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THE LABELING PERSPECTIVE

Schervish

EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS  
DURING THE SEVENTIES

McGinnis  
Solomon

COMPUTER SIMULATION IN TEACHING

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Selvin

A COURSE IN SMALL GROUP SOCIOLOGY

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## Contents

### ARTICLES

- The Labeling Perspective: Its Bias and Potential in the Study of Political Deviance—*Paul G. Schervish* ..... 47
- Employment Prospects for Ph.D. Sociologists During the Seventies—*Robert McGinnis and Louise Solomon* ..... 57
- Computer Simulation and the Teaching of Research Methods—*Dean Harper and Hanan Selvin* ..... 64
- A Course in Small Group Sociology—*Stephen R. Wilson* ..... 71

### NOTES ..... 77

- Internationalizing American Sociology through the Research Committees of the International Sociological Association—*Morris Janowitz and Reuben Hill* ..... 77
- Ph.D. Language Requirements in Sociology: Re-examining the Hurdles—*Ronald C. Wimberley* ..... 85
- The Fate of the Ph.D. Dissertation in Sociology: An Empirical Examination—*William C. Yoels* ..... 87
- Editorial Standards and Authenticity of Manuscripts: An Earlier Generation Revisited—*Joel C. Snell* ..... 90

### LETTERS ..... 91

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- Davis, K.  
1963a "The theory of change and response in modern demographic history." Population Index 29(October):345-66.  
1963b "Social demography." Pp. 204-21 in Bernard Berelson (ed.), The Behavioral Sciences Today. New York: Basic Books.
- Goode, W. J.  
1967 "The protection of the inept." American Sociological Review 32(February): 5-19.
- Moore, Wilbert E., and Arnold S. Feldman.  
1960 Labor Commitment and Social Change in Developing Areas. New York: Social Science Research Council.
- Sanford, Nevitt (ed.)  
1962 The American College. New York: Wiley.

# THE LABELING PERSPECTIVE: ITS BIAS AND POTENTIAL IN THE STUDY OF POLITICAL DEVIANCE\*

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## *The Bias*

The most popular perspective on deviant behavior at the present time is commonly called the labeling approach. This approach, first enunciated in Tannenbaum's (1938) comments on "The Dramatization of Evil" and in Edwin M. Lemert's (1951) *Social Pathology*, is most baldly stated by Becker (1963:9): "The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label."

Sociologists who describe deviance as a process of labeling draw upon the symbolic interactionism of George Herbert Mead. Mead (1964:209-46 *passim*) provides the social-psychological framework for understanding how the individual comes to be labeled deviant in the first place and then, as the consequence of this labeling, to manifest the various subjective orientations and conduct that Lemert (1967:40-64) refers to as "secondary deviation." The Meadian perspective enables sociologists to designate the process of becoming deviant (cf. Matza, 1969) rather than merely to assert that "mind" or "personality" or some other intervening unknown or "black box" acts as a deterministic transmitter of forces, impinging upon the actor and making him deviant.

Ideally, then, the labeling approach to deviance studies organizational and social-psychological conditions and consequences not as separate issues but as related in an ongoing dialectic. Organizational factors do not deterministically force individuals into deviant patterns of behavior. Rather, the labeling ap-

proach provides the framework for a refined qualitative analysis of how an individual or group, with at least some degree of wilful compliance, comes to internalize the normative expectations which are expressed in and communicated through particular labels.

With such an emphasis upon the creative yet social character of man, it is strikingly ironic that labeling theorists often neglect their Median heritage by speaking of man in a rhetoric more evocative of the determinism Mead sought to deny.

Although the labeling approach has generated numerous insightful studies of the processes of identification and deviance, the (unfortunate) methodological and ideological thrust of this approach has been, with a few noteworthy exceptions, towards a philosophical bias or sentimentalism. Although my notion of philosophical bias is akin to Gouldner's (1955) concept of metaphysical pathos,<sup>1</sup> I am using the former term to denote the somewhat different pessimistic and fatalistic assumptions that an imputed labelee is both *passive* and stands alone as an *individual*.

This paper seeks to explore some of the reasons for this philosophical bias, to document

<sup>1</sup> In the middle fifties Gouldner (1955) criticized the *metaphysical pathos* of researchers who fatalistically and pessimistically (498) assumed the natural passivity of man and decried the impending spread of bureaucracy and its effects into every aspect of modern life. Debunking such pathos, Gouldner countered that the condition for Michel's concern about the "iron law of oligarchy" is an "iron law of democracy" according to which men "doggedly rebuild" the bridges of democracy after each inundation of oligarchy has washed them away (506). Although I am indebted to Gouldner for the notions of passivity, pessimism, and fatalism (which I have incorporated in my notion of philosophical bias), a discussion of the bias of labeling studies must also emphasize how these studies focus on situations in which *individuals* rather than *aggressive groups* are engaged in the dynamics of labeling and counter-labeling.

\* An earlier version of this article comprised a section of a paper presented at the Twenty-First Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems in Denver, 1971. I wish to thank especially Howard S. Becker and John I. Kitsuse for their incisive and helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

how it has led sociologists within the labeling perspective to examine the passive and individualistic aspects of deviance, and finally to point to some hopeful signs that interactionists may be moving toward a balancing perspective, emphasizing aggressive, political, group resistance to and counter-application of labels.

There are two principal reasons why the labeling approach to deviance has fallen into the philosophical bias of viewing the imputed deviant in passive and individualistic terms. The first reason is methodological, the second is ideological.

#### *Methodological Source*

The methodological orientation of labeling theorists is rooted in the emphasis on quantification and verification of data that arose in the late 1930's and is only now being seriously challenged. Until recently, sociologists dealing with qualitative data assumed the goals, rhetoric, norms of validity and reliability, and methodological procedures of the more positivistic, supposedly more scientific, wing of sociology. As a result, labeling theorists' efforts to develop and apply their perspective often became directed toward gathering verifiable data rather than generating theory. In turn, these sociologists tended to concentrate on smaller scale studies of individual labelees where data was more reliable and more readily verified (even if not necessarily more valid).

Instances of sociology's flirtation with the canons of extreme quantification and positivism are well known. The work of George Lundberg (1939, 1947, 1955, 1956) is a case in point. Less familiar, perhaps, is how this natural science model specifically affected symbolic interactionists and thus the emergence of labeling theory. The labeling theorists, rightly understanding the subtlety and complexity of their framework, felt vulnerable to the pressures of positivistic methodology. As a result, they required that the context or field of their empirical studies be both fairly highly ordered and microcosmic in order to attain an adequate degree of validity within the limitations of their relatively low-powered methodology. In order to develop valid theoretical statements about the internalization of norms and identity, these labeling theorists naturally searched out those settings in which

they could clearly explicate the process of interaction. Consequently, labeling theorists sought to study the most obvious and clear-cut examples of the phenomenon of deviant formation by labeling. Their modest methodological tools (as compared to the rigorous expectations of quantification)<sup>2</sup> compelled them to examine those situations in which the labelee is brought into contact with such highly formalized agencies as the school, mental hospital, prison, or novitiate. Only in these and comparable situations could the researcher ever hope to document the process by which the labelee becomes assimilated into the role patterns designated by the systematic application of label. Unfortunately for the long-range development of the labeling perspective, those situations that imposed the fewest methodological problems for research were, not surprisingly, the ones in which individuals become formed rather passively into secondary deviants.

With a few important exceptions, such as Becker and Geer<sup>3</sup> (1957, 1960; Becker, 1958), methodologists treating qualitative data have been rather apologetic in their efforts to make their approach respectable according to the criteria of quantitative research. This interpretation of the methodological source of the philosophical bias of labeling studies is confirmed by the methodological reflections of some of those directly connected with the labeling perspective. Even Blumer, in his

<sup>2</sup> To their credit, Glaser and Strauss (1967) anticipated the direction of the criticism presented here. They proffer a clear analysis of how sociologists failed to appreciate the value of their qualitative methodology for generating grounded theory and focused instead on conforming and subordinating those qualitative aspects of their research to the seemingly more legitimate enterprise of developing and verifying logico-deductive theory. Glaser and Strauss point out two phases in the history of American sociology as the foundation for what I would consider a kind of inferiority complex among sociologists working with qualitative data. The first phase resulted in putting "the generation of grounded theory into second place, and made verification the dominant orientation in virtually all sociological work" (12). The second phase, closely linked to the first, was "the clash between advocates of quantitative and qualitative data" (15).

<sup>3</sup> Becker and Geer take pains to differentiate the distinctive methods, types of data, and theory-generating function of participant observation and to resist the subordination of this approach to models of quantitative research.

“Appraisal of Thomas and Znaniecki’s *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*” (1939), threw the weight of his analysis “toward an examination of verification, rather than toward the question of how to generate rounded theory” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 14). But this stress on objective research and verification goes back even further. Mead (1964) took pains to enunciate the philosophical bases of scientific knowledge (45–61), and to establish the social act as the objective index of a person’s subjective orientation (65–82). This emphasis has continued to the present, leaving its mark on almost all works dealing with methods of qualitative research (cf., for instance, Dean, *et al.*, 1967; Hammond, 1964, especially Udy; Barton and Lazarsfeld, 1961; Adams and Preiss, 1960).

The most instructive examples of the bias toward verification and how this contributes to an individualistic bias in labeling studies are the methodological works of Cicourel (1964) and Bruyn (1966). Although Cicourel mentions the function of qualitative research for the development of theory (71), he focuses on the up-grading of qualitative methods to insure systematic verification of theories and hypotheses. He also reveals a lower esteem for the function of theory generation than Glaser and Strauss in his remark that participant observation should focus on “testing hypotheses. . . . Otherwise this method amounts to a continual ‘pilot study’” (67). Similarly, the dominant concern of Bruyn’s monograph exploring the historical and philosophical foundations of participant observation and its methodology is to encourage the field researcher “to be systematic in his work and obtain verifiable data” (252). Bruyn maintains that qualitative participant-observation research comprises a “new empiricism” to be distinguished from the more behavioristic “traditional empiricism” of social science (4–6). While Bruyn makes an impressive case for the role of participant observation research and verification techniques (198–254, 255–270), he reveals strong attachment to verification in his approach to qualitative research.

Of course there is nothing inherently wrong with any attempt to bring rigor to the sociological enterprise. An exclusive focus on theory generation to the neglect of data-gathering and verification is just as inadequate as the opposite alternative and would return us to

the disjunction between theory and research so well criticized by Merton (1945) over twenty-five years ago. But the point remains: an excessive emphasis on verification in quantitative research seems to have constrained the theoretical scope of this perspective. In practice, labeling theorists tend to apply their perspective to the more formal and structured settings in which individuals are labeled. A passive characterization of labelees readily follows. A single *individual* in a well organized situation is seldom able to accomplish a viable political denial of the validity of a label. At most he might occasionally resist the application of a label to himself or to an associate.

#### *Ideological Source*

A second reason why the labeling approach has tended to focus on the passive aspects of the individual labeled deviant derives from the liberal perspective espoused by many contemporary sociologists. Whenever someone engages in cutting through a society’s ideological understanding of its institutions he becomes more aware of the coercive effect these institutions have on their members or clients (cf. Berger, 1963:25–53; 1971). This realization, I believe, has led sociologists to study those situations and aspects of so called “deviant” behavior where agents of social control coercively apply labels to individuals. Becker’s (1967:243–46) classic essay, “Whose Side are We On?,” summarizes the sympathies of contemporary practitioners of the interactionist perspective and frankly admits the perspective’s ideological bias. According to Becker, in the past sociologists all too frequently assumed that “the man at the top knows best.” Consequently, sociologists failed to realize that they were actually taking a side when analyzing conflict or deviance within levels of a hierarchy. When students of deviance came to the awareness that they must inevitably “take a side” and that the side they had usually taken in the past was the side of the super-ordinate, they developed—by choice and out of reaction—a counter perspective to the earlier pro-establishment bias. The result, notes Becker (1964), has been the development of an “unconventional sentimentality.” Consequently, says Becker (1964:5), the pro-establishment bias

assumes, and refuses to examine the assumption, that things are in fact "worse" than they might be, . . . (the unconventional sentimentalist) assumes . . . that the underdog is always right and those in authority always wrong . . . The same kind of sentimentality is sometimes found in studies of deviance, manifesting itself in a tendency to refuse to admit that the deviants under study have done wrong.

As we will exemplify below, this unconventional sentimentality, while clearly a necessary balance to the pro-establishment bias, too often blinded those working within the labeling perspective to the study of *political deviance*: those cases where aggressive, activist groups present ideologies and/or perform actions that radically challenge an established hierarchy of values and norms. Further—and what is important for our considerations in this paper—this political deviance invariably involves negotiation or struggle between agents of social control and political deviants in which various favorable and unfavorable labels are exchanged, accepted, resisted and countered.

#### *The Irony of Labeling Studies*

Obviously, identifying the reasons for the contemporary emphasis on the passive individual does not refute the theoretical or empirical findings of existent labeling studies. It is not so much that these studies have been wrong but that labeling theorists, more often than not, failed to appreciate the power of their new perspective for studying political deviance.

Moreover, what is more ironic (and unfortunate) about this failure is that precisely because labeling studies have been so stimulating and provocative, they have spurred further research which, instead of expanding the scope of interactionist analysis to study the negotiation of labels by aggressive groups, has merely repeated documentation of the successful labeling of helpless individuals.

#### *Documentation of the Bias: Viewing the Labeled as Passive*

As we have said, the philosophical bias of studies of deviance has two components: first, an emphasis on the passivity of the labeled; second, a focus on the individual rather than on the group as the unit being labeled. This

dual bias of individuality and passivity pervades the literature of the labeling approach.<sup>4</sup> First, we will document the bias toward studying settings in which individuals remain passive within the labeling process.

Thomas Scheff (1964; 1966), Thomas Szasz (1961), R. D. Laing (1962; 1967), and Erving Goffman (1961) all study how powerless individuals come to be treated as mentally ill according to the will and perspective of their families, friends and psychiatrists rather than according to some inherent or objective mental disability. In the legal sphere, Duster (1970) and Schur (1965) report the secondary consequences of labeling for drug users, homosexuals, and women having abortions. Sudnow (1965) and Chevigny (1969) unveil the dynamics and underlying rationale behind the seemingly arbitrary plea and charge negotiations by which police and courts allocate particular individuals to specific categories of crime or guilt. Similarly, Matza (1969), Cicourel (1968), and Tannenbaum (1938) describe how various imputations or labels imposed upon people lead to the emergence of delinquent and criminal behavior. Erikson (1964; 1966) and Currie (1968) describe how legal systems cull out and certify certain quotas of persons as deviant in order to identify the normative boundaries of the society. Studying less dramatic expressions of many of the same processes, Goffman (1963), Freidson (1965), and Kitsuse (1964) examine the dynamics of stigmatization whereby various negative characteristics are imputed to a person who subsequently faces such reactions as the retrospective reinterpretation of his previous actions and words. Another striking use of the labeling approach to study imputations of labels to individuals is Cicourel and Kitsuse's (1963) investigation of how the designation of students as either "college-qualified" or

<sup>4</sup> For example, both biases can be seen in this quotation from Denzin's (1968) study, "The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy and Patient-Therapist Interaction":

In order for the therapist to enact his own role as medical practitioner, it is necessary for the patient to publicly accept his status in the hospital and to develop a view of self which is in accordance with the therapist's. In short, the patient must learn to view the hospital as a legitimate treatment source. In addition, he must learn to view himself as mentally ill and in need of treatment. . . . The therapist forms an initial definition on the basis of this presentation and proceeds to act toward the patient in a manner which tends to support and validate his initial definitions (349-50).

"non-college qualified" (and, by implication, the designation of their occupational choices) are determined not so much by the student's ability, motivation or peer-group but by practices of the high school administrative organization, especially the routine decisions of guidance and counseling personnel.

*Documentation of the Bias: The Individual as the Unit of Analysis*

Freidson (1965:98), suggests that sociologists might profit from paying more attention to the aggressive aspects of the labelee's role in the process of label designation:

Individuals do come to define themselves in a particular way and to seek out the agencies at which they present themselves. In this sense, the deviant population defined by agencies may not be that which the agency has picked out so much as that which has picked itself out—"professional deviants," as it were, of special characteristics.<sup>5</sup>

While Freidson's comment seems to suggest the balance we are advocating, his caveat falls short. Apart from the general tendency of labeling studies to concentrate on the passive rather than the aggressive aspects of the labelee, on the *coerced imputation* of a label rather than the *chosen internalization* of a label, we have also noted the focus on the individual rather than the group. Returning to Freidson's statement, it is significant that even when he does discuss the value of studying the defensive or aggressive moves of the imputed recipient, he still speaks of individuals.

Several studies have been made on the process of defensive label-resistance or aggressive counter-labeling by particular individuals. But, because these studies continue to focus on the individual, they fail to come to grips with the politics of power that groups use when seeking to resist and counter an "enemy's" label.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> However, Freidson admits that in his own study of the disabled he speaks of the labelee "as a pawn" (1965:98).

<sup>6</sup> Alex Thio (1973) in the most recent issue of this journal suggested a closely related argument. Thio would presumably agree with the thesis of this paper that labeling theorists have focused on powerless individuals and that this bias expresses itself in the methodological, conceptual, and theoretical formulations of the labeling perspective. The critical difference

For instance, Goffman in *Stigma* (1963) and *Asylums* (1961) speaks of the processes, respectively, of "stigma management" and "secondary adjustment" by which an individual appears to follow the rules while secretly resisting an expected routine. Sykes and Matza (1957) investigate four neutralization techniques by which an individual may resist the internalization of the socially derogatory label of criminal. Sobel and Ingalls (1968) examine the efforts of psychiatric patients to resist the self-help role their psychiatrists insist upon, and to substitute what the patients consider the more pleasing medical-patient role that allows for greater passivity, dependency, and submission.

Kai T. Erikson (1968:337-38), seeking to stress the active character of the medical patient, distinguishes two aspects of the labeling process, role-validation and role-commitment:

Role validation takes place where a community "gives" a person certain expectations to live up to . . . Role commitment is the complementary process whereby a person adopts certain styles of behavior as his own, committing himself to role themes that best represent the kind of person he assumes himself to be, and best reflect the social position he considers himself to occupy,

According to Erikson (1968) sociologists have been more concerned with the processes of validation than personal commitment. In so doing, "sociologists have largely overlooked the extent to which a person can *engineer* a change in the role expectations held in his behalf, rather than passively waiting for others to 'allocate' or 'assign' roles to him" (338). Applying the corrective he advocates (but still focusing on the individual), Erikson documents the "long and delicate negotiations" between the individual patient and the hospital staff during which a compromise emerges between the individual's personal sense of identity and the functional needs of the institution.

Orrin E. Klapp (1972:3) is also concerned with the dynamics of self-typing as opposed to typing by others; but again the individual is the unit of analysis. Klapp maintains the

between our arguments is that while Thio maintains that the cause of this bias is the labeling sociologists' "tacit support of the power elite" (8), I include methodological sources as well. Also, somewhat more optimistically, I discern signs of hope within the labeling perspective for a response to this bias.

premise that "everyone in modern society is vitally interested in creating a type for himself, the deviant no less than the Philistine. Self-typing gives psychological content to the quest of status." Going further, efforts at self-typing are basically attempts at "finding oneself"; thus personality-typing is "less a matter of measuring 'traits' than of finding out how people type themselves" (4). Finally, correctly pointing out the usually implicit attempts at counter-labeling, Klapp maintains that the effort to type oneself "includes the effort to type others."

Also examining the negotiation of labels by individuals, Austin T. Turk (1966:339-40) holds that deviance measured by the violation of laws often results from the response of non-pathological, "essentially normal persons" to realistic conflicts of interest. Scheff's (1968:4) discussion of the negotiation of labels in the psychotherapeutic and criminal (plea-bargaining) settings corroborates Turk's point:

My purpose is to argue that responsibility is at least partly a product of social structure. The alternative to the doctrine of absolute responsibility is that of relative responsibility: the assessment of responsibility always includes a process of negotiation. In this process, responsibility is in part constructed by the negotiating parties.

Happily, these studies stress that an individual is not determinately fixed in a particular role merely because a group attempts to impute that role. However, even though some labeling theorists manifest an appreciation for the aspects of conflict whereby labels are negotiated, neutralized, resisted, or countered, they still fail to consider cases where the negotiation of labels occurs between two groups rather than between two individuals or an individual and a group.

In summary, four points can be made. First, these studies consistently consider the individual as the unit of analysis. In almost every instance the sociologist examines the imputation by an organization or group of people of a label to an individual. There is virtually no consideration of two or more organizations or groups vying for a particular label or seeking to impute a label to one another. Second, there is a persistent over-tone of deterministic language and imagery.

The labelee is spoken of as "victimized"; he is "imputed" a label; he is under "compulsion." For example, while bowing to the fact that "reality is not wholly like that," Freidson (1965:98) explicitly maintains a perspective that "sees the individual as a pawn or victim of others' conceptions of him, and of the structure of agencies into which he happens to get pushed." Third, it is precisely these characteristics of labeling studies—their emphasis on the individuality and passivity of the labelee—that betray their pathos of pessimism and fatalism. Fourth, this bias, as we have said, is directly opposed to what we would expect from analysts who are committed to Mead's insistence that individuals are in constant reflective dialogue with reality rather than simply determined by it.

#### *Breaking Away from Philosophical Bias*

Is there any possibility that sociologists who use the labeling perspective will overcome their philosophical bias? In view of the theoretical resources implicit in Mead's concept of social interaction, labeling theory should be able to cope with aggressive group negotiations. Moreover, the recent increase in the visibility of political deviance may spur sociologists to a more encompassing use of the labeling perspective.

*The Meadian Framework.* On the theoretical level as we have pointed out, the Meadian stance from which the labeling perspective emerged insists that the formation of identity involves more than the result of externally imposed patterns of behavior and thought. It also stresses an opposite aspect: what Strauss (1964:xv) calls "emergent evolution." Based on Mead's notion of the creative, unpredictable "I" dimension of the "self," the notion of "emergent evolution" implies, says Strauss (xv), "that persons are somewhat freer agents than is allowed in the more usual sociological view: freer not only to find ways to circumvent norms and rules, but also freer to help change the social structures within which they find themselves."

Although seldom treated explicitly, this inherent potential of symbolic interactionism to study the voluntaristic aspects of interaction and to extend its framework to the group level never has remained too far beneath the surface and has begun to be treated more directly.

Thus a return to this original Meadian affirmation is not so much a new insight as a fuller explication and application of a neglected theme.

For example, in one recent study, Becker and Horowitz (1970) take note of the aggressive approach of various groups ordinarily labeled deviant. The authors point out that in San Francisco a "culture of civility" has emerged which allows for a toleration of and accommodation to the "minor forms of deviance encompassed in sex, dope, and cheap thrills" . . . Thus "deviants find it possible to live somewhat more openly in San Francisco than elsewhere" (1970:17, 14).

Earlier, Lemert (1967:14) suggested the need, in studies of deviance, "for a theory of associational groups as agencies which fix and alter the order of value satisfaction, as well as shape means to ends." Suggesting that forms of aggressive group deviance (even if not political in the strict sense of radically new value assertions) have been around for a long time, Lemert points out that

A vast amount of case evidence shows that illegal price-fixing, misrepresentation, adulteration, collusive bidding, abetting extortion by labor racketeers, tax evasion, restrictive covenants, as well as a modicum of more traditional crimes, including even behavior chargeable as treason, follow from informal, clandestine, political decisions of associations (15).

Going back even further, although Goffman (1961:215) consistently focuses on the individuals as his unit of analysis (because "collective means of working the system seem not too common in mental hospitals"), he does speak of the character and function of "secondary adjustment" (189) by which "the individual (or group) stands apart from the role and the self that were taken for granted for him by the institution." He also speaks of the "underlife" of an institution (199) as comprised of the "full set of such adjustments that all the members of the organization severely and collectively sustain."

In sum, it seems that although the labeling approach has not followed them up, it theoretically does leave a place for the analysis of forms of aggressive political deviance.

*Visibility of Political Deviance.* Some would hold that the neglect of the political aspects

of the labeling process is due simply to the scarcity of political deviance during the late 1950's and early 1960's when the labeling perspective was emerging. Along this line, Horowitz and Liebowitz (1968:282) contend that "Deviance has been studied by employing a consensus welfare model rather than a conflict model because, for the most part . . . the subordinate parties, the deviants themselves, have not entered the political arena." In the words of Becker (1967:240-1):

It is a situation in which, while conflict and tension exist in the hierarchy, the conflict has not become openly political. The conflict segments or ranks are now organized for conflict; no one attempts to alter the shape of the hierarchy. While subordinates may complain about the treatment they receive from those above them, they do not propose to move to a position of equality with them, or to reverse positions in the hierarchy. Thus, no one proposes that addicts should make and enforce laws for policemen, that patients should prescribe for doctors, or that adolescents should give orders to adults. We call this a political case.

While it would not be difficult to make the case that the incidence and visibility of political deviance have increased during the past few years, it does not seem valid to maintain that such deviance is a recent phenomenon. Examples abound of individuals and groups undercutting existing value orientations by aggressively seeking to win acceptance for their views of reality as expressed in the labels they attempt to legitimate: colonists who dumped tea into Boston Harbor, failed to pay taxes, and asserted their independence; slaves who conspired to rebel and flee and the whites who sheltered them; the Confederacy that sought to dissolve the Union; the early years of labor organizing and conflict; pacifists throughout American history who were brought to trial and jailed; the numerous phases of the black struggle for civil rights; women's efforts to win suffrage; the battle by Communists to gain the right to free speech and the right to hold public office; the conflicts surrounding atheists who refused to pray and science teachers who neglected Genesis.

Nevertheless, the recent increase in the incidence and visibility of political deviance may provide an objective context within which

labeling theorists may counteract their philosophical bias.

At an early date, Becker (1965:78) suggested that such activities as homosexual defense organizations, self-help organizations of heroin addicts, and the LSD movement headed by Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert "exemplify the increasing militancy, organization, and self-consciousness of deviant worlds and their growing unwillingness to let respectable society have its own way with them unchallenged." More dramatically, perhaps, groups of radicals and revolutionaries, such as the Black Panthers, the Chicago 7, the Catonsville 9, and American Indian and Chicano defense leagues have challenged the legitimacy of existing norms, values, and behavior. They have explicitly and aggressively confronted dominant American culture and authority in the press, in the courts, on the streets, and in the countryside. Regretably, among sociologists using the labeling perspective, this data goes begging for analysis.

*Other Sources of Transition.* Surely the increased amount and visibility of political deviance and the inherent emphasis of Meadian interactionism are factors contributing to the new consciousness of political deviance evidenced in Becker's statement quoted above. But other factors more directly involved in the relations of labeling theorists to political deviance provide a fuller explanation of this transition. Although a detailed examination of these factors is beyond the scope of this paper, some speculation is possible.

First, it is hardly a secret that social scientists (and especially sociologists) are a liberal lot (cf. Lipset and Ladd, 1970). Likewise, sociologists, as well as their graduate students and undergraduate majors, tend to be over-represented in the more radical activities on the campuses and in many change-oriented groups and movements. Within this framework it is not difficult to suppose that labeling theorists who already make their living by close analysis of contemporary social phenomena would be doubly interested in the more radical instances of labeling and counter-labeling which are sociologically exciting and to which they, their students, and their friends are related.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, labeling theorists,

who are already sensitive to emergent social patterns, are now becoming even more aware of the forms of political resistance present today. It would not be surprising then to find that they will increasingly transfer their methodology for participant observation to the study of macro-level, political cases of resistance to labels and counter-labeling.

Finally, new attitudes towards qualitative research might legitimize more macroscopic studies of political labeling among groups. Labeling theorists (among other sociologists using qualitative data) are ceasing to be embarrassed by their concern for generating rather than verifying theory, or by their use of qualitative rather than quantitative data. Recent methodological treatises (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Blumer, 1969; Becker, 1970; Lofland, 1971) have enhanced the sophistication of the methods of qualitative research, and have legitimated theory generation from qualitative data as a valuable enterprise distinct from logico-deductive theory and verification.<sup>8</sup> Labeling theorists are no longer quite so defensive or apologetic about their methodology, and may even boast that its creativity and accuracy surpasses that of the logico-deductive approach. Moreover, labeling theo-

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cern for a friend who was on trial for destroying draft files, provided the impetus for my application of the labeling perspective to the dynamics of the political trial of the Chicago 15 (Schervish, 1971).

<sup>8</sup> A number of implications follow from the methodological stance taken in the works cited just above: 1) most significantly, an emphasis upon the generation of grounded theory as the signal goal and *raison d'être* of qualitative methods (cf. Glaser and Strauss, 1967:6-7); 2) a functional classification of qualitative methods according to how field research actually proceeds rather than according to some analytic scheme which seeks to reduce methodology "to a defensible set of rules and procedure" (Becker, 1970:8; cf. also Lofland, 1971:13-58); 3) the evolution of methodological procedures such as "exploration" and "inspection" to ensure "the direct naturalistic examination of the empirical social world" (Blumer, 1969:42 ff.); 4) the abandoning of current methodology which give preference "to theoretical schemes, to preconceived models, to arrays of vague concepts, to sophisticated techniques of research, and to an almost slavish adherence to what passes as the proper protocol of research inquiry" (Blumer, 1969:33); and 5) the realizations that "there is no fundamental clash between the purposes and capacities of qualitative methods or data," and that "accurate description and verification are not so crucial when one's purpose is to generate theory" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:7, 28).

<sup>7</sup> In my own case, for example, my political views about the Vietnam war, coupled with my personal con-

rists now should be able to move beyond their carefully drawn social-psychological studies of individuals and begin to explore group, organizational, and societal levels of labeling conflict.<sup>9</sup>

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it is hoped that this treatment of the conceptual, ideological, and methodological shortcomings of the labeling approach may encourage labeling theorists to confront the limitations that pose a perennial problem for studies in the interaction framework. As sociologists begin to examine the various forms of political "deviance" (as staged in and around the courtroom, for instance) they may come to shed light upon other significant theoretical issues such as Lemert's (1967:3) call for a "suitable way of integrating the notion of deviation into a theory of social change." In this way, labeling theorists will be able to break out of the dilemma that now disposes them either to limit their investigations to microcosmic social-psychological settings (where existent norms and values are seldom significantly challenged), or to study rather amorphous macrocosmic situations where it is difficult to document much more than the platitude that social life is a matter of symbolic interaction.

<sup>9</sup> The trial courtroom, because it is an increasingly popular forum of political "deviants" for confrontation, offers a fertile opportunity for theory generation, and is sufficiently structured to satisfy those concerned about quantitative rigor, may provide a starting point for the application of the labeling perspective to political "deviance." The legal framework of the American courtroom provides a relatively uncomplicated forum within which conflict parties debate the validity of labels before a jury that ultimately determines which one of the opposing labels may become operant in its consequences. Further, the courtroom is a highly visible yet formalized platform from which conflicting groups can execute the politics of communication and constituency building.

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