Class Activities

Chapter 11: Labeling Theory and Conflict/Marxist/Radical Theories of Crime

**Class Activity 1: Labeling Theory**

**Application of Labeling Theory (Single or Paired)**

**Instructions:** Examine thetwo pictures and answer the questions below.





1. What labels do you associate with the first picture?
2. What labels do you associate with the second picture?
3. If the man in the first picture was accused of a crime, what crime do you think he might be accused of based on his appearance?
4. If the man in the second picture was accused of a crime, what crime do you think he might be accused of based on his appearance?
5. Why do you think we label people?
6. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of labeling people.

**Class Activity 2: Peacemaking Criminology**

**Simulation (Class Activity)**

**Instructions:** Please read the “Peacemaking Criminology” section of the textbook. The instructor will assign each class member a role to play in a peacemaking/sentencing circle. The goal of a peacemaking circle is to determine collectively a sanction and to reintegrate the offender.

**NOTE: The professor will hand out the description of the Peacemaking/Sentencing Circle to each student. The professor can ask for participant-volunteers or assign roles as necessary. The goal of the exercise is to familiarize students with peacemaking concepts and their implementation in a mock court scenario.**

**Description of a Peacemaking/Sentencing Circle**

A sentencing circle is a community-directed process, conducted in partnership with the criminal justice system, to develop consensus on an appropriate sentencing plan that addresses the concerns of all interested parties. Sentencing circles use traditional circle ritual and structure to involve the victim, victim supporters, the offender, offender supporters, judge and court personnel, prosecutor, defense counsel, police, and all interested community members. Within the circle, people can speak from the heart in a shared search for understanding of the event, and together identify the steps necessary to assist in healing all affected parties and prevent future crimes.

**Offender Support Roles**

* **Offender:** You are a cashier at Wal-Mart. You earn minimum wage. You recently turned 18 years old. You dropped out of high school in your senior year to help support your family. You live at home with your mother (who is a single parent), two siblings, your girlfriend, and your newborn child. You are feeling the financial strain of having to help support such a large family. While working one day, your girlfriend calls to remind you the baby needs diapers and formula. You don’t have the cash to pay for the items. You decide to take $50 from the cash register. Unbeknownst to you, the loss prevention officer sees you take the money and place it your pocket. He has you on video. He approaches you at your station and asks you to follow him to his office. He confronts you with the video. You immediately confess and give him back the money you took. He states that he has to call the police and file charges because it is company policy. The police arrest you and charge you with misdemeanor theft.
* **Girlfriend:** You are the girlfriend of the offender. You are 17 years old and you have just given birth to your first child. When you got pregnant, your parents kicked you out and you now live with your boyfriend, his mother, and his two siblings. You live in a two-room trailer. You are not able to work because you have just given birth. When your boyfriend calls to tell you he has been arrested, you are shocked. You have never known of him being in any trouble.
* **Mother:** You are the offender’s mother. There are currently six people you are working to support. You work as a waitress who earns less than minimum wage, but you earn tips. Sometimes the tips are good and sometimes they are not, but you do the best you can to make ends meet. You did not want your son to drop out of high school, but you were relieved to get some help supporting your family. You are surprised to learn that your son has been arrested for theft. You’re worried about what is going to happen to him.
* **Father:** You are the offender’s father. You are divorced and live alone. You work odd jobs but you have not been able to gain full-time employment. You admit a lot of your difficulties come from the fact that you are an alcoholic. You have fallen behind on your child support payments and you have served time in jail for failure to pay. You are surprised that your son has been arrested. You feel partly responsible for your son’s situation because if you had paid the support on time, maybe he would not have felt the need to steal the money.
* **Brother:** You are the younger brother of the offender. You are 16 years old. Your brother has always been a positive role model for you. He encourages you to stay in school and not drop out like he did. You have a close relationship and feel he is someone you can depend on.
* **Sister:** You are the younger sister. You are 13 year old. Your older brother is usually the one who picks you up from school. He is the one that helps with your homework. He often cooks dinner for the family when your mother has to work. Your brother is someone you lean on since your mom and dad divorced. You don’t want to see him go to jail.

**Criminal Justice Roles**

* **Police officer:** You are the police officer who arrested and charged the offender with misdemeanor theft. At the time of the arrest, the young man was cooperative and respectful. On the way to the police station, the young man expressed remorse for his actions.
* **Prosecutor:** You are the prosecutor in the case. You have grown dissatisfied with the traditional way of handling cases, so you have agreed to participate in the sentencing circle. You think it may hold more potential for deterring future criminal behavior than the process that is currently in place. You also think the process gives the victim a voice, which you feel is missing from more traditional methods of processing cases.
* **Defense attorney:** You are the defense attorney. You think the current system of processing cases does little in the way of helping victims and offenders. You have volunteered to participate in the sentencing circle because you think it will allow for a more individualized look at the circumstances of the offender and the offense.
* **Probation officer:** You are the probation officer in the case. You have agreed to participate in the sentencing circle because you feel there should be alternative sanctions available to offenders. You want to be involved in the process of how offenders attempt to make amends for their behavior and want to help offenders reintegrate back into the community. You are responsible for preparing the presentence report for this case. You report the following to the court: (1) the defendant is an 18-year-old male; (2) he failed to complete high school, dropping out his senior year; (3) he lives with his mother, two siblings, a girlfriend, and his newborn baby; (4) he is unemployed (he lost his job as a result of the offense); and (5) he has no prior criminal history.

V**ictim or Victim Support Roles**

* **Wal-Mart store manager:** You are the store manager of Wal-Mart. The defendant has worked for you for about 18 months. He never missed work and he often asked for extra hours. In your opinion, he was a hard worker and a dedicated employee. The loss prevention officer made you aware of the fact that the defendant had taken money from the cash register. You fired the defendant because that is the company’s policy.
* **Loss prevention officer:** You are the loss prevention officer. You witnessed the defendant place money in his pocket from the cash register. You confronted him and he immediately admitted what he had done. He returned the money to you and apologized for his behavior. According to company policy, you had to see that the defendant was prosecuted.

**Class Activity 3: Restorative Justice Perspective**

**Case Study (Single or Paired Activity)**

**Instructions:** Read the following case study carefully. Read the “Restorative Justice Perspective” in the textbook. Please answer the questions at the end of the case study.

You are participating in a restorative justice court hearing. Here are the facts of the case:

Donna Thomas is a 21-year-old college junior. On Friday night, she went to a local bar with three friends. Her friend, Carla Johnson, volunteered to be the designated driver. However, after they arrived, Carla began drinking. Donna drank four beers in a 2-hour period. The third friend left the bar with other friends. Fearing that Carla was too drunk to drive, Donna decided to drive them home. In her intoxicated state, Donna accidently traveled off the roadway into a ditch, lost control of her car, and drove into a house. Donna and Carla were not injured, but an elderly woman who was asleep in bed suffered several broken ribs and a concussion. When the police arrived, they conducted field sobriety tests and arrested Donna. Her blood alcohol content was .08, which is the legal limit. The victim has agreed to participate in a restorative justice hearing because she feels that forgiveness and mercy may teach Donna more than harsh punishment.

1. How would you apply the three elements of “The Balanced Approach” noted in the textbook to this case?
2. What sentence/sanction do you feel Donna should receive? Explain your decision.
3. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of restorative justice models?
4. Do you think restorative justice has a place in our criminal justice system? Why or why not?