



GSOC.CR3 Labelling Theory and Crime

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Where a question refers to Item C, use both the Item and your own knowledge of labelling theory in your answer.

Item C: Aaliyah's caution

A hypothetical scenario written for this exercise, for students to apply labelling theory to.

Aaliyah, aged 14, is caught shoplifting a chocolate bar from a corner shop and is given a police caution. After this, staff at the shop begin watching her closely whenever she enters, and some pupils at her school start calling her 'the thief' after hearing about the caution. Aaliyah begins avoiding shops altogether and, after months of being treated with suspicion by adults and some classmates, starts spending more time with a group of older teenagers who are frequently in trouble with the police. Six months after the caution, Aaliyah is arrested again, this time for being involved in a group shoplifting incident with her new friends.

1 According to Howard Becker, an act only becomes 'deviant' when...

- ☐ A) it breaks a written law
- ☐ B) a social group or rule-makers label it as such and react to it
- ☐ C) the person doing it feels guilty
- ☐ D) a court convicts the person

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

2 Sociologists use the term 'labelling' to describe a particular process.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 Howard Becker's 1963 book *Outsiders* set out an interactionist theory of deviance.
(a) Explain what Becker meant by describing deviance as a 'social construction'. (2)

(b) Explain what Becker meant by a 'moral entrepreneur'. (2)

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 The sociologist Edwin Lemert distinguished between two types of deviance.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Lemert also identified 'secondary deviance' as a distinct process.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 State what sociologists mean by a 'master status' in the context of labelling theory, giving an example.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

7 State one criticism often made of labelling theory.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

8 State one further criticism of labelling theory.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

9 Look again at Item C. Aaliyah's first act, shoplifting a chocolate bar, leads to a police caution; being called 'the thief' and treated with suspicion follows, and a second, more serious offence follows that.

Using Item C and your knowledge of primary and secondary deviance, explain how Aaliyah's experience might be understood using Lemert's ideas.

(Total for Question 9 is 6 marks)

10 Look again at Item C. By the end of the six months, Aaliyah is treated with suspicion by shop staff and some classmates, and has become closer to an older, already-labelled peer group.

Using Item C and your knowledge of labelling theory, explain how the concepts of 'master status' and the self-fulfilling prophecy could apply to Aaliyah's experience.

(Total for Question 10 is 6 marks)

11 Edwin Lemert's concept of deviance that results from the label applied to an earlier act is called...

- ☐ A) primary deviance
- ☐ B) secondary deviance
- ☐ C) boundary maintenance
- ☐ D) strain

(Total for Question 11 is 1 mark)

12 Labels can be applied by both formal and informal agencies.

(a) State one agency that might apply a formal deviant label to a young person. (2)

(b) State one agency that might apply an informal deviant label to a young person. (2)

(Total for Question 12 is 4 marks)

13 Labelling theory offers a distinctive explanation of crime and deviance, but it has both supporters and critics.

Evaluate the labelling theory explanation of crime and deviance. In your answer you should refer to sociologists' views and consider strengths and weaknesses of the theory.

(Total for Question 13 is 12 marks)

- 14** Sociologists sometimes describe a sequence of increasingly deviant roles that follows secondary deviance.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

- 15** Explain one reason why sociologists argue that some groups are more likely than others to be labelled deviant by the police.

(Total for Question 15 is 2 marks)

- 16** State one way schools or workplaces might unintentionally reinforce a deviant label.

(Total for Question 16 is 2 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.CR3 Labelling Theory and Crime

Question 1

- **B1** B (a social group or rule-makers label it as such and react to it)
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** attaching a definition such as 'criminal' or 'deviant' to a person or an act, often based on a reaction from others rather than the act itself (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. once applied, a label can affect how a person is treated by others
- **Answer: Attaching a definition such as 'criminal' or 'deviant' to a person or act, based on a reaction from others; once applied, a label can affect how the person is treated.**

Question 3

- (a) **B1** identifies that no act is inherently deviant in itself
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. it becomes deviant because social groups or rule-makers define and react to it that way
- (a) **Answer: No act is inherently deviant in itself; it becomes deviant because social groups or rule-makers define and react to it that way.**
- (b) **B1** identifies a moral entrepreneur as a person or group who campaigns to have a new rule or law created, and enforced
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. often to address behaviour they personally see as wrong or threatening
- (b) **Answer: A moral entrepreneur is a person or group who campaigns to have a new rule or law created and enforced, often to address behaviour they see as wrong or threatening.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies primary deviance as a minor, often unplanned act of rule-breaking
- **B1** explains it usually has little or no effect on how a person sees themselves
- **B1** development, e.g. it often goes unnoticed or unpunished
- **B1** further point, e.g. because primary deviance is not usually publicly labelled, most people who commit it do not go on to develop a deviant identity
- **Answer: Primary deviance is a minor, often unplanned act of rule-breaking that usually has little effect on a person's self-image, often going unnoticed or unpunished; because it is not usually publicly labelled, most people who commit it do not develop a deviant identity.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies secondary deviance as deviance that results from the social reaction to, or labelling of, primary deviance
- **B1** explains that being caught and labelled can cause a person to reorganise their self-image around the deviant label
- **B1** development, e.g. this can lead to further, more serious deviance
- **B1** further point, e.g. sometimes described as the start of a 'deviant career'
- **Answer: Secondary deviance is deviance that results from the social reaction to primary deviance; being caught and labelled can cause a person to reorganise their self-image around the label, which can lead to further deviance, sometimes described as a deviant career.**

Question 6

- **B1** the label that comes to dominate how a person is seen by others, overriding their other qualities (oe)
- **B1** a correct example, e.g. someone becomes known mainly as 'a criminal' rather than as, for example, a good friend or employee
- **Answer: The label that comes to dominate how a person is seen by others, overriding their other qualities; for example, someone might become known mainly as 'a criminal' rather than as a good friend or employee.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. it can be too deterministic, assuming being labelled will always lead to further deviance, when many labelled people do not reoffend
- **B1** brief development
- **Answer: Critics argue labelling theory can be too deterministic, assuming being labelled will always lead to further deviance, when in reality many labelled people do not reoffend.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies a further recognised criticism, e.g. it does not fully explain why the initial, primary deviant act happened in the first place
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or that it relies heavily on small-scale, qualitative studies, making it harder to generalise its findings
- **Answer: Labelling theory does not fully explain why the initial, primary deviant act happened in the first place, and relies heavily on small-scale, qualitative studies, making it harder to generalise.**

Question 9

- **B1** correctly identifies the first, chocolate-bar shoplifting incident as primary deviance: a relatively minor, one-off act
- **B1** correctly identifies the police caution and being labelled 'the thief' by peers as the labelling or societal-reaction stage
- **B1** explains this reaction leads Aaliyah to be treated with suspicion, reducing her trust and opportunities
- **B1** links this treatment to Aaliyah associating with an older peer group already in trouble with the police
- **B1** correctly identifies the second, group shoplifting arrest as secondary deviance, produced by the earlier labelling
- **B1** accurate use of Lemert's terminology throughout (primary deviance, secondary deviance)
- **Answer: The initial chocolate-bar shoplifting is primary deviance; the caution and being labelled 'the thief' by shop staff and peers is the labelling stage, which pushes Aaliyah towards an older, already-labelled peer group, and her later group shoplifting arrest is secondary deviance, produced by the earlier label rather than by the original act alone.**

Question 10

- **B1** correctly applies master status to Item C, e.g. Aaliyah increasingly being seen mainly as 'the thief' by shop staff and some peers, overriding her other qualities
- **B1** explains how being treated with suspicion by shop staff and classmates narrows Aaliyah's opportunities and relationships
- **B1** links this narrowing to Aaliyah turning towards the older peer group who are already in trouble with the police
- **B1** explains that the further offending which follows can then appear to confirm the original label
- **B1** identifies this pattern, where a label leads to behaviour that then seems to prove the label right, as a self-fulfilling prophecy
- **B1** clear, accurate use of labelling terminology throughout
- **Answer: Aaliyah risks acquiring a master status as 'the thief', which narrows her relationships and opportunities and pushes her towards an already-labelled peer group; her later reoffending then appears to confirm the original label, even though the label itself contributed to the outcome, a self-fulfilling prophecy.**

Question 11

- **B1** B (secondary deviance)
- **Answer: B**

Question 12

- (a) **B1** names a genuine formal agency, e.g. the police, through a caution or an arrest
- (a) **B1** brief accurate development
- **(a) Answer: The police: issuing a caution or making an arrest formally labels a young person's behaviour as deviant or criminal.**
- (b) **B1** names a genuine informal agency, e.g. peers, the school or the local community
- (b) **B1** brief accurate development
- **(b) Answer: Peers: classmates calling someone 'the thief' informally attach a deviant label without any official legal process.**

Question 13

- **Level 4** (10-12): A detailed, well-balanced evaluation that accurately explains the labelling theory explanation of crime, supported by accurate reference to named sociologists. Strengths and weaknesses are analysed in depth, and a reasoned, supported judgement is reached. Sociological terminology is used accurately and consistently throughout.
- **Level 3** (7-9): A clear evaluation of labelling theory, with some accurate reference to sociologists. Some analysis of strengths/weaknesses. An attempt at a conclusion, which may be only partly supported.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Some relevant explanation of labelling theory, with limited development or accuracy. Little clear evaluation of its strengths or weaknesses.
- **Level 1** (1-3): One or two isolated, undeveloped points about labels or reactions to deviance, with little or no sociological terminology or accurate detail.
- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Becker's argument that deviance is socially constructed: no act is inherently deviant, it becomes deviant when a social group or rule-makers (moral entrepreneurs) label and react to it that way.
 - Lemert's distinction between primary deviance (a minor act with little effect on self-image) and secondary deviance (deviance produced by the reaction to primary deviance, once a label is applied).
 - The concepts of master status and the self-fulfilling prophecy: once a deviant label becomes the main way others see a person, this can shape treatment and opportunities in ways that make further deviance more likely.
 - Strength: labelling theory usefully highlights how the reaction of the criminal justice system and wider society can itself worsen or amplify deviant behaviour, rather than crime being caused only by the individual.
 - Strength continued: it draws attention to the fact that not everyone who breaks a rule is treated, or labelled, the same way, raising questions about who gets labelled and why.
 - Weakness: critics argue it is too deterministic, assuming a label will always lead to secondary deviance, when many people who are labelled do not go on to reoffend.
 - Weakness continued: it does not fully explain why the original, primary act of deviance happened in the first place, and relies heavily on small-scale, qualitative studies, which limits how far its findings can be generalised.
 - A balanced conclusion should weigh labelling theory's insight into how societal reaction can shape a deviant career against its limited attention to the original causes of rule-breaking and the fact that not every labelled person follows the pattern it describes.

Question 14

- **B1** the idea that, once someone is labelled deviant and experiences secondary deviance, they may progress through a sequence of increasingly deviant roles or behaviour over time (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. linked to the individual increasingly organising their identity around the deviant label
- **Answer: The idea that, once labelled deviant and experiencing secondary deviance, a person may progress through a sequence of increasingly deviant roles over time, as their identity becomes organised around the label.**

Question 15

- **B1** identifies that the police, like other social groups, can hold stereotypes about who is a 'typical' rule-breaker
- **B1** development, e.g. this can shape which people and areas receive closer surveillance, affecting who is more likely to be caught and labelled, regardless of actual rates of rule-breaking
- **Answer: Sociologists argue the police, like other social groups, can hold stereotypes about who is a 'typical' rule-breaker, which can shape which people and areas receive closer surveillance and are therefore more likely to be caught and labelled, regardless of actual rates of rule-breaking.**

Question 16

- **B1** identifies a genuine mechanism, e.g. treating a pupil or employee with continued suspicion because of a past incident
- **B1** brief development, e.g. this can reduce trust and opportunities regardless of the person's current behaviour
- **Answer: A school or workplace might keep treating someone with suspicion because of a past incident, reducing their trust and opportunities regardless of how they are currently behaving, reinforcing the original label.**