

# Sociological Theories - Interactionism

## LO1 – DESCRIBE SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF CRIMINALITY

Assessment Criterion	Content	Amplification
AC2.3  You should be able to -  Describe Sociological Theories of Criminality	<b>Sociological Theories</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Structure</li> <li>• <b>Interactionism</b></li> <li>• Realism</li> </ul>	<b>You should have knowledge and understanding of:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Marxism</li> <li>✓ Functionalism</li> <li>✓ <b>Labelling</b></li> <li>✓ Left and Right Realism</li> </ul>

### INTERACTIONISM

Interactionism is a sociological theory that emphasises the interactions between people rather over the importance of big institutions of society such as the class, education or political systems. Put simply interactionism emphasises the small scale over the big.

**CRIMINAL RECORD**

### HOWARD BECKER'S LABELLING THEORY

Howard Becker (1963) argues that there is no such thing as a deviant or criminal act; an act only become deviant or criminal when the groups which have the power to label it as deviant or criminal, do so and set about controlling it. This theory works well with social structure theories such as Marxism and feminism. In a capitalist society the ruling class set the rules for the working classes, and in an ethnically divided society, minority ethnic groups are judged and labelled according to the standards of the dominant ethnic group.

### PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND MASTER STATUS

The interactionist sociologist Edwin Lemert distinguishes between primary and secondary deviance. **Primary deviance** involves acts of minor deviance, such as avoiding paying fares on public transport or keeping money from being over-changed in the supermarket, nearly everyone does these acts from time to time and usually they do not attract a label. **Secondary deviance** on the other hand results from being labelled. Once caught and charged the person becomes defined by their deviance, it becomes a **master status**, all other statuses a person might have (e.g., father, son, neighbour etc) that person might have, are judged against this label. The person may find it hard to escape their status, so much so that they begin to accept it and so begins the **self-fulfilling prophecy**.

### LABELLING AND DIFFERENTIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

Interactionists argue that agencies such as are more likely to 'label' some groups as criminal. This means they are more likely to devote police time and attention on these groups and communities. This in turn means that these individual from communities will become over-represented in law enforcement actions such stop and search, arrest and ultimately conviction for criminal offences.

Put simply if the police go looking for criminality, they will find it.

### THE SELF- FULFILLING PROPHECY

Another important concept associated with labelling is 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. It is suggested that when a label is applied to an individual for example, mad, bad or criminal - their behaviour will become consistent with that label - this is the Self-fulfilling Prophecy. A label once applied may increase the chances of offending by isolating the individual from society and encouraging friends and family to reject them. The 'deviant' may consequently seek comfort, sympathy, normality and status in a 'subculture' of others who have been branded with a similar label.



Boris Johnson and Former Prime Minister David Cameron were both members of the Bullingdon Club. This was a notorious student group being associated with a wide range of illegal behaviour, this behaviour was not subject to the same social control and punishment that it would have attracted had they been poor people rioting, rather than rich people "letting off steam".