
LABELLING THEORY

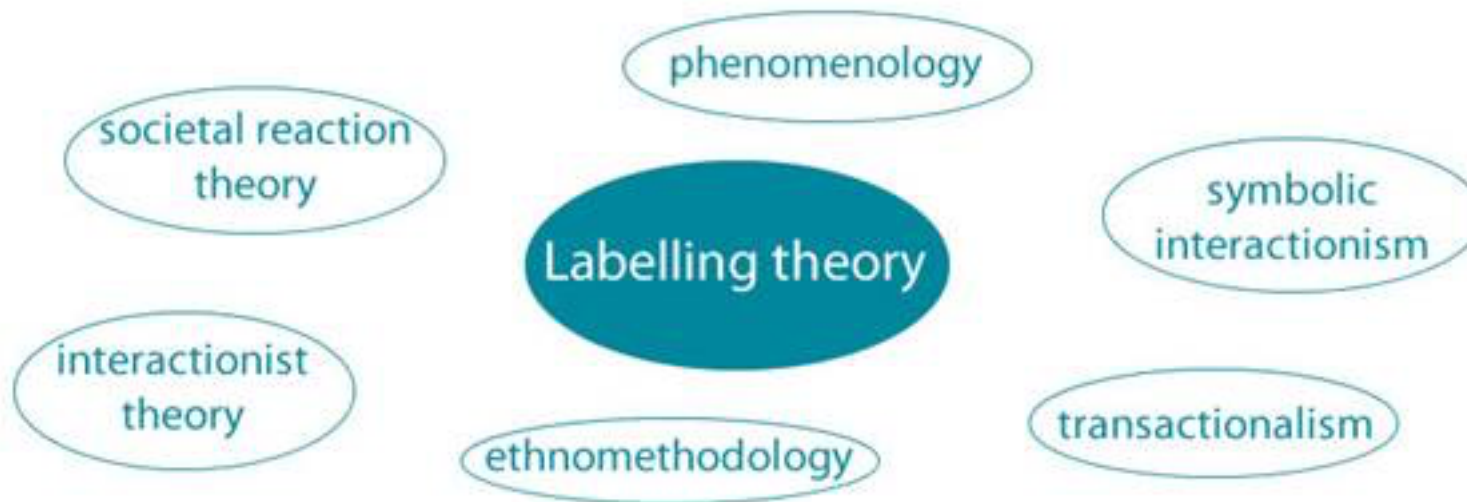
A critical exploration of why society deems it necessary use labels.

1500987 - Patricia Hogg
SJSI5018
Assessment 2

INTRODUCTION

- Labelling theory – what it is
- Positives and negative aspects of labelling
- Why society needs labels
- A critical exploration of class
- Summary and conclusion

LABELLING THEORY – WHAT IT IS



(Fig. 1. University of Portsmouth, 2012)

Labelling theory can be regarded as a collection of labels attributed to social interaction theories (University of Portsmouth, 2012).

LABELLING THEORY – WHAT IT IS

- Origins – Becker's (1963) research into deviance in USA (Giddens, 2006).
- Becker posited that

Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act a person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour people so label (Becker, 1963, p.9)

- Further development
 - society's views of individuals
 - individuals view of self (Lemert, 1972)

LABELLING THEORY – WHAT IT IS

- **Power determined labelling.** Becker and Lemert viewed labelling as a process which determined whether an act is labelled as deviant by those with the power and influence, e.g. a soldier killing someone in a war is not deviant, but outside of that context it is a crime (Giddens, 2006).
- **Context and circumstances.** Labelling theory has been criticised for placing too much emphasis on the action of labelling rather than the circumstances leading to the act of deviance (Bilton, *et al*, 1997).
- **Complex and difficult to prove.** Another critique is that it is difficult to measure just how much of an influence labelling has on increasing deviant behaviour as there are other factors which may be more significant such as association and interaction with criminals within a custodial environment (Bilton, *et al*, 1997).

WHY SOCIETY NEEDS LABELS

- **Power and control.** Labelling aids the social stratification and reproduction of inequalities within society to categorise, contain and organise people and things.
- **Government intervention.** Governments use labels when drafting legislation to target specific groups or individuals, e.g. The Equality Act (2010).
- **Convenience.** Provides compartmentalisation in the provision of services e.g. NHS.
- **Tangible and visible.** Friere (1973), proposed that by giving something a label it becomes real for society.
- **Societal function.** Enables society to function within the rules and boundaries set by it.

(Taylor *et al*, 2000; Wilkinson, 2011; Bordieu, 1984; *The Equality Act 2010*. Warwick-Booth, 2013; Friere, 1973)

LABELLING – POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS

Positive Aspects

- Inclusion
- Acceptance
- Access to services and resources
- Understanding
- Power
- Freedom
- Tolerance
- Identity

Negative Aspects

- Self-fulfilling prophecy
- Stereotyping
- Stigma
- Prejudice - personal and institutional
- Division
- Othering
- Impact on life-span development

(Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Field, 2012; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1993; Sarpong, 2017)



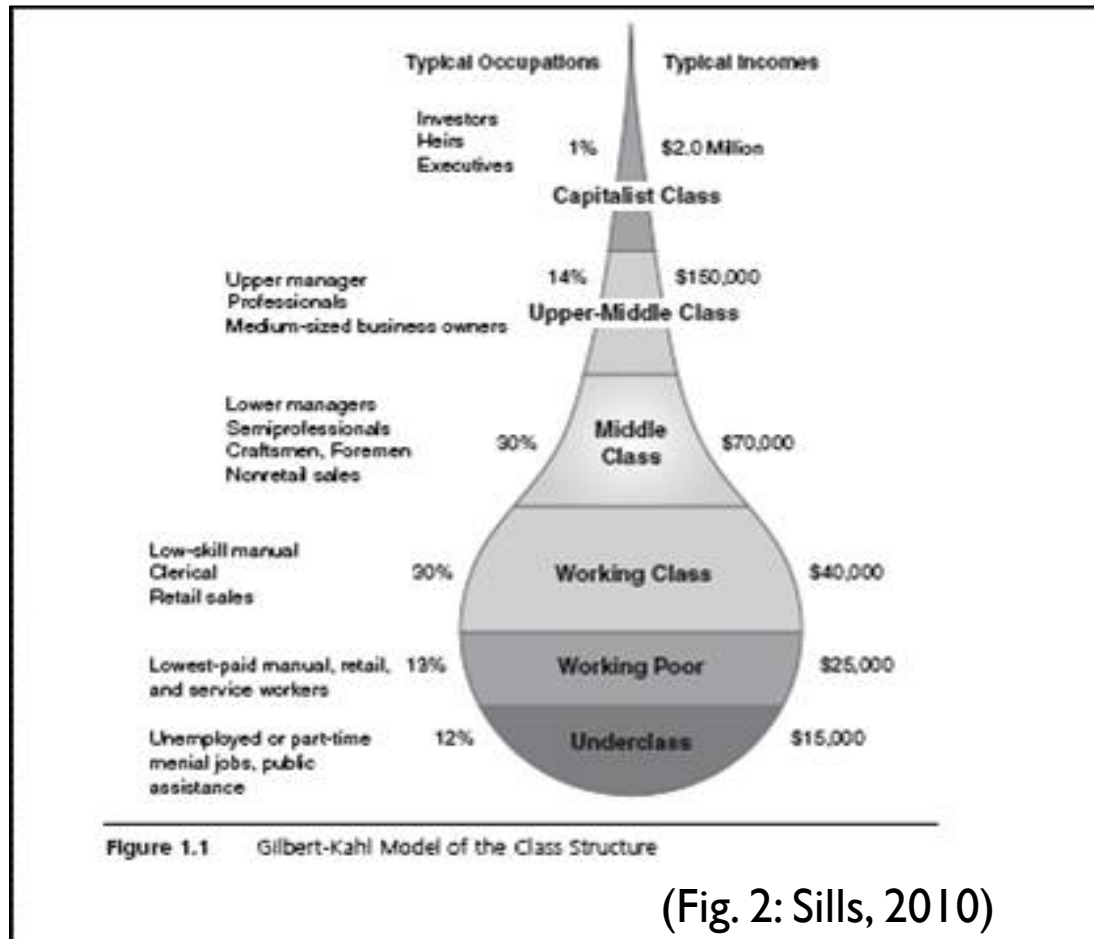
CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF CLASS

- The **'class' label** attributed to individuals or groups of people directly affects their social, economic and cultural capital (Ball, 2004).
- **Dominant classes**, i.e. those with more wealth and power exert influences over the other 'lesser' classes by promoting an ideology of desire for perceived high value attributes, i.e. material, personal and cultural (Bourdieu, 1984).
- **Stigma and exclusion** exist amongst people from all class backgrounds but those in the 'so called' upper classes have better access to social, economic and cultural capital which helps negate any adverse effects or consequences of their class (Giddens, 2006).



(Fig. 3. John Cleese, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett on the Frost Report
ITV/REX FEATURES, The Times, 2013)

CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF CLASS



Evolving class structure, increasing complexity but with an impact on economic capital.
(Gilbert and Kahl *cited in* Sills, 2010).

CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF CLASS



(Fig. 4. O'Connor, 2017)

'There's room at the top they are telling you still
But first you must learn how to smile as you kill
If you want to be like the folks on the hill
A working class hero is something to be'

(Lennon, 1970)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- Labelling is simplistic at its core but complex in its execution.
- It is dynamic, i.e. changing and challenging with the times
- The symbols of class versus the values of class can lead to conflict

June Sarpong (2017) cites the sentiments argued by Jo Cox, MP when she writes ‘.... we have far more in common than that which divides us’ ().

CONCLUSION

- Labelling is underpinned by theory, origins and development from the 1960s based on consideration of deviant behaviour, but also society's view and individuals view of self.
- At its root it can be seen to be about **power** and **control** but influenced by context and circumstances.
- It is complex and difficult to prove causal links but has positive and negative aspects. It can be helpful but also constraining and limiting.
- It has its uses for example, government targetted interventions and features in public service delivery e.g. NHS model.
- Describing labels, for example class, by a set of rules or features can make it tangible and real for society in order to function.
- It is a feature of society and has been explored in mainstream music and culture.

‘.... we have far more in common than that which divides us’

(Cox, 2016 *cited in* Sarpong, 2017, pp. 3-4)

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