

## **DEVIANCE, STIGMA, FREE WILL, SANITY, RATIONALITY, AND THE OUTER LIMITS OF IDENTITY**

Read: Rhodes 1-224

- I. Characteristics of stigmatization
  - A. Negative trait, due to
    - 1. Individual characteristic
      - a. Disease, disability
      - b. Rhodes: “dingy” (stigmatized)
    - 2. Or resulting from membership in a group
      - a. Race, ethnicity
      - b. Widows are anomalous in some societies, and stigmatized because they shouldn’t exist
    - 3. Of course, an individual characteristic will result in your being assigned to a group
  - B. Frequently, but not always, stigmatized people are deviant in the statistical sense—i.e., unusual
    - 1. However, categories containing large numbers of people may be stigmatized
    - 2. **DISCUSS:** Examples?
  - C. Original meaning: visible sign, not necessarily negative
    - 1. Unusual, and due to a strange cause
    - 2. The cross on tops of hands caused by a supernatural being
    - 3. A superficial feature (religious “stigmata”)
      - a. That reveals grace, holiness, innocence, etc., within
  - D. Erving Goffman, famous sociologist
    - 1. Stigma results in a “spoiled identity”

2. Begins famous book *Stigma* with a letter written by a girl to a newspaper columnist asking for help; she was born without a nose

## II. Stigmatizing processes

### A. Categorization and generalization

1. People who share a characteristic feature (“the mark”<sup>1</sup>—which refers to whatever elicits stigmatization)
2. Are lumped into a group and are seen to share certain other basic personal characteristics as well
3. Fairly superficial features are seen to indicate more fundamental traits that lead to deviant behavior or deficiencies of character

### B. Stigma is an extreme form of categorical inference:

1. It often “engulfs” the identity of the individual, because the objectionable characteristics attributed become highly salient

### C. For the most part, stigma is accompanied by very negative affect on the part of the stigmatizers

1. The affect elicited may be more complex than simple negative reactions
  - a. Sometimes fascination appears—there may not be a feeling of abhorrence at all
    - 1) Little children will react this way
  - b. Pornography sometimes includes people considered to be defective—obese, deformed
    - 1) This kind of pornography is playing with excess extremes and shock, seeking to invert what ordinarily is attractive
    - 2) So, the reaction might be a blend of fascination with repulsion

### D. Classic stigma:

1. Visible features are seen to be an index of (to point to)

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<sup>1</sup> Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963.

- a. The presence of more fundamental, invisible traits that are seen to produce deviant behavior or deficiencies of character
- 2. The reaction can be complex
  - a. In some kinds of stigmatization the stigmatizers know they should feel pity
  - b. Note that sometimes individuals who are stigmatized say they don't want people's pity, just equal treatment and respect
  - c. Or stigmatizers realize that some of this process is arbitrary and inappropriate
    - 1) They realize that there simply is not enough evidence for their negative reactions
  - d. So, if guilt and sympathy mingle, the very common emotion accompanying stigmatizing processes—ambivalence—appears

### III. Cross-cultural and historical variation

- A. Some unusual, stigmatized conditions in the West (epilepsy, psychotic episodes) are, as it were, harnessed in other societies
  - 1. A person who suffers from seizures might be recruited to be a shaman
- B. Historical variation in what is stigmatized, and how stigmatized people are understood
  - 1. Lepers a classic example
  - 2. Witches
    - a. Present-day secular, liberal explanations reject the notion
    - b. Deviant, previously stigmatized behavior is often *medicalized*
  - 3. **DISCUSS:** Examples?

### IV. Four perspectives have been taken in social science to analyze stigma

- A. The first examines how stigmatized people manage, cope

1. Accept the labeling, internalize the evaluation, see themselves as less valuable, feel shame
  2. Try to manage it, manage information about themselves
  3. Passing: costly to the individual who chooses this route
  4. Covering: work to keep displays at a minimum
  5. Dual consciousness: hyper-awareness, hyper-sensitivity
    - a. W.E.B. DuBois—we'll read his writing later on
  6. Accept that one's behavior is deviant, but disagree with totalizing label
    - a. "Hate the sin but not the sinner" expresses this idea
  7. Work to change meaning of stigmatized behavior or physical characteristic
    - a. This process needs time
    - b. **DISCUSS:** examples?
      - 1) African-Americans: reappropriate the N word
      - 2) Soul food becomes an emblem
      - 3) Even perform deviant stereotype ("Gangsta")
      - 4) Turn mainstream society's evaluation on its head
      - 5) Black is Beautiful
  8. Results is double deviance:
    - a. Belong to stigmatized group
    - b. And don't conform to society's expectations for group members
      - 1) Examples last class: Mandela, Martin Luther King, Ghandi, Ida B. Wells
- B. The second approach looks at self-fulfilling prophecy mechanisms, known as social labeling

1. The very act of putting a person into the category can result in that person being perceived to be like other members of the category
  2. These scholars also look at “secondary deviance” in which markables (people with marks) come to behave in deviant fashion as a result of the labeling
    - a. “Living up to their reputation,” as it were
- C. The third approach analyzes stigma as a social control mechanism
1. Stigmatized people serve as a warning, an encouragement to others to stay in line
    - a. They illustrate the dire consequences of not conforming—what was said last week about deviance in general
- D. The fourth approach sees stigmatization directed at people whose appearance or behavior challenges prevailing definitions of the social order, the cosmos—challenges the prevailing categories, classification systems
1. Unlike third approach, which is about social control functions
    - a. This targeting is not considered a conscious process
- E. Example:
1. Kondo describes how she was seriously pushed to conform to Japanese notion of what a daughter is and does, and knew she had to conform
  2. We can see the social control going on (pt. 3)
  3. But also, she was a “conceptual anomaly”—the disconnect between her appearance and behavior challenged the way the world was seen to work (pt. 4)
- V. Summary
- A. Those subjected to the stigmatizing process are seen as a threat to community well-being
    1. Even though the threat is symbolic, not real
  - B. The credibility of such reasoning is established by convincingly demonstrating the links between the person bearing the mark and danger

- C. Such stigmatizing behavior affirms the values of the in-group
1. Displays the in-group's superiority
  2. Enhances its solidarity
  3. Affirms its power—to define, to exclude, to punish
  4. Affirms that the cosmos, the social order, the classificatory system is indeed what people believe it is—and it is a just world
    - a. If you look the way you do, you (or perhaps your mother during pregnancy) must have done something wrong
      - 1) Accidents, illnesses, deaths don't "just happen"
      - 2) Hypothesis that it's just too threatening for people to consider the possibility that bad things randomly happen to good people and vice versa
      - 3) We are socialized during childhood to believe that good things happen to good people and vice versa
    - b. And affirms that entire groups belong where they are, low in the hierarchy

## VI. Criminality

- A. **DISCUSS:** reasons for our affinity for rebels, criminals?
1. We all know, deep in our hearts, that we don't fit in
    - a. Few, if any of us can comfortably and at all times occupy the category 'normal'<sup>2</sup>
    - b. We all chafe against being forced into society's preconceived categories
    - c. We all experience unacceptable desires, impulses
  2. The world is unjust, corrupt, indifferent
    - a. Nelson Mandela, Geronimo, etc.
    - b. Vigilante groups in the Wild West—Clint Eastwood, etc.

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<sup>2</sup> Steph Lawler, 2008. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. Cambridge (UK): Polity Press, p. 145.

- c. Civil disobedience, violence during political protests
- 3. Following a higher authority
  - a. Jesus of Nazareth put on trial and crucified
- 4. On the surface engaging in criminal acts, but below the surface, something we can sympathize with
  - a. Ignorance, naiveté, desperation (looting; Jean Valjean stealing a loaf of bread in *Les Misérables*)
  - b. To right a wrong, even though action is against the law (vengeance, etc.)
  - c. Our actions are justified because we have been mistreated by society
    - 1) Thelma & Louise—movie
- 5. Glamour, excitement, wealth of the (successful) criminal life
  - a. Bourgeois?
- 6. The forbidden is tempting
  - a. Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison" song
    - 1) "I shot a man in Reno just to see him die"
    - 2) Big roar of appreciation from the prison population
  - b.. Rhodes (p. 64) speaks of the "popular fascination with the outlaw":

"Often centers on the possibility that someone outside the current regime of law could escape its guarantee of order and, by the use of force alone, establish a new regime based on his own, currently illegitimate, desires"

B. How the criminal is constructed:

- 1. Durkheim's essay (posted as optional on the website) analyzes "abnormality" as benefiting society

He sees it as organically related to the normative order. Crime provides an opportunity to represent it as an evil and spell out how it will not be

tolerated: it is stigmatized and punished. He sees it functioning to show to community members that there is a moral order

2. A “criminal” doesn’t just engage in criminal behavior, but IS a criminal, it is an identity
  - a. We may break the law frequently (e.g. speeding), but we don’t see ourselves as criminals
3. A criminal is “other”
  - a. Members of a society can project their repressed forbidden impulses, unconscious nonconforming desires onto the criminal
  - b. Thus reassuring themselves they are OK
    - 1) Disavow their dangerous impulses—“only a criminal would do that”
    - 2) “Rapists are totally different from ‘normal men’”
      - a) Even though there’s no profile that predicts what kind of man would commit rape (or murder)
      - b) (There are, of course, profiles of rapists who repeat their crimes, as well as sexual crimes against children)

## VII. What produces criminals?

- A. Lombroso: criminals are apes in our midst
  1. Hereditary/biology determines their criminal behavior
  2. You can discover these individuals (stigmata)
  3. As Gould points out, notion that some people are inherently criminal continues today
- B. A more recent theory: about XYY men
  1. If they have 2 Ys, then double trouble, of course they’re more aggressive
- C. DISCUSS: Theories of causality in the Rhodes book?

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