

# Chapter 7

## Exploring the Labeling Theory of Deviance in Barbados: How Youths' Perceptions of the 'Deviant' Label Is Not Accepted

Nicole Branch-Ellis  
Bowie State University, USA

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter presents findings from a study exploring the extent to which formal interactions with social control agents may propel youth toward delinquent self-perceptions. Using the West Indian island of Barbados as a case study, this research examined the juvenile justice system and juveniles perception of their experiences with the law. This research investigated how youths' exposure to arrest and incarceration affected the likelihood that the juveniles would label themselves negatively, assessed the importance of perceived negative labeling on delinquency, and examined the impact of detention on youths' perceptions of their future possibilities. Findings show that being publicly branded as a deviant does not equate to the acceptance of a deviant label. This research shows that labeling was less likely to be internalized based on the juvenile's social environment; personal, family, and peer history with the law; view of the offenses; personal characteristics and strength; and the practices of social control agents that may acts as a buffer to accepting a deviant label.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-9343-4.ch007

Copyright © 2026, IGI Global Scientific Publishing. Copying or distributing in print or electronic forms without written permission of IGI Global Scientific Publishing is prohibited. Use of this chapter to train generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is expressly prohibited. The publisher reserves all rights to license its use for generative AI training and machine learning model development.

## INTRODUCTION

Little is known about the effects of negative labels on juveniles who have come into conflict with the justice system outside of the United States and Europe. This chapter examines labeling theory's tenets of the etiology of juvenile delinquency by exploring whether youth who come into contact with social control agencies in Barbados are negatively labeled as "delinquent" or "deviant," and the subsequent effects of any such labeling on youth. The purpose here is to determine the extent to which formal interaction with social control agents (in this case, the juvenile justice system comprised of the police, magistrate courts, and correctional institutions) propels juveniles towards delinquent self-perceptions.

Twenty-seven adolescents, 13 females and 14 males, from the Government Industrial School/Secure Residential Facility (GIS/SRF) (formerly named the Government Industrial School in Barbados - GIS) were surveyed. This research (a) documents the offenses committed by girls and boys that placed them in the juvenile detention facility; (b) describes and analyzes the detained youth's perceptions of their experiences with the juvenile justice system, to determine if there is a relationship between the courts' adjudication and the adoption of a deviant self-perception; and (c) discuss the gender-response to youth in conflict with the law. This research revealed two significant findings: (1) even though most of the girls in the system are non-violent offenders, girls are typically incarcerated at an alarmingly higher rate than their male counterparts and (2) contrary to the labeling theory hypothesis, youth in the justice system did not unanimously accept a deviant label because they had been incarcerated.

Notably, it was not until the late 1970s that researchers began to include females in their study samples (Belknap, 2001). Still, there was a point when female delinquents had not been given the same attention as their male counterparts, and everything we "knew" about female delinquency was primarily derived from studies of male delinquency (MacDonald and Chesney-Lind, 2001; Hipwell, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, Keenan, White, and Kroneman, 2002). Now we can say that over the last couple of decades, there have been studies that have progressed our knowledge of gendered pathways and offending (Kruttschnitt, 2016). Akin to the United States, (Espinosa and Sorensen, 2015), adolescent girls have become the fastest-growing segment of the juvenile justice population in Barbados.

According to Sutton and Ruprah (2017), crime rates within the Caribbean have been rising since the 1980s, with almost half of the population (40%) believing that crime is the greatest peril to their country's stability. Despite the growing academic research focused on penal systems in the Caribbean (Bailey & Coore-Desai, 2009; Bergman, Seepersad, Safranoff, & Cafferata, 2020), these efforts have focused on adult incarcerated populations. There has been a limited number of empirical studies

32 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: [www.igi-global.com/chapter/exploring-the-labeling-theory-of-deviance-in-barbados/397420](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/exploring-the-labeling-theory-of-deviance-in-barbados/397420)

## Related Content

---

### Restorative Compassion at Work: Intentional Work-Community Training

Lynne M. Langand Frida C. Rundell (2023). *Restorative Justice and Practices in the 21st Century* (pp. 24-52).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/restorative-compassion-at-work/322561](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/restorative-compassion-at-work/322561)

### Anti-Money Laundering in the Insurance Sector: The Turkish Case

smail Yldrmand Abdul Rafay (2021). *Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing in Global Financial Systems* (pp. 108-127).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/anti-money-laundering-in-the-insurance-sector/274818](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/anti-money-laundering-in-the-insurance-sector/274818)

### Corruption Court Case

(2025). *Exploring the Complexities of Criminal Justice* (pp. 131-138).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/corruption-court-case/360072](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/corruption-court-case/360072)

### Casual or Casualty?: Victimless Crime's Socio-Economic Impact in Indian Context

Himanshi Bhatiaand Prateek Sikchi (2024). *Economic and Societal Impact of Organized Crime: Policy and Law Enforcement Interventions* (pp. 154-172).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/casual-or-casualty/341498](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/casual-or-casualty/341498)

### Four Fundamental Principles to Enhance Police Performance and Community Safety

Eamonn Arbleand Bengt B. Arnetz (2021). *Interventions, Training, and Technologies for Improved Police Well-Being and Performance* (pp. 231-245).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/four-fundamental-principles-to-enhance-police-performance-and-community-safety/281306](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/four-fundamental-principles-to-enhance-police-performance-and-community-safety/281306)