-15. A third problem with the study, at least in its published version, is the meaning of "more offenses." Were the differences between apprehended and unapprehended youths in most cases a matter of one offense or several? A fourth troubling aspect is the inability of the researchers to match more than half of the apprehended offenders with unapprehended offenders when the pool of unapprehended offenders was so large.

The Gold and Williams study is an example of the kind of research which needs to be done. Its findings suggest that there may be some empirical basis for the labeling perspective, but they hardly provide sufficient support for the labeling hypothesis.

McEachern Study. The study by A. W. McEachern (1968) is designed, according to its author, to assess the relative effectiveness of different dispositions and supervision practices in the probation system. The study is based upon data gathered from 2290 youths who were referred to the probation intake agency in eight California counties over a two month period, and followed for one year. It excludes youths who would have

been eighteen within a year of referral because they would pass out of the jurisdiction of juvenile court before the study's one year follow-up period was completed. It also excludes all youths who were committed to institutions (apart from detention before hearing), and all children who were referred for dependency or "minor" traffic violations. Information was obtained on all youths' personal characteristics, delinquent history, school experience, socio-economic status, family history and structure, reason for referral, detention history, court process and initial disposition and placement. All, regardless of initial disposition, were followed for one year. Information was also gathered on individual probation officers' characteristics, positions and case-loads.

Youths in the study are all referred to the probation department for intake interviews. As a result of this initial contact, some are made wards of the court but others are not; some are "treated" by probation officers, and some are not. Youths were divided into four categories:

1. Not ward of court and no treatment;
2. Not ward of court and treatment;
3. Court ward and no treatment; and
4. Court ward and treatment.

This study can be used to test the labeling proposition that youths with more severe dispositions are more likely to commit further offenses than youths with less severe dispositions. One must, however, assume that being made a court ward and being "treated" are more severe dispositions than not being made a ward of the court and not being contacted by a probation officer.

McEachern created an index of the number and seriousness of offenses over time. He then compared each youth's offense rate for the twelve months prior to inclusion in the study (*i.e.*, prior to his referral to intake) with his offense rate for the twelve months after inclusion. Nearly three quarters of the youths (72%) were *not* referred for delinquent acts during the twelve month follow-up period.

In light of the labeling theory proposition, we would expect to find a variation in offense rate with the court wards and "treated" youths showing a greater incidence of referral during the follow-up year. The offense rate did vary among the four classes of juveniles but not completely in line with labeling theory. Youths who were made wards of the court (*i.e.*, labeled) showed a greater *decrease* in delinquent activity during the

follow-up period than the youths who were not made wards of the court. This finding is contrary to labeling theory propositions.

A second finding is that youths who had some contact with a probation officer (whether they were made wards of the court or not) committed *more* offences on the average than the youths who had had no contact with a probation officer. This finding supports the labeling perspective.

The greatest decrease in offenses was recorded for the group of youths who were made wards of the court but were not contacted by a probation officer even though data on the background characteristics of these youths showed that this group contained a disproportionate number of youths who had serious problems.

It is difficult to make sense of these findings from a labeling theory perspective. They would seem to suggest that official labeling action itself is not detrimental, but that contact with treatment agents is. Perhaps the interaction inherent in probation supervision tends to push the youth to an increased self-definition of himself as a delinquent whereas being made a ward of the court without any treatment is a positive labeling experience which enables the youth to define himself as someone the court believes can "stay out of trouble" in the future.

The published report of this study has some serious gaps in information about the decisions by probation officers to contact or not contact youths. Youths were classified as not treated if there was no indication that they were ever contacted by a probation officer. But the reason for this lack of treatment is not clear. Was it a decision by the court or intake officer that none was needed, or was it simply happenstance? One might argue that the results show that decisions about which youths to treat were highly accurate — the ones deemed not in need of treatment got into less trouble. However, this is hard to show because the research report includes no qualitative material from the probation officers themselves about how they set priorities within their caseload, and there is no discussion about whether probation was ordered for those youths who were never contacted. The reader is left with the feeling that there must be some important explanatory variables which have been left uncontrolled in this study, but this may reflect our belief that a system which has important effects upon the lives of children must have a rational basis. It may not.

Thornberry Study. Thornberry (1971) also attempts to de-

termine the relationship between legal dispositions and subsequent criminal behavior of youths, but he examines the effect of institutionalization as well as of less severe dispositions. Thornberry's hypothesis, in line with labeling theory, is that as the dispositions become more severe, the impact of the labeling process on the individual is greater, and therefore criminal activity increases.

Thornberry attempted to test this hypothesis through an analysis of the longitudinal data collected by members of the University of Pennsylvania Research Center on all boys born in 1945 who lived in Philadelphia at least between the ages of 10 and 17. The names of these boys were checked in the records of the Philadelphia Police Department and all their offenses and their dispositions were recorded.⁹ Thornberry's study is based upon a population of 3,475 boys who committed a total of 9,601 offenses. It includes data on all of each boy's offenses from his first recorded offense to his last recorded offense before he was above the age when he could legally be considered delinquent.

Thornberry uses four dispositional categories. The least severe is *remedial arrest* (6,515 cases) in which the youth is only handled by one agency and the case is resolved in a matter of hours. The next most severe disposition is *adjustment* (1,338 cases) in which the delinquent is dealt with by the Probation Department and occasionally by the court itself as well as by the police. The child may be warned to stay out of trouble and the court may informally "keep tabs" on him. These two dispositions put little or no constraint on the youth's behavior. A more severe disposition is *probation* (1,094 cases). Juveniles have a court hearing and are placed under the direct supervision and guidance of the Probation Department and are required to report regularly to their probation officer. The most severe disposition is *institutionalization* (654 cases) where the youth is incarcerated.

Subsequent criminal behavior is defined in this study in terms of two basic concepts: the volume of recidivism and the seriousness of the offense committed.

The data presented go in the direction hypothesized by labeling theorists in regard to *volume* of subsequent crimes for three groups of youth: white boys, boys of upper socio-economic status, and boys whose initial apprehended offenses were of a less serious nature. For these groups Thornberry found early severe dispositions (short of institutionalization) were more likely than lenient ones to be associated with a greater volume of subse-

quent crimes. This relationship between severity of disposition and volume of subsequent criminality is not found, however, among youths who are black, of lower socio-economic status, or who initially committed more serious crimes. There was no association between the severity of disposition and the *seriousness* of subsequent crimes, regardless of race, socio-economic status or seriousness of initial offenses.

The most severe disposition, institutionalization, is associated with subsequent criminality in a way that is directly counter to the labeling hypothesis. Youths of all categories who were institutionalized had a *lower* subsequent rate of criminality in terms of both seriousness and volume than the youths who had not received such severe dispositions. The author speculates that the positive effect of institutionalization in decreasing subsequent crime may result from the time spent in incarceration, but he feels that this is unlikely especially since incarceration is also associated with a decrease in the *seriousness* of subsequent offenses and we would not expect a decrease in the seriousness of offenses to be associated with institutionalization. There are three other possible explanations for the finding on the effects of institutionalization. One is that punishment works. Youths who are sent away don't like it and try not to do things which will subject them to such an experience again. A second possible explanation is that youths who are incarcerated learn a lot, become more professional in their delinquency, and consequently don't get caught as often, especially if they are motivated to avoid apprehension because of their extreme distaste for incarceration. This latter argument is not really counter to labeling theory, and may suggest why some propositions are so hard to test empirically. An increase in the actual offense rates of labeled youths may be completely masked by a corresponding increase in expertise in avoiding apprehension. A third explanation, in keeping with labeling theory, is that by the time a youth reaches the point of being institutionalized, he has already moved into secondary deviance and is no longer affected by court labeling. By the time the judge decides to send him to an institution, his definition of himself as a delinquent and the definition of him as delinquent by others may be well established. If this is the case, then the labeling theorist would not expect to find an increase in subsequent offenses as a result of institutionalization. The secondary delinquent, well settled into his delinquent identity and well started on his delinquent career, may reach a point where delinquent activity either stabilizes at

a certain level, or becomes less visible because of the delinquent's greater skill in avoiding apprehension. These speculations highlight one assumption which those who test the propositions of labeling theory tend to make. They equate severity of disposition with severity of labeling effect. This may be true only to the point where secondary deviance begins to operate.

Implications. The three studies presented here do not provide very strong support for the proposition that labeling by the juvenile justice system increases subsequent delinquent behavior. They all have methodological weaknesses, which make their findings less definitive than they might otherwise be. Furthermore, the findings are inconsistent with one another. Some support labeling theory; some do not. Clearly, there is a need for more empirical tests of this theory. It is necessary to specify which youths are most susceptible to labeling effects and at what points in the process labeling has its greatest impact.

B. Community and Family Reaction to a Youth's Juvenile Justice Contact

A second category of empirical studies may provide some insight into the short- and long-range consequences of labeling. It deals with the reactions of community members and families to youths who have had contact with the juvenile justice system.

In an effort to minimize stigma, juvenile courts in the United States make an effort to sharply limit the number of community members who have knowledge of a child's contact with the court. Courtrooms are usually closed to visitors and records are confidential. On the one hand the court goes to considerable trouble to avoid the leaking into the community of information about a youth's contact with the court. On the other hand, it involves a youth's family at every level of the proceedings.

Community Reaction. In recent years there has been a growing concern that the privacy protections afforded by the juvenile courts have been inadequate and that court and police records are accessible to employers, the armed forces, and other interested parties (Lemert, 1969). Although laws in some states provide for the expungement of juvenile records after a period of years if no criminal convictions have occurred, such procedures are rarely practical (Baum, 1965; Booth, 1963). A California legislative committee found that the number of routine documents on which a defendant's name may appear from the time his case began until its final disposition often ran over 100.

(Lemert, 1969: 383). Thus, it seems clear that interested parties presently have access to information about a juvenile's court and police contact, and will have even greater access in the future as information systems become more efficient and complete.¹⁰

What effect does this knowledge have? There are possibilities of short-range effects and long-range effects. Some short-range effects have been documented in regard to police and court handling. The youth who is known to the police is more likely to be picked up by the police for questioning about incidents in his neighborhood. He is more likely to be dealt with more harshly by both police and courts if he is apprehended for new acts (Werthman and Piliavin, 1967; Terry, 1967; McEachern and Bauzer, 1967). A youth who has been in juvenile court who subsequently manages to stay out of trouble, and is fortunate enough to not be found in the wrong place at the wrong time may avoid these short-range difficulties, but he may have problems a few years hence when he attempts to get into the Armed Services, get a hack license, or get a civil service job. Some youths may be handicapped by a juvenile court record; other youths may not be. Whether they are or not probably depends in part on luck and on whether the youth aspires to any of the jobs or positions in which his court contact is likely to be discovered and considered a handicap. Goffman (1963) discusses the problems of managing undisclosed discrediting information which faces individuals with what he calls "spoiled identities." The "discreditable" person is one who must face unwitting acceptance of himself by individuals who are prejudiced against persons of the kind he can be revealed to be.

Two empirical studies give some indication of the effects of court contact on job possibilities. Both show that court contact leaves its mark. Prospective employers are loath to hire a person with a record, even if it is only an arrest without a conviction.

Schwarz and Skolnick (1962) tested the effect of an assault charge upon employment possibilities of lower-class unskilled workers through a field experiment. Four employment folders were prepared, the same in all respects except for the criminal court record of the applicant. The first folder indicated that the applicant had been convicted and sentenced for assault; the second that he had been tried for assault and been acquitted; the third indicated that he had been tried for assault and acquitted and included a letter from the judge certifying the finding of not guilty and reaffirming the legal presumption

of innocence. The fourth folder made no mention of any criminal record. A sample of one hundred employers was utilized. To each, only one folder was shown and the employer was asked whether he could "use" the man described in the folder. Employers were not given any indication that they were participating in an experiment. Nine of the twenty-five employers shown the "no record" folder gave positive responses. Only one of the twenty-five shown the "convict" folder gave a positive response. Three of the twenty-five approached with the "accused but acquitted" file offered jobs, and six of the twenty-five approached with the applicant whose file included information on his acquittal and a letter from a judge offered a job. Even an acquittal appeared, in this study at least, to decrease the unskilled worker's chances for employment.

The most disturbing finding in this study is the similar reactions by employers to conviction and acquittal. Although the subjects in this study were not identified as juveniles, the findings have some implications for juveniles. One might surmise that the employers who do not distinguish between conviction and acquittal probably would not distinguish between a juvenile court experience and a criminal court experience either. The distinctions so carefully maintained by the legal system may have little importance in the larger community.

A similar study was conducted in the Netherlands by Buikhuisen and Dijksterhuis (1971) with similar results. In a field experiment, 150 job application letters were sent to 75 large companies in the Netherlands. The letters were identical except for criminal record. One letter included an admission of one conviction for theft, a second included an admission of having temporarily lost a driver's license for drunken driving, and one made no mention of a criminal record. Three comparable companies were matched and each was sent one of the letters. The results showed that both categories of ex-delinquents received significantly fewer positive reactions to their applications than the applicants who made no mention of a previous conviction. Fifty-two percent of the letters with no criminal record received a positive reaction compared to thirty-two percent of the letters mentioning the theft conviction and twenty-six percent of the letters mentioning the license revocation for drunken driving. These two studies show a clear tendency on the part of employers to react less positively to applicants with a known criminal record, than to applicants for whom no criminal record is known.

Balch (1972) studied the reactions to delinquent labels by teachers and students in a junior high school. He randomly assigned 254 ninth graders and 31 teachers to experimental and control groups in which members filled out questionnaires designed to elicit their reactions to five students, each of whom was described in a brief vignette. The questionnaires were identical in every respect but one — in the experimental group each student was identified as a juvenile delinquent. He found that students and teachers alike perceived the labeled boys less favorably than the unlabeled boys. However, contrary to expectations, neither teachers nor students tended to be more punitive toward the delinquents than toward the nondelinquents.

Another study of stigma and deviant careers in school (Fisher, 1972) concludes that a negative association between the status as a delinquent and school performance existed *before* the identification of the juvenile as a delinquent as well as after. Youths were having trouble in school before their teachers knew that they had been labeled as delinquents.

Not all members of the community express equal intolerance of the juvenile who has been in trouble. A mail questionnaire study of public opinion on the definition, reporting, and correction of delinquency by Faust (1970) shows that tolerance varies considerably among members of different racial, status, and age groups. The more tolerant adults tend to be white, middle-class, younger, and better educated.

Family Reaction. Labeling theorists stress the importance of interaction with “significant others” in the labeling process.¹¹ For the youth who values family members as “significant others,” the reaction of his relatives may be one of the key factors in determining whether the court experience will be an important labeling experience for him. Some youths may be punished or ostracized by other family members because of their court experience. Other youths may find a lack of concern among family members or attitudes neutralizing the importance of the court experience. Yet other youths may find family members rallying to their aid and working positively to help them move toward nondelinquent behavior.

The juvenile court tends to operate on the premise, or at least the hope, that the latter positive reaction will occur. Efforts are made to involve the family in the court proceedings as soon as possible. Most guidelines for police handling of juveniles give explicit instructions regarding the prompt notification of a youth’s parents if he is apprehended. Probation officers, in pre-

paring intake and pre-disposition reports, may talk to the family, school officials, and other persons with whom the youth may be in contact. The court is committed, at least in theory, to strengthening the family and keeping the child in his home if possible. However, there are youths who have no family, in the sociological sense, although some adult is legally responsible for them and signs the appropriate school and court papers. Blood relationship does not carry, in and of itself, affection and a sense of emotional involvement and responsibility. A child's emotional ties to caretakers, whether they be natural or adoptive parents or others, flow primarily from the psychological and emotional attachments which are built up through years of physical and emotional care and regular contact. The youth who has no real family, blood or adoptive, may be little affected by the labeling of family or community. He may be isolated already from legitimate activities and well into secondary deviation.

Even if a child has a family, the family may be unable or unwilling to help him. Delinquent behavior may pose serious hardship on a family with already dangerously overloaded emotional, social, and economic resources. Such a family may see the delinquent member as evidence of its own failure or as a threat to the well-being and respectability of other family members. Concealment of the delinquency may impose considerable strain on the family and subject members to frustrating role stresses and discomforts (Bryant, 1973). The family may also fear that the official labeling of one of its members will increase the possibility of future official labeling of other family members. In fact, probation reports often cite as negative information about a youth the fact that he or she has a sibling or parent who has also appeared in the court or spent time in an institution. Since each labeling incident of any member is to some extent a labeling of the family, the family may feel threatened by the labeled member and react strongly to isolate him from the family group. Parents often try to minimize the contamination of younger children by an older child who has gotten into trouble. Such a family may be eager to rid itself of its unruly youthful member and may resist efforts to impose responsibility for him or her. On the other hand, parents may resist removal of a child from the home because they see the loss of the child as public evidence of their own failure.

Limited public knowledge of a youth's court appearance may protect the parents more than the youth. Almost everyone who matters to a youth knows about his court appearance and

can readily get access to his record — *e.g.*, family, school officials, future employers, probation and institutional workers. Parents, however, may be protected from community knowledge by lack of newspaper publicity, closed courtrooms, and general limiting of community knowledge about the delinquent incident. In fact, the parents' desire for protection from public knowledge of the incident may act as a strong force to keep a child in a family situation when he would be better off out of it. Removal of a child from the home is harder to hide than a court appearance.

Training school staff members who worked on a special project with the families of new arrivals to the Iowa Training School (O'Neil, 1969) noticed that parents tended to feel a sense of guilt about their son's confinement to the institution and a sense of failure in their family relationships. They also felt criticism of themselves by people in the community or members of their own family. Such parental feelings provide the potential for labeling and scapegoating of a delinquent youth. Snyder (1971) found some support for the existence of parental scapegoating of delinquents in her interviews with boys concerning their perceptions about the court hearing. Many of the youths mentioned that their parents' behavior was the thing that made them feel worst during their court hearing, especially such behavior as making negative remarks about them in front of others and crying. Several mentioned that their court experience had made their families feel ashamed.

Foster (1972), in his study of boys' perceptions about the impact of court appearance on their lives, found that 73% of the boys felt that the attitude of their parents towards them had *not* changed as a result of the court appearance. In the majority of cases, parental attitudes toward their children seem pretty well set before court appearance. They either regard their sons as troublesome and are not surprised that they have gotten in trouble or they feel their sons are basically good and will turn out well despite the court appearance. Nevertheless, in at least the remaining 27%, court labeling may have important repercussions on family interaction patterns, and the youth may experience serious changes in his family status as a result of his court experience. It would be interesting to do a follow-up study comparing the subsequent offenses of boys whose parents regarded them as troublesome with the subsequent offenses of boys whose parents thought that they were basically good.

The results of these three studies are inconclusive. There is

evidence of parental shame and feelings of failure and some indication of negative interaction between parents and their delinquent offspring. There is also evidence that parent-child interaction patterns are well-established prior to court appearance and that the contact with the juvenile justice system does not substantially modify them.

Given the potentially important labeling role of the family, it is important to acquire empirical information about how a family reacts to a member who has been officially labeled as delinquent. In what kinds of situations does the family join with its deviant member to ward off negative evaluations by the community? In what kinds of cases does the family coalesce with the court agencies to vilify the family member? In what kinds of situations does the family withdraw from the whole affair? If we find that family labeling has a great impact upon at least some youths, then efforts to minimize the stigma attendant upon court appearance or diversion programs should focus upon the family as well as the community. For some youths, removal from the home, if it could be done in a non-stigmatizing way, might result in less labeling than returning the youth to a home where he or she is defined as "bad" or "no good." The problem, at present, is that the alternatives to home are usually detention facilities or institutions which create a whole new set of problems for the youth and do nothing to minimize stigma.

Our traditional assumption that a youth in trouble belongs in his family whenever possible serves a useful purpose for the middle-class, law-abiding community. The ideology that the family unit should be kept intact and that a family should take care of its own, shifts the responsibility for youthful deviant behavior away from the community and locates it in the family. It also makes morally suspect any commitment of public funds to homes and programs which provide alternatives to the family. If the family is regarded as sacred and its preservation is a public goal, then programs providing alternatives to the family may be perceived as morally wrong. Preservation of the family provides a moral justification for providing minimal community and court services to youths in trouble. Such justification will probably continue unless strong empirical evidence is presented to show that many youths really do not have any functioning family unit or that some youths are seriously harmed by family labeling and scapegoating.

C. The Effect of Labeling upon a Youth's Self-Concept

The previous sections dealt with studies which attempted to show a change in behavior as a result of labeling by the juvenile court system and with the reactions of family and community members to the label and the labeled individual. This section deals with the juvenile's own reaction to the labeling experience. Two kinds of studies are included in this section. The first focuses upon the subjective meaning of court appearance to the youths, and the second focuses upon the effect of official labeling upon a youth's self-image.

Impact of Court Hearing upon Youth. Snyder (1971) studied the impact of the juvenile court hearing upon 43 boys, ages 10-16, who had been placed on probation by the court. For 25 of the youths, the experience was a new one; the other 18 had been on probation before. In most cases the actual hearing was observed and the judge and the probation counselor were interviewed. The boys themselves were interviewed a few weeks after the hearing. Snyder found that the most frequently mentioned feeling about the court experience was fear, and the thing that almost all the boys (37 of 43) remembered most vividly was that the judge had placed them on probation instead of sending them away. None of the boys mentioned any feeling of guilt, although a few mentioned that they felt shame during and immediately after the hearing but it diminished with time. Most of the boys denied responsibility for their actions, even though all but one had admitted the offense. Some of the youths did perceive some labeling effect from their court experience. One youth said, "The kids at school find out and look down on you once they know you have been to court" (Snyder, 1971: 488). Youths who had been on probation before felt that once they had been picked up for something, they were suspected of having committed every subsequent offense in their neighborhood.

Baum and Wheeler's study (1966) of 97 boys who had just experienced their first commitment by the juvenile court revealed that the dominant response to the experience of commitment was shock, upset, and unhappiness. Over half of the boys said that they felt that the decision to send them away was fair, and they felt that it would help them by teaching them a lesson, or by breaking a pattern of criminal activity. Most felt that the trouble they were in was their own fault. Some of the boys felt that commitment would have no effect upon them primarily because of what they imagine happens to the "record," i.e., "it is destroyed" or "no one will talk about it when I reach 17."

Less than a third of the boys felt that institutionalization would harm them and they were primarily concerned about potential employers and the draft board.

The main concern of the boys in both studies seems to center upon the immediate outcome of the hearing—probation or commitment. The one clear difference in findings between the two studies regards the youth's feelings of responsibility for his behavior. Most of the youths placed on probation denied responsibility for what they had done, while most of the youths committed to institutions blamed themselves for their behavior. It is interesting to speculate whether this difference in response is the result of different interviewing techniques, reflects a factor in the situation which influenced the judge's decision, or whether it is the result of the decision. Perhaps in a hearing in which a boy is committed, a special effort is made to make the boy feel that he has misbehaved and that he, himself, is responsible for his commitment. If this is the case, a court appearance in which a youth is committed may be an important labeling experience because of its emphasis upon the boy's own responsibility for the commitment.

Foster's study of juveniles' perceptions of stigma following public intervention for delinquent behavior (1972), like Snyder's, and Baum and Wheeler's, does not reveal much perception of stigma on the part of the youths involved. His study group consists of 196 delinquent boys from an urban community of 300,000 population — 80 with police dispositions; 115 with juvenile court dispositions. The cases were gathered from the police department and the juvenile court over a period of three months and all subjects were interviewed at home within ten to twenty days after final disposition.

Generally, the youths did not feel that their contact with a law enforcement agency had resulted in any significant social liability in terms of interpersonal relationships. They did not perceive any negative effect whatever upon the attitude of their friends toward them, and there were only a few mentions of slight negative effects upon family relationships. Neither the type of disposition, nor the age nor ethnicity of the subjects significantly altered these responses. The interviewed subjects were asked if they thought what had happened would "create any special difficulty in completing school." Of the 172 boys still in school, 92% felt there would be no special problems. The few who felt otherwise were boys who had been having school problems before getting in trouble with the police. The boys

responded with statements such as "what I did had nothing to do with school," or "the teachers don't know about it, so it won't matter." The only spheres about which the boys expressed concern were contact with the police and future employers. Fifty-four percent of the boys expected the police to keep an eye on them once they had been in trouble and forty percent of the boys felt that future employers would hold the incident against them.

None of these three studies provide strong evidence that the juveniles see the court experience as a deeply stigmatizing one. Their concerns seem to be primarily practical ones — hearing outcome, police surveillance and possible job discrimination. As Baum notes, "in the eyes of these youth, commitment to an institution is punishment for misdeeds" (1966: 183). Foster concludes that the results of his study indicate that the extent of perceived stigmatization and social liability that follows police or court intervention seems to be overestimated in the labeling hypothesis. If the deviant believes that his misdeeds are "nothing at all," or that people will soon forget about them, then the long-term implications of the incident are lost from the deviant's perspective, regardless of the real existence of social liability (1972: 208). This perspective is in keeping with the process of neutralization hypothesized by Sykes and Matza (1957) in which the infractious nature of offenses is negated and infraction is converted by the actors into mere action.

Official Labeling and Self-Image. Self-image has at least two components relevant to this discussion of delinquency. One is self-esteem, which has to do with how one feels about oneself and is usually described in qualitative terms as high or low. The second is the image an individual has of himself as a particular kind of person. Measurement of self-esteem or self-image is usually ascertained by some kind of questionnaire or interview in which the individual is asked to choose from a list of words those which he feels best describe him or which he thinks others would use to describe him. Or he may be asked to complete questions such as "I am—" or "My mother thinks I am—," or to agree or disagree with statements about himself. Often a scale of this kind is administered at several points in time so that it is possible to measure a youth's feelings about himself before and after an event such as arrest or institutionalization.

In the first study described here (Jensen, 1972), the relationship between officially-recorded delinquency, self-reported delinquency, self-evaluation as a delinquent, and self-esteem is

explored. The study is based upon data gathered in 1964-65 by the Survey Research Center at the University of California, Berkeley, from black and white male students in eleven junior and senior high schools in California. Data are from three sources: school records, a questionnaire completed by the students, and police records.

The most striking finding of the study, relevant to the labeling perspective, is that officially-recorded delinquency is related to self-definition as a delinquent and is more strongly related for white adolescents than for black adolescents. In fact, among youths with a record of two or more offenses, almost twice as many whites as blacks at least sometimes think of themselves as delinquent. White youths are also more likely than black youths to believe that others think of them as delinquent. The tendency of blacks to reject or ignore the label when applied persists in each class context. Among white adolescents, however, there is variation among the status categories. Lower class white boys are more likely to see themselves as delinquent than are the boys whose fathers had some education beyond high school.

The relationship between officially-recorded delinquency and self-esteem showed a different pattern. There appears to be little relationship between official delinquency and self-esteem for white adolescents, but an interesting pattern of relationship by status for black youths. For blacks, officially-recorded delinquency is associated with *high* self-esteem among *lower* status youth and is associated with *low* self-esteem among *higher* status youth.

One difficulty with this study is the lack of a defined time sequence. It is impossible to know whether a youth's low self-esteem or self-definition as delinquent preceded or antedated his first being officially labeled as a delinquent. Unless his self-conception changed after his first brush with the law, it is hard to attribute the effect to labeling. A study by Ageton and Elliott (1973), because it has a longitudinal dimension, provides some data on this point. The study is based upon a secondary analysis of data from 2,617 youths in eight California secondary schools who were interviewed once annually from 9th grade through 12th grade. Those who moved or dropped out of school were included. Self-concept was measured each year by a short form of the Socialization (SO) Scale from the California Psychological Inventory. Data were also obtained from parent interviews, teacher ratings, and school, police, and

court records. The results show that, over a four-year period, white (Anglo) youths who had had police contact showed a significant decrease in self-concept when compared with their peers who had had no such contact. Police contact is not a significant factor in accounting for a change in self-concept for any other group (Mexican, black or other). Ageton and Elliott (1973) found, as did Jensen (1972), that it was lower-class white adolescents who were affected by official contact with the juvenile justice system. They found, further, that police apprehension was the most important factor with regard to explaining a decreasing self-concept. Neither self-reported delinquency, nor the delinquency of one's peer group were as important. In other words, a youth's self-concept was influenced by whether he had ever been "caught" by the police rather than by whether he and his friends had ever *done* anything wrong.

One further finding of this study which is particularly interesting in regard to labeling is that the negative effect of police contact seemed to erode over time. Snyder (1971) reports similar findings in her study of adolescents' reaction to court experience. She notes that the youths seemed to develop an awareness and concern for others during and immediately after the hearing, but it subsided markedly with the passing of time. If additional research bears out this tentative finding, that the effect of official labeling wears off, then it is hard to make a case for the effect of labeling experiences upon an individual's future behavior. Exploration in this area could have important implications for the problem of "delabeling," and raises questions about the circumstances under which the effects of labeling wear off. The studies just described provide evidence that official labeling leads to a change in the self-image of some adolescents. White, lower-status boys and upper-status black youths seem to be the most affected by official acts of labeling.

CONCLUSION

The efforts to find out if contact with the juvenile justice system increases a youth's delinquent behavior have lead to conflicting results at best. There is some indication in one of the studies (Thornberry, 1971) that labeling affects white youths more than minority youths, an interesting aspect of labeling which needs to be developed further. Although there is some evidence (O'Neil, 1969; Snyder, 1971) that families sometimes resent or feel shamed by youths who have gotten in trouble with the law, and one can speculate about the potentially serious effects of labeling by family members, there is

little empirical research available on the effects of family labeling. What there is (Foster, 1972) indicates that most youths perceive no change in parental attitudes toward them as a result of their court appearance. There is fairly consistent evidence that community members react negatively to youths whom they know have had court contact. Two studies (Schwartz and Skolnick, 1962; Buikhuisen and Dijksterhuss, 1971) showed that a known record of an arrest hurts employment chances. A third study (Balch, 1972) showed that teachers and students react less favorably to a youth who has been to court.

Juveniles themselves don't perceive their court experience as highly stigmatizing. Nevertheless, there is some evidence (Jensen, 1972; Ageton and Elliott, 1973) to suggest that self-definition as a delinquent is related to court contact for some youths, particularly white youths. There is a hint in two of the studies (Snyder, 1971; Ageton and Elliott, 1973) that the labeling effects of court contact may erode over time. In summary, we don't know much about the effects of court labeling upon juveniles. Existing research raises interesting questions about who is affected by labels, which labels have the greatest effect on youths and whether labeling effects have any long-term impact.

Two important policy questions are raised by the conclusions of this survey. One involves diversion and the other involves the court's role regarding the labeling of juveniles. A major argument advanced by proponents of diversion is that diverted individuals are less likely to commit another crime than the individuals who have not been diverted. Part of the basis for this argument is that the official contact with the court (labeling) is detrimental. This would be a strong argument if it were supported by empirical evidence. At this point, it is not. The labeling argument is an appealing argument because it has a certain common sense ring to it, and because it appeals to the liberal reformist belief that the person who comes in contact with the court — whether adult or juvenile — gets a bad deal. It would be unfortunate, however, if we let our concern for labeling effects blind us to some of the less desirable aspects of diversion projects.¹²

A second policy question concerns the proper role of the court regarding community labeling. At least in part, the court responds to labels already given to youths by families, schools, and other community agencies. The court may act primarily to legitimate community labels, or it may question and chal-

lenge them. In determining how best to respond to community labels, policy makers need to acquire information about the labeling process:

1. Which agents move juveniles into the justice system? How do they do it?
2. Under what circumstances, if any, is a court applied label crucial to a youth's movement away from or into delinquent behavior?
3. What short-range or long-range effects does court legitimation of community labels have upon youths?
4. Under what circumstances should the court resist the efforts of parents, schools and other community agencies to persuade it to legitimate the labels they have already attached?

In addition to the research which is beginning to be done on the effects of institutional labeling, there is a need for a study of the dynamics and effects of labeling on the interpersonal level. This review has raised questions about the reactions of a youth's friends and family members to his deviant behavior. How does official labeling of a youth modify his interactions with family and friends? Under what circumstances do family and friends react primarily to a youth's behavior and under what circumstances do they react primarily to the fact that his behavior brings him to the official attention of the community? What kind of congruence is there between the youth's perception of changes in family attitude toward him and his family's perception of changes in their attitudes? Are there different patterns of family reaction to a youth's arrest, and are these patterns related to the extent of a youth's subsequent delinquent behavior?

As the youth goes through the juvenile justice system, what experiences, in addition to the court hearing itself, stand out in his mind as being most important or most demeaning? Does he describe encounters with individuals — police officers, guards, peers, social workers — that modify his image of himself?

Are only some youths affected by court labeling? Are some affected positively while others are affected negatively? If so, what are the characteristics of youths who are affected, and how do those affected positively differ from those affected negatively? How do youths resist or neutralize official labeling experiences? In addition to the study of juveniles who continue to reappear in the court, we need to study juveniles who come into court and then manage to stay out of trouble with the law.

The labeling perspective opens a rich source of insight and research possibilities to us. It focuses our thinking upon the ways in which youths are defined as deviant, the ways in which they are swept into the juvenile justice system, and the effects upon them of other persons' reactions to their behavior. It focuses our thinking also on the youth's perceptions of the process. Perhaps, as research on labeling accumulates and becomes more precise, and as we become better able to raise researchable questions, labeling will emerge as an important causal factor in the etiology of delinquent behavior. Meanwhile, no such evidence exists, and it would be a disservice to both the labeling perspective and the youths in the juvenile justice system to act as if it did.

NOTES

- ¹ This is a very brief and somewhat simplified description of one aspect of labeling theory — the way in which it promotes deviant behavior in an individual labeled "deviant." For more extended discussions about labeling theory in general and about the uses of labels by the dominant society, see Becker, 1973; Downes and Rock, 1971; Erikson, 1962; Scheff, 1966; Schur, 1971; Spitzer, 1971; Warren and Johnson, 1972.
- ² Ray's (1961) description of the re-entry problems of ex-heroin addicts highlights some of the problems of "delabeling."
- ³ This review does not include studies of police decisions to arrest juveniles because such studies focus primarily on the decision about whom to label rather than upon the effects of being labeled. For a review of studies about labeling by police, see Ward, 1971. For some specific studies of police response to juveniles, see Black and Reiss, 1970; Gandy, 1970; Goldman, 1963; Gould, 1969; Hohenstein, 1969; Piliavin and Briar, 1964; Werthman and Piliavin, 1967; and Weiner and Willie, 1971.
- ⁴ Young (1972) hypothesized that youths who possess characteristics which are viewed negatively by the dominant society are more likely to be dealt with severely by the juvenile court than other youths who committed similar acts. She found in her study of 2,001 youths in a Utah Juvenile Court that her hypothesis was supported in regard to ethnicity (white-nonwhite), religious activity, and parental income.
- ⁵ Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) found that children who were expected by their teachers to "bloom" intellectually, showed a greater gain in IQ points after one year than other children of equal ability for whom no such expectations were held.
- ⁶ *E.g.*, in The Bank Wiring Room, workers who were labeled as "rate busters" were pressured to bring their behavior back within acceptable limits. The experiment also showed that labels applied by members of one's own work group were more effective in changing behavior than labels applied by management representatives. Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939).
- ⁷ Wheeler and Cottrell (1966) cite "a variety of social science theory and evidence which suggests that official response to behavior may initiate processes that push the misbehaving juveniles toward further delinquent conduct." But none of these discussions of labeling provide any direct empirical evidence for this hypothesis. See Freidson, 1965; Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951; Kitsuse, 1964.
- ⁸ A recent study on the effectiveness of probation concluded that boys assigned to probation appear to be "better" or "easier" cases than those assigned to other treatment facilities (Scarpitti and Stephenson, 1968).
- ⁹ For a detailed description of how these data were gathered and for other interesting findings resulting from the data, see Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin, 1972.
- ¹⁰ For a discussion of records in juvenile court, see Lemert (1969).

- ¹¹ The reaction of "significant others" is an important factor determining the impact of an act of labeling upon an individual. A "significant other" is someone whose opinion the youth values. Whose opinion does a youth value? Tannenbaum (1938: Ch. 1) notes that "[b]ehavior is a matter of choice as to whose approval you want. And whose approval you want may be determined by such invisible and subtle influences as whom you like, who has given you pleasure, and who has commended you."
- ¹² Freed (1974), an early advocate of pre-trial diversion, is now raising some thought-provoking questions about it and urges that diversion legislation be postponed until a more thorough examination of the implications of diversion and diversion procedures is made. Among other unanswered questions, he notes the lack of evidence that diversion reduces recidivism.

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