

PERCEPTION AND RESPONSE
TO STATUS

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TO STATUS AMONG
FEMALE "EX-CONS"

By

RONALD OWEN HINCH, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Ronald Owen Hinch, B.A. (Saint Mary's University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Jack Haas

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Abstract

The labeling perspective assumes that officially labeled people will perceive that they have been discredited. It also contends, as do certain hypotheses regarding the socialisation of women, that assessments made by others will affect the self-esteem of the person who is discredited. This study offers the critique that these assumptions and hypotheses assume an oversocialised individual. Data analysis confirm this critique. Five women did not perceive any damage to their respectability in any of the five roles--family member, wife/girlfriend, mother, friend and employee--examined in the study. Some women were also observed to have perceived improvements in either specific roles or their self-conceptions. Other factors, such as psychiatric histories, physical handicaps and previous identities are perceived to be more influential in determining status than legal histories.

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Introduction:

Stating the Problem

The term stigma and its synonyms conceal a double perspective: does the stigmatized individual assume his difference is known about already, or is evident on the spot, or does he assume it is neither known about by those present nor immediately perceivable by them? In the first case one deals with the plight of the discredited, in the second with that of the discreditable. This is an important difference even though a particular stigmatized individual is likely to have experienced both situations. (Goffman, 1963, 4)

In the case of former inmates of penal institutions, it would appear that a major discrediting influence is the existence of a criminal record (including both the conviction and the sentence served). The extent to which this record is familiar among persons with whom the former inmate interacts will partially determine whether or not it already discredits, or has the potential to discredit the ex-inmate's claim to respectable status. The important factors, however, are the extent to which others negatively evaluate the holder of a criminal record, and the problem of whether or not they communicate this evaluation to the ex-inmate.

However, we are not concerned here with the problems of determining whether or not others actually im-

pute disrespectable status to "ex-cons." Instead our primary concern is to determine whether or not ex-inmates perceive being discredited. In particular, the study will attempt to determine whether or not a particular segment of the ex-convict population--former inmates of prisons for women--perceive being discredited. This focus on "female ex-cons" is intended to draw attention to certain abuses of the labeling perspective, as well as inadequacies in statements regarding the socialisation of women.

The abuse inherent in the labeling perspective is that its emphasis on describing and analysing perceptions and responses to stigmatisation leads to a distorted image of reality. The impression is created that all persons bearing discredited traits will perceive themselves to be discredited. Similarly, statements by Bardwick and Douvan (1971), Greenglass (1973) and others regarding female socialisation would have us believe that any loss of status in interpersonal relationships is almost certain to affect a woman's self-image. Implicit in these abuses and statements is the assumption that the individual, particularly women, depend almost exclusively on the assessments by others in determining their own identities. Little attention has been paid to what Blumer (1972) refers to as the individual's ability to "interpret" the actions of others. That is,

little attention has been devoted to showing that the individual does not merely respond to assessments made by others, he also makes "indications to himself." In Blumer's words:

the human individual proceeds by pointing out to himself the divergent things which have to be taken into account in the course of his action. He has to note what he wants to do and how he is to do it; he has to point out to himself the various conditions which may be instrumental to his action and those which may obstruct his action; he has to take account of the demands, the expectations, the prohibitions, and the threats as they may arise in the situation in which he is acting. His action is built up step by step through a process of such self-induction. The human individual pieces together and guides his action by taking account of different things and interpreting their significance for his positive action. (Blumer, 1972, 147)

In other words, the individual is not a being whose social world is created for him, he is a being who creates and gives meaning--through his interpretation and action--to his social world.

Several points made by Blumer in the quotation just cited are important for this study. Following Blumer's analysis, the individual in "building up" his social world must interpret the "obstructions as they arise." If no obstructions are presented, or at least none are perceived, then the individual bases his action and his identity on the "demands and expectations" which do present themselves. In other words, in terms of the problem in question in this study, if the person perceives no

imputations of disrespect, then he "takes account of the demands, the expectations, the prohibitions, and the threats" encountered by people who do not possess a discredited trait. He bases his action on the premise that he is respectable.

These, then, are the possibilities which the labeling perspective has failed to stress, and which certain statements concerning female socialisation have ignored. Let us take a more detailed look at these perspectives, as well as the perspective employed in this study.

I--Theoretical Considerations:

The symbolic interaction perspective--the perspective used in this study--accepts as its basic premise that human beings interact with each other on the basis of symbolic communications. In other words, as Blumer says in summarising Mead:

Instead of the individual being surrounded by an environment of pre-existing objects which play upon him and call forth his behaviour, the proper picture is that he constructs his objects on the basis of his on-going activity. In any of his countless acts--whether minor, like dressing himself, or major, like organising himself for a professional career--the individual is designating different objects to himself, giving them meaning, judging their suitability to his action, and making decisions on the basis of the judgement. (Blumer, 1972, 147)

It is precisely this ability of the individual to interpret his own and others actions which is the key to

this study. It provides the basis for the two major hypotheses of the study. The first of these hypotheses is that even though a person may perceive that others discredit her, she may not perceive that these imputations of disreputable status are an accurate and justified assessment of her. The second hypothesis is that some people may not perceive that they have been discredited by being publically--i.e. legally--labeled as "criminal or law breaker." It is these assumptions which lead, furthermore, to the critiques of the labeling perspective, and certain hypotheses concerning female socialisation which follow.

The labeling perspective continues to emphasise that once an individual becomes labeled "deviant" it is virtually impossible to escape from, or "outgrow" this label. For example, Ball (1970) states:

...The ceremonies of the courts in particular have been interpreted as degradation rites, a collective respectability-removing ceremony in which the community or its agents successfully impose definitions of abnormality and moral unworth on their victims, thus destroying their potential claims to future deferential treatment. And it is a fact that later efforts to reimpose respectability are frequently not nearly so efficient or thorough. (Ball, 1972, 355)

Furthermore, the quotation from Goffman's Stigma (1963, 4), which appears as the opening statement in this introduction, assumes that all persons possessing a discredited trait will assume that they have been, or could be dis-

credited. Goffman and Ball are not, however, the only sociologists making such statements. After reading the work of Schur (1971) and Lemert (1951) it becomes difficult to imagine that anyone can ever leave their discredited pasts behind them. The shadow of these past misdeeds, it seems, will always be there requiring only a knowing individual to expose the discreditable person's past. It would appear that the discreditable person is doomed to the continual threat of ridicule and anticipated embarrassment.

Goffman (1963: 1961: 1959) does, of course, describe various moves and strategies used by discreditable people to either pass as normals, or to show normals that they are once again respectable people. Furthermore, the "techniques of neutralisation" described by Matza and Sykes (1968) make it clear that discredited people will frequently resist, or reject any imputations of disrespect. However, even these possibilities are subject to criticism. They presuppose that the discreditable person perceives herself as a discreditable, or discredited person. The possibility that a discreditable person may not perceive herself to be such a person is set aside. This criticism may be made of the labeling perspective in general.

Consequently, the major point of difference between the labeling perspective's emphasis and the empha-

sis to be stressed here, is that while the labeling perspective assumes that a discredited person may want to regain respectable status, our emphasis is placed on showing that some officially labeled people may never perceive being discredited.* Such a person does not have to prove her respectability because she is respectable and is treated as such by other people.

Support for this hypothesis is found in the Foster, et al (1972), study, which indicates that only a small proportion of the delinquent boys studied perceived that official intervention by the police and/or courts had affected their relationships with their families, friends and teachers. Furthermore, slightly less than half did not perceive that their status with the police or with employers had been affected. They did not perceive that they would be more closely observed by the police, or that their employability had been affected.

The major difference between the Foster, et al, study and the current one (aside from the age and gender of the people being studied) is that the delinquent boys studied by Foster, et al, were not necessarily convicted of any offence. Some boys were merely "picked up"

* The exception here is that a person who has been sent to jail may perceive during incarceration that her status had been damaged. Upon release she may not perceive damage to her respectability.

by the police and given warnings. The women interviewed for the current study were all convicted and sentenced to varying terms in jail. As such, since even Foster, et al, note that severity of intervention does lead to a greater probability of perceived status loss, it would appear that the proportion of women in this study who would perceive loss of status would be higher than the proportion of juvenile males studied by Foster, et al.

Other factors also contribute to the likelihood that more women would perceive status loss. That is, if the analysis of female socialisation offered by Bardwick and Douvan (1971), Greenglass (1973) and others (Chodorow, 1971; Weisstein, 1971) is accurate. Their analysis suggests that women who break the law not only violate the law, but also transgress sex-roles. Both men and women are expected to behave according to rigid sex-role models. The male role-model emphasises:

Independence, aggression, competitiveness, leadership, task orientation, outward orientation, assertiveness, innovation, self-discipline, stoicism, activity, objectivity, analytic-mindedness, courage, unsentimentality, rationality, confidence, and emotional control. (Bardwick and Douvan, 1971, 225)

On the other hand, the female role-model emphasises:

Dependence, passivity, fragility, low pain tolerance, nonaggression, noncompetitiveness, inner orientation, interpersonal orientation, empathy, sensitivity, nurturance, subjectivity, intuitiveness, yieldingness, receptivity, inability to risk, emotional lability, supportiveness. (Bardwick and Douvan, 1971, 225)

In Chodorow's (1971) words, the male role-model stresses "doing," while the female role-model stresses "being."

The most important points to remember are that women are expected to submit to men, and above all else should not try to compete with men. Violation of this all embracing role-model damages her marketability as a marriage partner, which is assumed to be a woman's most sought after goal. An aggressive, competitive, nonconforming woman would be a threat to the status of a man socialised into a role model emphasising these same qualities. He must be the dominant ("doer") person in a relationship with a woman. Therefore, any woman who does not conform to the female role-model would be a threat to his "superior" status. By subordinating her own wishes to those of men, a woman demonstrates her "normalness." By engaging in illegal acts she demonstrates that she is either unwilling or unable (for whatever reason) to conform to the role-model prescribed for her.

It is also true that other people, not just potential marriage partners will expect a woman to conform to this role-model (Chodorow, 1971: Komisar, 1971: Greenglass, 1973: Bardwick and Douvan, 1971: Horner, 1969; 1970). It has also been suggested (Greenglass, 1973) that women, especially, will determine their status from the reactions of these others.

Everyone seeks others' assessments in determining their identity and status within the community. Not only do people seek others's assessments, they also internalise them, as well as the standards by which they have been made. That is, through the process of internalisation, it is possible that others' assessments of self will fuse with the self's assessments of self (see Berger and Luckman, 1967, 132-133 ff.). It is possible, therefore, for persons who perceive themselves to be discredited to have ambivalent feelings about their own identities and respectability (Goffman, 1963, 196). These ambivalent feelings arise because the person usually wishes to be known as a normal--i.e. respectable--person, entitled to the same courtesies and considerations as all others. Possessing a discredited trait, however, means that the possessor can be shown to be different or "inferior" in that respect, and would not, therefore, be entitled to respectable status. More importantly, they may experience feelings of doubt regarding their own respectability. They may believe that in at least this one respect they are inferior.

This is the premise upon which the labeling perspective's assumption that a publically identified lawbreaker, if the label is attacked with sufficient force (Garfinkel, 1968) and repetitively (Lemert, 1951), will begin to assume the identity implied by the label. Re-

cent investigation of this premise by Harris (1975), however, indicates that it may be overstated. Harris found that the incarcerated juveniles he studied had not begun to identify themselves as "deviant."

The problem of internalising and accepting assessments by others would seem, however, to be a particularly important problem for women who have been publically identified as lawbreakers. As several commentators on the role of women in society (Bardwick and Douvan, 1971: Horner, 1969; 1970: Chodorow, 1971: Greenglass, 1973: Weisstein, 1971: Konisar, 1971) have indicated, women, perhaps more than men, depend on the assessments of others for their self-conceptions. The clearest statement regarding the importance of others in the establishment and maintenance of women's identity is found in Greenglass' analysis. She writes:

While depending on the response of others for self-esteem is increasingly discouraged in growing boys, girls are primarily cued to others for feelings of self-esteem and they are increasingly encouraged to define themselves in terms of their success in interpersonal relationships. Moreover, differential sex socialization practices continue well into adolescence where, in the absence of objective achievements females come to define their identities in terms of their relationships with others, i.e. mother, girlfriend, wife, etc....The ability to establish and maintain successful and satisfying interpersonal relationships is undoubtedly significant for most members of our society, both male and female. However, in females, it becomes the self-defining, most rewarding achievement task. (Greenglass, 1973, 110)

This analysis, however fails to fully appreciate the ability of the individual--whether male or female--to interpret, and judge the appropriateness of others actions for the individual's future action (Blumer, 1972). In other words, both the labeling perspective and Green-glass have oversocialised conceptions of the people they attempt to describe (see Wrong, 1961)

Furthermore, an important factor to consider in any analysis of crime and criminals is that of class. The labeling perspective in particular is subject to the criticism that it frequently ignores the importance of a person's social class as being an important determinant of an individual's assessment of her public identity. This does not mean that social class is the only factor, or even the most important factor, but that, from the perspective of this study--symbolic interactionism:

the organisation of a human society is the framework inside of which social action takes place. (Blumer, 1972, 152)

In other words, within the context of the individual's class position, the offence committed may not be perceived as a serious offence, or as Matza and Sykes (1968) suggest, the victim may be "condemned" as deserving the perpetration of the offence. The individual may also simply reject any notion that the offence for which she has been condemned deserves condemnation.

It is particularly important in this respect to take into consideration those findings of what may now be considered a passe interest in deviance--subcultures and countercultures. Of particular interest here is the work of Miller (1970) in the area of "focal concerns. He writes:

No cultural pattern as well-established as the practice of illegal acts...could persist if buttressed primarily by negative, hostile, or rejective motives; its principal motivational support, as in the case of any persisting cultural tradition, derives from a positive effort to achieve what is valued within that tradition, and to conform to its explicit and implicit norms. (Miller, 1970, 363)

However, in terms of identifying possible sources of stigmatisation, it would appear that the most problematic relationships for women would be their interpersonal relationships. These would include their relationships with their families, men and friends. It is these relationships which Goffman (1963), Ball (1970) and Greenglass (1973) indicate are the most crucial in determining public and private identity. In addition, Greenglass (1973), and others, suggest that the role of "mother" is a particularly important aspect of women's identity. Consequently, this role must also be considered.

There are, however, certain potentially stigmatising situations which both men and women encounter. Previous research (Schwartz and Skolnick, 1968) has shown that former inmates of penal institutions may experience

difficulty finding jobs. Indeed, this research has indicated that even though some people may have been found "not_guilty" of a criminal offence, they may be denied employment. It would appear that even the suspicion of criminal involvement is sufficient cause for some employers to suspect the honesty and integrity of prospective employees.

Although it is true that women have been traditionally excluded from full participation in capitalist economy (Smith, 1973), it is also true that women are becoming an increasingly larger proportion of the work force. Furthermore, it is often a necessary precondition to parole that inmates of penal institutions locate employment before they are released. Consequently, it is possible that women leaving jail, and afterwards, may perceive that they are not as employable as women without the stigma of being "ex-cons."

Five roles or relationships, therefore, are to be considered in this study. They are:

1. Role as family member;
2. Role as wife, or girlfriend;
3. Role as mother;
4. Role as friend; and
5. Role as employee.

II--Organisation:

Each of the five roles will be considered separ-

ately. In each case the object will be to determine the extent of damage the women perceive to their respectability, and the responses these women have towards these perceptions. As Blumer (1972) has pointed out, a person does not just interpret others actions, the person also acts upon these interpretations. In each case the perception held by the largest number of women will be discussed first, while the least perceived status will be discussed last. Responses, on the other hand, will be presented in such a manner as to stress the similarities in the way women perceiving various statuses respond to these perceptions. The main objective, however, is to stress the relationship between perception and response.

In addition, however, to the perceptions of status and responses shown by the women in the five roles or relationships previously mentioned, a sixth "mini" chapter will be concerned with the perceived effects of incarceration and stigmatisation on the women's self-identity. If it can be shown that their self-esteem has not been damaged this would indicate that the role others play in maintaining women's identity is not as important as is assumed by Greenglass (1973) and others (Weisstein, 1971).

The order in which these roles and self-conceptions will be discussed is as follows:

1. Roles as family members;
2. Roles as wives and girlfriends;

3. Roles as mothers;
4. Roles as friends;
5. Roles as employees; and
6. Effects on self-esteem.

III--Methodology:

Since the perspective used in this study is a symbolic interactionist one, a methodology compatible with this perspective is essential. Ideally, this would require intensive participant observation (Polsky, 1969). However, the fact that no readily available community of "female ex-cons" could be discerned within the main research area, and time restrictions did not permit the luxury of attempting to find one, this method could not be used. Therefore, some other method of attempting to discover the way in which the women to be studied interpreted and constructed their social world and identities had to be used. The logical choice was to use in-depth interviewing.

Interviewing would permit maximum opportunity for soliciting from the women to be interviewed their interpretations of others responses to them, and their assessments of their identities. Rather than attempting to rigidly enforce pre-conceived categories of the researcher, every was made to see "...the standpoint of the acting unit" (Blumer, 1972, 151). That is, the research was designed to be as flexible as possible in order

to allow any attempts to classify and categorise perceptions and responses of the people being studied to be generated from the descriptions and interpretations they offer.

Consequently, the research instrument--an interview guide, or questionnaire--used in this study utilised open ended questions. This permitted maximum input from the women interviewed, and minimised input from the researcher's preunderstanding of the problems, issues and experiences encountered by women who have been in jail.

To further minimise the preunderstanding of the researcher, and to permit him to be better able to understand and view the world of "female ex-cons" from their perspective, a pre-test was used. This also enabled the researcher to test specific questions which seemed important to him prior to beginning the main study. Ames, et al (1970), for example, have shown that preliminary interviewing can be useful in identifying potential areas of investigation not previously considered by the researcher.

The results of this pre-test of the interview guide revealed that the researcher had been concentrating too heavily on trying to solicit information which would confirm only his belief that some discreditable people may not perceive damage to their respectability. The possibility that some people might actually perceive improve-

ments in either their public or self-images had been overlooked. Consequently this factor forced the researcher to reconceptualise the problem, and to seek further information in subsequent interviews regarding possible improvements in particular roles and self-esteem. As in the Bryan (1966) study all interviews were tape recorded with the prior knowledge and permission of the women being interviewed.

Two methods of contacting the former inmates of prisons for women were used. The first method involved using a social service agency (The Elizabeth Fry Society) as a contact agent. The second method, commonly referred to in the literature as "snowballing," was to use those women already interviewed as contact agents.

In respect to the first method, two distinct procedures were used. The first procedure was for the contact agent to inquire if any of its clients would be interested in participating in the study. In order to avoid the possibility of prescreening a list of all women known to the agency was obtained. The list yielded twenty-six names: Seven agreed to be interviewed; one was referred to the researcher by a previously interviewed woman; two refused to be interviewed; and sixteen could not be located. Those who refused to be interviewed did so because they either believed that they had nothing to contribute to the study, or that it was none of the researcher's

business where she had been and why she had been there.

The second way in which the agency was used as a contact agent was for the researcher to interview the residents of two halfway houses operated by the agency. The women were informed (in general, nonspecific terms) of the researcher's plans and were then asked if they would agree to be interviewed. At the time the interviews were conducted there were nine women living in the two residences. Of these, six agreed to be interviewed: The three who refused offered no specific reasons, although they gave the impression that the fact that they were expecting notification of full parole within the week was a contributing factor.

Since these half-way houses were located in cities other than the one in which the researcher, who lacked both time and financial support, live, it had not been expected that interviews with non-residents would take place. However, three additional interviews with nonresidents were conducted after referrals from the residents. These additional interviews were with women who were either former residents of the half-way houses, or persons known to the residents as a consequence of their frequent visits to the agency offices located in the same buildings. Seventeen women, therefore, were interviewed, while five refused to be interviewed and sixteen could not be contacted.

Finally, since the majority of the women--thirteen of seventeen--were interviewed after referrals from an agency active in parole and probation supervision it was necessary for the researcher to explain to them his relationship with the agency: That the agency was being used as a "contact agent," and the researcher had no formal connection with the agency. It was similarly explained that all supplied information would be treated as confidential. In each case they indicated that they understood the situation, but as always, there is no guarantee.

As an additional means of disassociating the researcher from the agency it was decided that the women would choose the interview site--usually their own home. This also provided the opportunity for the women to be more relaxed in familiar surroundings during the interview. The definition of "home," of course, became problematic in those instances where the women were residents of the half-way houses. In this case it must be assumed that the information supplied during these interviews was as accurate and as truthful as the information supplied during other interviews, if for not other reason than the women were given the opportunity to select a neutral site of their own choosing but declined. (Of course, some research (Jackman, et al, 1968) has been conducted, without apparant ill effects, using the police as contacts.)

Chapter I
Family Status

The importance of the family as a primary socialisation agent is well recognised in sociology. It is within the family context that we learn such basic skills as walking and talking. But we learn other things as well. Hardwick and Douvan (1971), and others (Berger and Luckman, 1967) indicate that it is within the family context that we begin to assume the sexual identity expected of us. Of more immediate concern to this study is the importance of the family in sustaining women's images of themselves as respectable people. Goffman (1963) has suggested that interpersonal relationships with other family members are extremely important in maintaining respectable identities for people who bear discredited traits. He suggests that fear of being discredited within these relationships often leads some discredited people to hide problematic aspects of their identities. Research by Jackman, et al (1968), substantiates this claim. They discovered that some prostitutes never inform certain family members, especially their mothers, of their activities.

Possession of a criminal record, therefore, might be considered as constituting a sufficient threat to respectable family status that convicted women might wish to withhold, if possible, this information. After all, as Horner (1969: 1970), Bardwick and Douvan (1971), Chodorow (1971) and others (Greeglass, 1973; Weisstein, 1971; Komisar, 1971) have asserted, role expectations for women are based on a role-model which stresses non-aggression and conformity, and law breaking can be considered as both aggressive and non-conforming behaviour.

While it is not always advisable to compare juvenile males and adult women, the findings of the Foster, et al (1972), study are important here. That study indicated that the juveniles studied did not perceive that their family status had been affected by the official intervention of the police and the courts. Instead, the more important factor was the identities the boys had built up prior to official intervention. This is an extremely important factor to bear in mind for the present study. It not only reinforces the basic premise of the symbolic interaction perspective, it also confirms that official intervention is not as serious a threat to family status as the labeling perspective, and certain theories of female socialisation and identity formation would have us believe.

The findings of the current study also confirm

that official intervention does not necessarily lead to discredited status within the family. Indeed, four women indicate that their family relationships had actually improved as a consequence of being sent to prison. Seven others, furthermore, do not indicate that their family status has been affected in any manner at all. In other words: eleven of seventeen women interviewed for this study perceived no damage to their family relationships.

Before proceeding further, it should be observed that two women have been excluded from the analysis because they have no family relationships to analyse. In Moniqué's case she had no contact with either of her two living relatives (an uncle "living somewhere in Germany," and "a young kid about twenty-six years old traveling in the States") for several years prior to her involvement with her husband (with whom she was arrested for fraud). Similarly, Janet has not had any contact with her family for over two years. Raised in an orphanage, and having spent a greater part of her adult life in psychiatric hospitals, Janet's contact with her family has been minimal. She was twenty-nine when she first met her mother; at that point her mother refused to begin any relationship. As Janet explains it:

...She said I was a mistake. So I never saw her again....(Janet)

Consequently only four women perceived their respecta-

bility within their families to be damaged.

In organising this and subsequent chapters we shall first describe the perceptions (interpretations) the women have of their status, and then describe their responses to these perceptions. In each case the most frequently perceived status will be presented first, and the least perceived status will be presented last. Those women who perceived their relationships to have improved will be discussed under the subtitle "Improved," while those women perceiving no damage, or improvements will be discussed under the heading "Unaffected." As for those women perceiving damage to their respectability, they have been grouped under two separate headings. Those women who indicate that they have not actually encountered damaging situations (stigmatisation), but who fear that it could happen at some future point will be discussed under the heading "Potential Damage," while those perceiving stigmatisation to have occurred will be discussed under the heading "Damaged." Since the women perceiving their respectability to be "Unaffected" outnumber the women in each of the other three possible status perceptions, we shall begin by describing their perceptions.

I--Unaffected:

Contrary to the implications of the labeling perspective and certain hypotheses suggested by the analysis

of female socialisation offered by Greenglass (1973) and others, sudden, and dramatic attempts to redefine a person's identity and respectability are not as important as identities that have already been assumed. The seven women to be discussed here clearly indicate that the identities they had established prior to incarceration are the identities which still determine their status. That does not mean, however, that these women have resumed, since being released, friendly or cordial relationships with their families; only two of these women have resumed such relationships. The relationships the other five women have resumed had been problematic before they went to jail, and are still problematic; some more so than others.

Conflicts arise for different reasons. For Ann and Barbara, their psychiatric histories are the problematic influences on their family statuses. In speaking of her relationship with her father, Barbara says:

...Sometimes he pushes. He brings up the past at me. Like back when I lost my kids (because she was admitted to a psychiatric hospital)--He throws that up to my face once in a while. (Barbara)

Similarly, her brother and sister "...think they are better than everyone else," because they have not been psychiatric patients, and Ann's parents reacted to her illness by giving her the nick name "The Freak."

Joyce's and Neena's problems with their families arose because their families had been "overly protective." Neena's description of her parents's reaction to her handicap (She has a bone disorder which restricted growth and severely impedes movement) best illustrates the nature of the problems these two women have had. Before her arrest:

My mother and father wanted a really nice daughter. Eh? I was never allowed to sort of, you know, go out, or allowed to be myself....And my parents were very, very--protective towards me, because of my handicap. I mean it was hard enough for me. They didn't have to shove it in my face. They wouldn't let me take a bus alone.--I couldn't do anything for myself. (Neena)

They displayed little inclination towards change after her release:

They haven't changed. I think, you know, we argue the same as always. They still try to be overly protective. You know? They try to do everything for me. (Neena)

While Joyce does not have a "handicap," her relationship with her family, particularly her parents, is very similar.

Deterioration in her relationship with her foster-mother finally forced Ellie to relocate in a different city. She relocated in a city three hundred miles away expecting that employment opportunities in the bigger city would be better. Since that time, even though she has been convicted for shoplifting and sent to jail, she has had very little contact with her foster-mother.

I really don't get along with my (foster) mother. I don't bother her, and she doesn't bother me. (Ellie)

The fact that this woman is her foster-mother could be interpreted as meaning that Ellie's emotional attachment to her might not be the same as it may have been with her real mother. It is difficult, however, to determine the full extent of this factor on Ellie's relationship with her foster-mother.

The impression should not be created, however, that all of Barbara's and Ellie's familial relationships are as problematic as the ones described above. For example, even though Barbara's father discredits her for being a psychiatric patient and losing her children, she perceives she has a more favoured position with him than her siblings.

I'm the only one that knows his phone number in the whole family. Nobody else has got it....Because my brothers and sisters they keep asking him for money to buy a house, and buy farms. He told them to go to work....He trys to help me as best he knows how....and he gets me money. (Barbara)

Similarly, Ellie, when asked if her brother's reaction to her had altered now that he was aware of her record, comments:

No! No!...We would never, because we get along so good. No, it would never affect our relationship. (Ellie)

In this respect, then, their perceptions are identical to

those of Shelly and Sharon who also have maintained "good" familial relationships.

II--Improved:

The overwhelming emphasis of the labeling perspective has been with documenting the negative consequences of officially imposed labels. Little attention or effort has been directed towards showing that some people might actually perceive improvements in their relationships with others. Indeed, even the current researcher had not considered this possibility during the early stages of his research. It is significant, therefore that four women (Betty, Jackie, June and Pam) indicate that their relationships with certain family members have improved as a consequence of incarceration. This does not mean that all family relationships have improved, or that further amelioration is impossible. Furthermore, some relationships are perceived to have improved more than others. Betty's case best illustrates the types and extent of improvements, as well as the lack of change in some relationships.

She states that prior to incarceration, her relationships with her family had been "stormy," marked by conflict and violence. Her step-father had "sexually assaulted" her when she was approximately thirteen, and continued to have a sexual relationship with her for two

years. Since then, she has harboured a "grudge" against him:

I tell my brothers and my sisters when they complain to me about him, I'm not the one to talk to because I don't like him in the first place." (Laughs) He can't do anything good in my eyes. (Betty)

While this relationship has remained static for over ten years, others have improved. However, the improvements noted in her relationship with her mother are limited to a greater "respect" for her mother's determination and fortitude in raising her on her own until she was five years old, and to a better "understanding" of her mother's reluctance to believe that her step-father had been having a sexual relationship with her.

She raised me until I was five years old all by herself. It took a lot of guts in those days, especially when you're German. Everybody gave her a hard time. I respect her for having the guts to do what she did. Raise me, and go to work. Even if I can hold it against my (step) father, I can't really hold it against her. I can't blame her for not wanting to believe me. (Betty)

This is the extent of the improvements in the relationship.

More dramatic improvements are noted in other relationships. The most significant of these is her relationship with her grandfather:

My grandfather, here he was sticking up for me again when he had no right to. I didn't deserve it. Eh? And he was going to come all the way down and talk to the minister in charge, because they had his granddaughter in

jail. (Laughs) And he started writing letters about prison camps, and...he knew what it was like, and--in prison--But they were glad to write somewhere nine straight consecutive months and know I'd be there. (Betty)

Before she was incarcerated she had been hitch-hiking across Canada, and her family was unable to maintain continuous communication with her. When finally they learned she was in jail, her relationship with them, most particularly with her grandfather, were able to improve.

For the first time in my life, my grandfather and I understand each other....I would go and spend another nine months (in jail) if I could have that kind of understanding with everybody. (Betty)

III--Damaged:

The fact that some people will perceive damage to their respectability is not disputed. What is in dispute is the labeling perspective's overemphasis on describing stigmatisation at the risk of creating the false impression that only negative consequences of official labeling are perceived. This overemphasis is dramatised by the fact that only four of the fifteen women, for whom family relationships can be analysed, perceived their respectability to be damaged within their families.

At least one member of Patti's, Brenda's, Lois's and Susan's families has discredited them. Indeed, all

of Patti's, Brenda's and Lois's families are perceived to have discredited them. Lois and Brenda comment:

I told my family I was in trouble. I asked for advice, and this and that--and they didn't seem to--you know--one way or the other. (Lois)

Of course I didn't expect them to visit every month, but--I got maybe three letters and two visits. And then I wrote and asked about having my, having some clothes sent down. I was getting out. But they never brought nothing. (Brenda)

Susan, on the other hand, has experienced difficulty in only one relationship. Just as Lois was to find that her record proved to be a source of vulnerability in her relationships with men, Susan discovered that her sister wanted to abuse her skills as a shoplifter:

...Now that she knows I steal a lot she wants me to go out and steal for her. (Laughs)
(Susan)

The responses these women have to these perceptions are presented below, and illustrate the importance of the perceptions themselves.

IV--Potential Damage:

The fact that none of these women perceive that their legal histories have merely the potential to discredit them is partially explained by the fact that their histories are known to their families. Therefore, the problem of hiding their pasts does not arise as such. As we shall see in the section on "reponses," some women had no control over access to their records. We shall also

see that Barbara's and Ellie's failure to reveal part, or all of their legal histories to specific family members does not indicate that they fear being discredited by these people. They did not inform these people because they believe either the relationship, or the record itself to be unimportant.

We have already seen that some women perceive their pre-incarceration identities to be more influential in determining their current status than their legal histories. It would appear, therefore, that such things as psychiatric histories, and physical handicaps are more important than legal labels. Remember, as well, that some women (Ellie and Joyce) perceived other problems--their inability to "get along" with their parents--to be more problematic to their family status than their legal histories. Consequently, the potential threat of their legal histories is disregarded by these women.

V--Responses:

The women's responses to perceived family status are not unlike responses indicated in previous studies of prostitutes (Jackman, et al., 1968: Young, 1970). While nonproblematic relationships are maintained without significant changes, problematic relationships are either discontinued, or maintained at physical and emotional distances. Responses differ, however, in at

least one important respect. Whereas some prostitutes, fearing stigmatisation, withheld discrediting information, none of the women interviewed for this study withheld information for this reason. If information was withheld, it was withheld because either the relationship was no longer important, or the information itself--the "record"--is considered unimportant.

For example, two women (Barbara and Ellie) state that they deliberately withheld from some or all members of their families the fact that they had been sent to jail. In Ellie's case it was simply a matter of not informing her foster mother with whom she no longer maintained a relationship. They simply don't "bother" with each other.

Barbara, on the other hand, informed her father of her second conviction and sentence, but did not inform him of her first. She did not inform him of the first because "...there is nothing he can do." In both cases there is the perception that the revelation of their legal histories would not affect their relationships. Either the relationship had been discontinued, or the record is unimportant.

Twelve of the remaining women indicate that their families were informed either immediately after their arrests (Lois, Sharon, Brenda, Jackie, Patti, Susan, Shelly, June and Pam), or after they had been convicted

(Ann, Betty and Neena). The latter three waited until then because they had not maintained close family ties for some time prior to incarceration. They give little detail, however, concerning the manner by which their families discovered that they had been convicted. They do not indicate if they voluntarily informed their families, or if their families learned of their plight by some other means.

The other nine women indicate that they informed their families to seek moral, and/or financial help (to raise bail).

I went home before I went to jail. For the weekend. You know? I told my family I was in trouble. I asked for advice, and this and that. (Lois)

I phoned (her mother) for bail. That's how she knew. I couldn't stand it. (Shelly)

In some cases the revelation was to lead, eventually or immediately, to stigmatisation (Patti, Lois, Brenda and Susan), while in others it was to lead to perceived improvements in relationships (Betty, Jackie, Pam, and June). The others (Barbara, Neena, Sharon, and Shelly) perceived no changes at all.

Only one woman (Joyce) clearly states that she had no control over her family's discovery of her offence. She had been arrested at her parents home in her father's presence:

Well I was picked up when I was at home. I

went home for the weekend. I went home on the Friday night. This (her offence) happened on the Friday. I went home on the Friday night, and the police came...on the Saturday. (Joyce)

In this case no damage to her respectability is perceived.

Once their offences became known to their families and their status had been determined, they responded in one of three ways. They would either (1) discontinue all family ties, (2) sever only those ties which became problematic, or (3) continue their relationships as they had done prior to incarceration.

Three women (Lois, Brenda and Patti) indicate that they had decided at one point to sever all family ties because they encountered stigmatisation in these relationships. Brenda, however, later resumed the ties she had broken. She says that:

...until things ironed themselves out I just didn't bother with them. I waited for a while...eventually I went around. (Brenda)

When the relationships were resumed, it was because she "went around" and not because they had changed.

Lois and Patti also express some reservations about their decisions to sever all family ties. The reason they have not resumed these ties, however, is best stated in Patti's own words:

Like I miss them--not being around them. And it hurts. But I'm better off without them. (Patti)

At least that way they do not have to face the continual

threat or embarrassment of being discredited by their families.

Other women encountering difficulties within their family relationships did not find it necessary to terminate all family ties. For Jackie, Barbara, Ellie, Betty and Susan all, that was required was to terminate those relationships which had become problematic. Only Susan, however, was to sever family ties because she encountered stigmatisation as a consequence of her legal history. The others discontinued family ties for quite different reasons. (Barbara discontinued her relationship with her siblings because they had treated her as an inferior ever since she had been a psychiatric patient. For Ellie and Jackie the problem was simply their inability to "get along" with their foster-mother and father-in-law respectively. Betty's case is more complex. She had been sexually assaulted by her step-father when she was thirteen and has remained hostile to him ever since. Furthermore, even though she understands why her mother refused to believe she had been assaulted, she no longer talks to her.) People who treated them harshly or unfairly had to be put behind them. With the possible exception of Betty whose feelings towards her step-father are much more negative, Barbara's attitude towards her siblings is an accurate reflection of the attitudes the other women express towards the people who have mis-

treated them. Barbara comments:

I don't bother with them....Because they think they know it all. They think they are better than everyone else. (Barbara)

Not all of their relationships, however, had to be terminated. Like Pam, Neena, Sharon, Shelly, Ann, Joyce and June these women perceive that certain relationships have improved, or at least not deteriorated. Consequently, there is no reason not to continue these relationships in at least the same manner as they had done prior to going to jail. In those cases, such as Betty's, Pam's, Jackie's and June's, where improvements are noted, the women indicate that they have either increased interaction with their families, or at least they no longer hold "grudges." They also express an interest in making even more improvements in relationships which they still perceive to be problematic. For example:

Like it's better now than it used to be. I couldn't stand them....It's a little better now....(But) there's still hard times.
(Jackie)

It is the "hard times" which still persist that Jackie and the others would like to reduce or eliminate.

In those instances where no changes are perceived, the women simply continue their relationships as they had done prior to incarceration. For some (Sharon, Shelly, Pam and Susan) this means continuing cordial, or

even "good" relationships, while for others it means continuing problematic (Sharon, Susan, Ann, Joyce, Neena and Pam) relationships. For example:

Well my sister and I were always quite close. I go visit her as often as I can. She lives fifty miles from here, and she took care of my kids for me while I was in the pen. (Pam)

...I was more close to my mother than I was to my father, and I'm more close to this sister (with whom she lives) than I am with other sisters....I don't like going to their houses because they're married to foreigners.... I don't get along with them too well--and they don't like me either. (Susan)

I can't go back there to live for more than a couple of weeks. I don't think I'd mind that too much....I just couldn't stay there very long. (Neena)

The important point to remember is that these relationships had been carried on in this manner even before these women were convicted and sent to jail.

Summary

Contrary to the emphasis of the labeling perspective and the implications of certain hypotheses regarding the socialisation of women, eleven women did not perceive that having a record discredited them. Indeed, four of these women perceived that their relationships with certain family members had actually improved as a consequence of going to prison. Furthermore, Ann and Barbara perceive that their psychiatric histories are

the only discrediting forces in their relationships with their families. Similarly, Neena perceives her "handicap" to be the major discrediting force in her relationship with her family. The implication is that legal labels take secondary importance when compared to both the label of mental illness and visible "handicaps."

It was also shown that the only reason that discrediting information is withheld from intimates is not "fear of stigmatisation." Either the relationship, or the discrediting information itself may be perceived as unimportant, and consequently there is no reason to reveal the past. It is irrelevant to relationship as it currently exists.

Chapter II
Status with Husbands
or Boyfriends

Sociological literature (Greenglass, 1973; Horner, 1969; 1970; Chodorow, 1973; Bardwick and Douvan, 1971) makes very clear the importance for women of maintaining images of themselves as attractive marriage partners for men. Anything which would indicate that a woman has departed from the very rigid female role-model damages a woman's attractiveness to men. For example, Eveson (1967) suggests that even the men with whom the female offender participates as partner in crime may reject her. In other words, a woman who displays aggressive, non-conformist behaviour, such as breaking the law, can expect to encounter difficulties in her relationships with men.

One factor which should become evident here is that the women interviewed for this study have not had personally gratifying relationships with men. In some cases, difficulties have occurred both before and after incarceration. However, not all of their relationships have been unsatisfactory affairs. It is important to

emphasise that the relationships these women have had with men after their release have been more satisfying than those they experienced before incarceration. They have, of course, experienced stigmatisation in some relationships, but they perceive their current relationships to be superior to those of the past.

Before proceeding further, it should be pointed out that four women (Ellie, Sharon, Barbara and Necha) have been excluded from the present analysis because they have no current intimate relationships. Nonetheless, the reasons they have no such relationships are important, especially for Sharon and Barbara. Barbara comments that she is unable to "talk to men" in the same manner she can with other women:

I think I get along better with women than I do with men....I can sit down and talk to them. I feel embarrassed talking to men. The questions they come up with. (Barbara)

One man did propose to her while she was in prison. However, she accuses him of being a "liar" and, therefore, an unsatisfactory partner:

He visited me, and ah--he said that--that he wanted to marry me and all this horseshit. But he lies too much....Now I don't want nothing to do with him. (Barbara)

She has seen him on one occasion after release: He said, "Hello," and she refused to answer.

Sharon, a homosexual, has no current girlfriend. Her last "old lady" was murdered a few years ago," and

has not established any new relationship.

I have to have respect for--you know--you
just don't find with a guy.--But I'm OK, be-
cause I know when it comes, it'll come.
(Sharon)

Finally, Neena and Ellie find themselves in unfamiliar cities. Ellie's move to a new location was prompted (partially) by the perception that it would provide a better opportunity for employment. However, since the move, she has been unable to find work, and has been imprisoned for shoplifting. In the few months following her release, she has not established any intimate ties with men. The only intimate she has is another woman who similarly relocated in the new city. Consequently there are no relationships to analyse.

Neena, paroled to an unfamiliar city, has discontinued all relationships with the people (including the man with whom she was arrested) she knew before going to jail. Furthermore, she has not attempted to initiate new relationships, especially boyfriends, because "...I don't plan on staying here." She intends to return to her native city after her parole is completed. In the meantime, most of her day is spent within the confines of the half-way house in which she lives; only on rare occasions does she venture outside.

Of the remaining thirteen women seven do not perceive or anticipate stigmatisation, four perceive that

their records could have, or might discredit them, and two have actually encountered stigmatisation.

I--Unaffected:

Six women (Janet, June, Jackie, Brenda, Ann and Pam) have established stigma free relationships with men after release. That does not infer, however, that all of their relationships have been free of conflict. As we shall see, Jacke, June and Janet have experienced conflicts in specific relationships. The others, however, state that their intimate relationships have actually improved over their pre-incarceration relationships. (Since they do not perceive improvements in specific relationships they have not been grouped with Monique, who perceives improvement in her relationship with her husband.)

For Ann, it is the first opportunity she has had to have a relationship with a man. Although she is twenty-four she has spent all but a few months of the past twelve years in either psychiatric hospitals or jail. It is only since her release from jail that she has had the opportunity to establish any intimate ties. Her boyfriend is aware of her record (They met while she was on day-parole), but this has not had an adverse effect on the relationships.

Brenda's and Pam's current relationships are far

less troublesome than previous marriages (Both are divorced). Brenda describes her current relationship as "good," but says that on one occasion when still married to her first husband, she would have preferred to stay in jail than rejoin him. The extent of the differences between their new and their former relationships is clearly seen in Pam's comparison of her current and past relationships:

...(It's) completely different from any relationship that I've ever known....He understands--me. Up until, you know, I met him the relationships I've had with men have not been very good. My first husband and I used to fight all the time. I was a nervous wreck when we divorced....And my second husband (The man she was sent to jail for killing) he was even worse. And well, he beat me an awful lot. Sometimes he would leave bruises all over me, and once he even caused internal bleeding. I was going to charge him then, but I told the hospital, the doctors, that it was an accident.--But now it's different. He knows where I've been and why. And it doesn't really matter to him. He works hard and is a good father to the boys. I mean he treats them as though they were his own kids. And he treats me real good too. We do have fights, arguments now and then, but they're never very serious. (Pam)

The three remaining women have experience difficulties in their post release relationships, but these difficulties are not related to their legal histories. The problems are more directly related to differences in role expectations and residual problems from previous relationships. Jackie, for example, became aware that not only did her husband "...not want me," he also appeared to

be unwilling to assume his responsibilities as father to their daughter. It seemed to her that he had relinquished his roles as husband and father to assist his father in caring for his younger brothers and sisters. Furthermore:

He always ran back to daddy. He can look after himself. He's twenty-six years old. He should be able to.--"Daddy needs me at home. Daddy said that...." I hate that. (Jackie)

Since separating from him she has established a new relationship with a man she describes as a "pretty close friend:"

He's in pretty much the same situation I am. You know? He's separated right now, and I am. His wife can't stand me, and my husband can't stand him. And we said, "They'd make a good pair." (Jackie)

He is aware of her record, but he has not discredited her.

The problems June and Janet have had with their boyfriends are attributed to different causes. Janet says that her own "emotional problems," and the personally traumatic experiences she has had with men in the past prevented her relationship with her new boyfriend from getting off to a good start.

...When I first got out I was having a few emotional problems. I was up on the mountain (a psychiatric hospital) a couple of times. I couldn't stand guys. I thought they were just trying to do one thing to me, because that was the only thing they have been doing since I remember. Ever since I got out of the hospital. (Janet)

"The relationship is "good now."

On the other hand, June attributes the problems she has had with her boyfriend to their inability to live together. They had been living together, but decided to discontinue this arrangement because they could not "get along." She comments:

We fight all the time. You know? If I'm with him we fight, but if I'm not with him I fret. What can you do? (June)

His only reaction to her conviction and imprisonment was:

He was surprised. He never met a girl who had been in jail. (June)

Although she indicates that he has not discredited her, she does perceive that he discredits her friend who has a record. Accepted at face value this apparent contradiction may be explained by suggesting she perceives that despite his knowledge of her past (a discrediting source in others) he perceives that she is not like her friend.

Finally, while it may be true that sex-role stereotyping has influenced the relationships these women have with their boyfriends, none of them indicate that it has the potential to combine with their legal histories to discredit them. Indeed Pam, Monique and Ann clearly state that the important factor is the way women leaving prison view themselves. Pam and Ann comment:

I mean--If you come out of jail like some of them do, then people are bound to--you know--

not want to associate with you. (Pam)

I think both men and women get treated the same. People do not use the options that are around them. (Ann)

II--Potential Damage:

The threat that a "record" will discredit claims to respectability, is obviously a problem for some people. If nothing else, the labeling perspective makes that clear. Therefore, it is not surprising that four women perceived that they would be discredited if their legal histories were revealed. All four (Susan, Betty, Patti and Joyce) state that they were reluctant to reveal their legal histories to their boyfriends. For example:

I had a heck of a time trying to tell him, because, like, I've known him, it will be about a year on Wednesday, that I've known him. And I only told him in June (about ten months). You know? It took me, more or less, all that time to build up to telling him. (Joyce)

While the others took more or less time, the fact remains that they were afraid that their records would discredit them.

Only Joyce, however, perceives that women would be less favourably esteemed than men for breaking the law. She comments:

I would say that it (having a record) is held against a woman more than it is against a man. I mean, not that I've run into it, but--I would say that it is more accepted in a man than it is a woman. (What do you mean by accepted?)

Well, more, or less, guys are expected to get into trouble, and to--something like that. I don't know.--Girls are supposed to be goody-goodies. (Joyce)

The mere fact that the others have records is sufficient reason for them to believe others might discredit them.

III--Damaged:

Both Lois and Shelly perceive that they have been discredited in their relationships with their husbands (from whom they are separated) and some of their boy-friends. They attribute this partially to the fact that they have records and partially to the fact that they are women who have records. This is clearly shown in the following passage:

I think guys do hold it against you. But women? I don't know. I think men are more apt to take you for granted. (Laughs) Or, "You've been discovered by the heat, so you're no good to make it for me." You know? (Laughs) Like they couldn't use you in a crime, or--like they're motivated to use you.--Like this guy I used to go with, he wanted to be a big dealer. You know? He was going to use me. (Lois)

In other words, one man didn't want her because she would be a liability to his plans, while the other man wanted to exploit her vulnerability as both a known law breaker and a woman (she would be less noticeable) in his plans.

IV--Improved:

Sometimes people find themselves in situations

which are not only intolerable, but which require assistance from others. This is the way Monique perceives her marriage prior to incarceration. Because her husband had been such a heavy user of drugs they required large sums of money to support his drug dependency. The only way they could acquire this money was to resort to illegal means. Consequently her husband's drug dependency and their efforts to acquire the drugs had made her marriage a difficult union to tolerate.

It was really hard to live with him....I loved him but he was making me miserable because of the whole thing--Like, when we first started he was taking forty sleeping pills a day. You know how many milligrams? Well, I couldn't leave him because he was just dying in front of me. (Monique)

They needed help.

The help arrived in the form of their arrest and conviction for fraud. As a consequence of his incarceration he overcame his drug dependency.

It's a good thing that he went to jail. And he even tells me the same thing. (Monique)

It is important to note, therefore, that it is his period of incarceration, and not her's, that is perceived as the improving factor in their relationship.

W--Responses:

Without compromise to the thesis of this study, it is apparent that previous experiences and relationships

affect current relationships: No one can totally divorce herself from her personal history. Therefore, it is not surprising that the traumatic relationships that these women have had with men in the past have repercussions for current relationships. In some cases these non-legal hassles have combined with legal stigma to cause women to terminate particular relationships.

For example, both Shelly and Lois have experienced (before and after incarceration) personally unsatisfactory relationships with men. They have both been subjected to physical and psychological abuse at the hands of their husbands (before and after incarceration). Based on these experiences these women not only perceive that men "are motivated to use you," (but that the particular men with whom they have had relationships are "...mad men."

He was a mad man. Always beating me up.--
Really! I should have charged him.--He was
sick. Eh? (Shelly)

The solution for these women was to terminate the problematic relationships; both women have established new relationships which are described as "good," or at least better than previous relationships.

Similarly, even though they did not actually encounter stigmatisation in their intimate relationships with men, Pam, Jackie, Brenda, Janet and Betty indicate that their former boyfriends and/or husbands had sub-

jected them to various forms of abuse (physical and non-physical). Their reaction to this abuse was to do as Shelly and Lois had done. They terminated the relationships, claiming in some cases (Brenda, Jackie, Pam, and Betty) that these men were not worthy of respect.

Finding new boyfriends, however, has not been a task free of the doubts and anxieties wrought by their previous experiences. For example, Janet states that her current relationship was not "too good at first." The reason it had not been "too good" she suggests is that not only did she have "emotional problems," but she was unable to trust men. They had been "just trying to do one thing to me...ever since I remember." It wasn't until after an incident in which she had "taken off" and had been beaten that she decided she would be better off staying with the man she had been living with at the time.

Like, I ran away once and got a black eye from the guy that picked me up. And I got cut. And I never thought it was worth it since. (Janet)

Other women (Susan, Betty, Patti and Joyce) experienced doubt about their status as potential mates for men because they feared their legal histories might discredit them. Each expressed some doubt about revealing their legal histories to their boyfriends. Consequently they waited for periods up to one year before telling their boyfriends about their pasts. They told them in

order to avoid the embarrassment of having to explain why they did not tell them if they discovered the discrediting information via some other means.

Patti is the only one, however, who did not voluntarily inform her boyfriend of her past. She had tried to keep her record secret, but the small star shaped tattoo on her hand gave her away the first time she met her boyfriend. She had wanted to keep it hidden, but he knew what it meant. "It's a jail tattoo." Since then the relationship has grown to the point where they plan to marry and have a family.

Other women (June, Brenda, Jackie, Ann and Pam) have made no attempt to keep their records secret. They informed their boyfriends very early in their relationships about their pasts. In Pam's case the revelation came the first time she met her boyfriend. She told him then because:

...I don't feel--it's nothing to be proud of--
but I will not let it build up around me--close
around me. I will not live a sheltered life.
(Pam)

The others express similar reasons for telling their
boyfriends.
boyfriends.

Since establishing these new relationships, moreover, all of the women except June state that their relationships are "good." The revelations, or discoveries of Patti's, Joyce's, Susan's and Betty's pasts have served

to:

...make our relationship a good one. You know? He knows what happened. There isn't anyone that can come up to him and try to tell him something he doesn't already know. (Betty)

The remaining eight women (Pam, Shelly, Monique, Ann, Janet, Jackie, Brenda and Lois) express similar opinions concerning their current relationships. Indeed, as we have already seen Monique perceives improvements in her relationship with her husband. The important point is that they are trying to make their relationships even better. Ann, Patti, Joyce and Susan are either making plans to live with or marry their boyfriends. Even June, who expresses some doubt about her current relationship, is attempting to solidify the relationship. She is attempting to resolve the problems she and her boyfriend have been having regarding their inability to live with each other. Rather than terminate the relationship, they have decided to maintain separate residences until they can resolve their conflict.

Summary

Clearly the existence of a "record" is not perceived to be major threat to respectability in relationships with men for most of these women. Again, as was the case with family relationships, previous identities and experiences were perceived as being more problematic

or important. This was particularly evident in Janet's case. Furthermore, the fact that only three women state that sex-role stereotyping became problematic in their relationships with men is important. Even though the other women may have stereotypic conceptions of what women are "supposed to be," they do not believe that having a "record" damages that image. Three women explicitly state that the most important factor in determining a woman's respectability is the image she has, and presents of herself. In other words, if she perceives that her legal history discredits her, then a woman is going to encounter stigmatisation.

The perceptions these women have of previous experiences with men have affected their current relationships. Previously unsatisfactory relationships have made these women cautious about entering new relationships. The fact that they have entered into new relationships, and are trying to make these relationships better than previous relationships signifies, however, that they still believe that having a relationship with a man is important--perhaps the most important factor--in maintaining public and private images of themselves as women.

Chapter III
Status as Mothers

The fact that the female role-model places great importance on the rôle of mother is unquestioned. What is questioned is that women who have been publically identified as lawbreakers would perceive this to be a necessarily discrediting influence to their self-images as respectable and capable mothers.

The findings of the current study indicate that legal labeling has only a minimal effect on on the self-images these women have of themselves as mothers. Only three of the seven women (Those women who have no children have been excluded from the analysis.) who have children perceive that their legal histories discredit them as mothers. That does not imply that the other four women have not encountered stigmatisation in their roles as mothers, because three of them have. The stigmatising source for these three women, however, is their histories as psychiatric patients. Only one woman, therefore, perceives no stigmatisation of any kind. We shall begin with the four women who perceive no legal stigma (Unaffected).

I--Unaffected:

Legal histories are not as important in determining respectable status as mothers for some women. Three women state that the only reason they are not currently living with some or all of their children is their histories of mental illness. Commenting on the loss of their children, Barbara and Lois state:

They said I was dangerous to myself and others.
(Barbara)

I didn't even know she was there (Children's Aid) until two years later, or something. I had a nervous breakdown. (Lois)

Similarly, Pam says she was a "nervous wreck" when her husband divorced her and won custody of her daughter.

As for her history as a "criminal," Pam maintains that she was granted parole because she had been able to realise that her two sons (from a subsequent marriage) were being improperly cared for while she was in jail, and she had taken action to ensure better care:

Barry was in Children's Aid, and Fred was born while I was in Kingston. And then...the guy-- who I shot, his first wife took Barry out of Children's Aid, and you know, looked after him. And I guess that, I don't know, there was no better place for them. I thought it was just great. But in the long run, like, she was just, she was taking things out on Barry--for what I did. And when I finally realised it, what was going on around--I took Barry from there and left him with my older sister. And I was going for parole. I got it, I guess, because I was smart enough to realise what was going on with my children. (Pam)

In other words, she received support from the parole board for her belief that her legal history did not discredit her as a mother.

Finally, Jackie's daughter was born after her release. Since then the baby has been a central figure in Jackie's dispute with her husband. It is her perception that her husband was not interested in her and the baby:

He figured they need him at home. He has thirteen brothers and sisters younger than him.... They needed him. Their father can look after them....He's got his own family--his own family to look after, never mind them. (Jackie)

The fact that he doesn't is the major point of contention between them. She more or less perceives that since she is the baby's mother, and her husband refuses to play his role, she is the only person capable enough to provide the necessary care for the baby.

II--Damaged:

Different things lead different people into believing they are discredited, or that their status within a particular role is damaged. For Sharon and Brenda the fact that they had already begun life styles which would see them go to jail several times in the ensuing years lead them to believe that they might not be able to provide the constant care and attention their children would need. Consequently they gave their children, at birth, to trusted family members to be cared for by

these people.

In Betty's case the problem was that she had to prove, after her release, that she would not resume using drugs and associating with drug users before she could regain custody of her daughter. She comments:

I thought it was due--due to the drug problem that I had. They wanted to see how I would do. (Betty)

It took her almost six months to prove that she would not resume her former activities.

III--Potential Damage:

None of the seven women perceive that their records have merely the potential to discredit them. Their records are either not important--at least not as important as their psychiatric histories--or already discredit them.

IV--Improved:

None of the women perceive that their records have improved their images as mothers; even though Pam perceives that the parole board has reinforced her belief that she is a capable mother.

V--Responses:

Even though someone encounters stigmatisation, that does not mean that this imputation of disrespect is accepted. As Matza and Sykes (1968) have suggested, some discredited people may reject both the people and

the criteria which discredit them. For example, only two women (Sharon and Brenda) indicate that they accept that their status as mothers is discredited by their legal histories, and one (Lois) of three (Barbara, Pam) women encountering stigmatisation as a consequence of their psychiatric histories accept that she is discredited. In other words, three of six women encountering stigmatisation do not accept that they are discredited. Let us begin with those who reject the imputations that they are not capable and respectable mothers.

Both Barbara and Betty reject that their psychiatric and legal histories respectively discredit them. Barbara suggests that because she had sought, received and is responding to treatment she is once again a capable mother. "...With this medication I can cope with everything." Betty expresses similar resentment that her daughter was kept from her for six long months after she had been released from jail. It took her six months to prove that she would not resume former activities.

Similarly, Pam discounts any notion that her legal history discredits her. However, she is less confident about her psychiatric history. She does not dispute the imputation that the fact that she was a "nervous wreck" at the time her daughter was placed in her former husband's custody discredited her as a mother at that point. Since then, however, she believes that she has regained

respectable status as a mother. She can even point to the fact that (she perceives) she was granted parole so that she could resume her role as mother to her two sons.

Lois, Brenda and Sharon also do not dispute the discrediting capabilities of the forces that discredit them. Lois, like Pam and Barbara had been a patient in a psychiatric hospital when her children were legally removed from her custody. Her response to this action is acceptance that others can provide a "better home" for her daughter than she can.

...She's better off there. She has a mother and a father. They gave her a good home environment, and I didn't have much to offer her. Right now I don't have anything to offer her. (Lois)

Similar reasoning provided the rationale which led Sharon and Brenda to place their children in the custody of trusted family members. They did it, says Sharon, "...to protect them."

Finally, Jackie perceives that the only person capable of caring for her daughter is Jackie herself. Her husband was unwilling to perform either his role as husband or father, so therefore, as a demonstration of her independence from him, and of her confidence in her capabilities as a mother she:

...packed me and the baby up and moved in with my girlfriend.

Summary

As was seen in Chapter I regarding family status some women view their psychiatric histories to be more problematic to their respectability than their legal histories. Three women (Lois, Pam and Barbara) have encountered stigmatisation as a consequence of their psychiatric, but not their legal histories. On the other hand, three other women (Betty, Sharon, and Brenda) have encountered stigmatisation as a consequence of their legal histories. The implication being that if two discrediting traits are possessed at the same time, the one perceived to be the greater threat is the one which is most closely associated with the person's mental capacities.

Of more importance, perhaps, is the fact that of the six women encountering stigmatisation half do not accept that the criteria by which they have been discredited are legitimate. Pam, Barbara and Betty clearly state that even though they have been discredited, they are not unworthy people. Finally, one woman (Jackie) perceives no discrediting influences on her status as a mother. Consequently, it may be stated that while some women will perceive damage to their images as mothers as a consequence of their legal histories, others will not.

Chapter IV

Status with Friends

Previous research (Becker, 1963: Goffman, 1963: Polsky, 1969: Sawchuk, 1974) indicates that the fear of being discredited will often lead people who bear discredited traits, or do less respectable things than "normal people" do, to withdraw into groups composed mainly of people who do the same things, or bear the same or similar discredited traits. The implication of this research is that the only reason for maintaining friendship groups bearing the same discredited characteristics is to avoid stigmatisation. Little emphasis has been devoted to showing that some people may not perceive any need to change their friendship groups. That is, they may have been associating with similarly discredited people even prior to incarceration, and consequently the "withdrawal" noted by this research may simply be part of the individual's continuing--not a new--interest in people like themselves. These people share, in general terms, the same kinds of interests; they share similar backgrounds, and expect to achieve similar goals.

As such it may be expected that the most likely

"friends" to discredit these women, are the friends who do not share the same background, or who do not share the same interests as these women. This does not imply, however, that these women do not perceive changes in their own interests or the interests of their friends. It must be remembered that because someone viewed themselves, or their friends as being "this way" at some previous point in their life, that they will do so now or in the future. New experiences, and new interpretations of past and present experiences combine to produce a "new self." In other words, identity does not remain constant over time. It changes as the demands and definitions of the situation change. Consequently, if a woman perceives changes in herself but not in those people she associated with prior to incarceration, it is possible that she would perceive a need to seek new friends and acquaintances who share her newly acquired perspective and interests.

The reverse, however, may also happen. Friends with whom an individual shared experiences and interests in the past may perceive that the individual concerned has not changed. Therefore, they react to her in the same manner as they did in the past. That is they will expect her to do the same things as she did in the past, even though she may no longer conceive of herself in the way she once did and they still do.

All of these situations are observed among

the women interviewed for this study. Seven women indicate that they did not want their legal histories revealed to new acquaintances fearing that these people would not fully understand that, even though they broke the law, they are not "criminals" (More will be said of this point in Chapter VI which is concerned with the women's perceptions of the affects of official intervention, on their self-images). Another woman maintains that her friends still respond to her in the way they did prior to her arrest and conviction. For them, she is still the person she was "back then." Finally, nine women perceive that they have not encountered any stigmatisation in their friendship relationships. In some cases they no longer have the same friends they had prior to incarceration--for reasons which will become clear--but this does not indicate that they feared being discredited by their old friends. In other cases they have maintained the same, or substantially the same friendship ties. Let us begin with the nine women perceiving no damage to their friendship ties.

I--Unaffected:

The possibility that some or all of their friends would discredit them is discounted by nine women. The important factor for these women is not their pasts, but their present. Joyce says it for all of them (Barbara,

Neena, Shelly, Sharon, Brenda, Janet, Pam and June) when she says:

...They all know that I've been in jail and what I was in for, and what not. And, you know, I've been more or less accepted on how I am now.
(Joyce)

Indeed, Barbara comments that all of her old friends were:

...glad to see me when I got out....I walked up to the fourth floor. I opened the door and just stood there....They all came at me.
(Barbara)

This should be taken to imply that all of these women have re-established the friendship ties that they had prior to incarceration, because only Barbara and Sharon have done so. It simply means that in those relationships which they have either re-established or initiated since their release they have not encountered any stigmatisation. Their pasts are either unimportant (the women who have initiated new ties) to their present identity, or the strength of their pre-incarceration ties has not been damaged by their convictions and sentences served.

II--Potential Damage:

The threat that their legal histories would discredit them if their friends were informed of these histories was perceived by seven women. All of them (Patti, Ellie, Lois, Monique, Jackie, Ann and Betty) were reluctant to inform, or allow others to inform their new ac-

quaintances of their records. For example, Jackie "presumes" that the majority of her friends are aware of her legal history although she is uncertain how they would know:

I might have told them. I don't know.--But I doubt it. It's tough enough to say it....I don't want to say nothing. (Jackie)

Similarly, Ann says:

You don't run and tell them right off. I mean especially friends. I mean you've got to be with people in order just to call them an acquaintance, let alone friends. (Ann)

It should be emphasised that in those relationships where their pasts have been revealed they have not encountered stigmatisation. However, they still prefer to allow friendships to develop to the point where they are confident that the knowledge of the past will not disrupt the relationship.

III--Damaged:

Sometimes people are expected to behave in the same way they did in the past. That is, they become stereotyped as being a particular type of person who behaves in a certain way. The sense, therefore, in which it can be said that Susan has encountered stigmatisation is the extent to which she perceives she has been stereotyped as a "shoplifter." Previously she had gone on shoplifting excursions with her friends, but now they expect her to do their stealing for them.

They all want me to go out and steal fur coats for them. (Susan)

Where once it had been a "joke" to steal from stores, it is no longer a joke. She has been in jail, and they have not.

IV--Improved:

While none of the women perceive improvements in specific relationships, they perceive, in some cases, that the friends they have now are "better" people than the friends they knew prior to incarceration. The reasons the new friends are perceived in this way are made clear in the next subsection (Responses) which is concerned with the way these women react to their perceptions.

V--Responses:

Most of the seventeen women have sought, or were forced to seek new friendship groups since their release. Only four women (Barbara, Sharon, Ellie and Susan) have maintained substantially the same friendship groups they had prior to incarceration. Eight others (Pam, Ann, Neena, Monique, Lois, June, Joyce and Betty) were forced by parole restrictions to seek new friends with different interests than those they knew prior to incarceration, while the remainder voluntarily sought new friends.

However, even though Pam, Ann, Neena, Monique,

Lois, June, Joyce and Betty were forced by parole restrictions to seek new friends, they state that like Brenda, Shelly, Pam and Jackie they would have sought new friends anyway. Patti sums up the situation for them this way:

My old friends seem to be still in the same space as when I was with them five years ago. They're still doing the same things. You know?...And I guess I don't want that anymore.
(Patti)

Patti, Jackie, Betty, Lois, Shelly, Brenda, June and Monique wanted to avoid becoming entangled in the same kinds of behaviour which had resulted in them going to jail, while Pam simply says that her former friends were not really her friends. They had been her former boyfriend's (whom she had killed). She had never been "close" to them.

My relationships before, friends and that, was mostly his friends.--You know? We weren't really all that close. They were his friends.
(Pam)

The others (Ann, Joyce and Neena) indicate that their pre-incarceration lifestyles resulted, or lead to few permanent ties being established. Ann says that her history as a psychiatric patient in various hospital and on various wards of the same hospital taught her not to establish strong friendship ties, and to quickly "dissociate" herself from any ties she did form. She was constantly being switched from ward to ward, and from hospi-

tal to hospital. Therefore, it was best not to establish any permanent ties.

Similarly, Joyce says she has always been a "loner," and Neena says her constant travelling meant relationships were always transitory:

I was always travelling, and then I got arrested. I mean, it's hard to describe, really. Like people were coming and going all the time. I don't know where any of them are. (Neena)

Consequently Ann, Joyce and Neena had no "old" ties to reestablish.

Finding new friends, however, has not been easy for some of these women. Trusting new friends with the fact that they had been in jail was particularly problematic for Patti, Lois, Betty, Ann, Jackie, Ellie and Monique. They did not want their friends to know about their pasts fearing that they would be discredited. Consequently they waited until after the relationships had developed "normally" before divulging their legal, and in some cases (Joyce, Lois and Ann) their medical histories. In extreme cases (Jackie and Patti) they never volunteer their histories, even though they may recognise that they have no control over access to this information. Whereas Jackie and Susan have resigned themselves to the fact that they no longer control access to their histories, Patti has not. She would still like to control this information. When her old friends would introduce her to new

acquaintances she would admonish them if they revealed her legal history. For example:

...my one girlfriend...she introduced me to a couple people...."This is Patti. My friend. She just got out of jail." You know? This is the way she introduced me, and I told her, "please don't do it." (Patti)

By that time, however, "...everybody knew about it."

Some women, furthermore, have deliberately established only limited friendship groups since being released. Betty and Pam have limited their friendship ties to primarily those friends of the men they live with.

Most of them I've met through (her boyfriend). But I don't have, really, any close girlfriends at all. If I have to confide in somebody I talk things over with (him). I don't feel that a close relationship with, you know, another girlfriend is good. It interferes with your family life....I just stay home most nights.

It should be noted as well that Patti, Lois, Monique, Neena, Joyce and Shelly, in spite of parole restrictions for most of them, have limited their friendship ties to people who bear similarly discredited legal and medical histories. Monique, Joyce and Neena have simply not developed friendship ties outside of the half-way houses in which they live. For Monique and Neena it is a matter of not wanting to stay in the cities in which they now live. Monique is waiting for her husband to be released from jail, and Neena doesn't want to establish any ties she knows she will have to break when her parole is over and she may leave the city to which she

was paroled.

Although Patti, Lois and Shelly state that they associate with other ex-cons, former drug users and alcoholics (activities which led them to be sent to jail, and which they express an interest in escaping from) like themselves, they do not fear that these people will lead them back into these activities. As Patti says, the new friends have been:

...in jail and everything. Like they've really been through it. (Now) they're trying to make something of themselves. (Patti)

In other words, because they shared a common history and now share a belief that they must "make something of themselves" in the "straight" world, these people do not pose the threat that their old friends do.

Finally, the four women (Ellie, Susan, Barbara and Sharon) who have maintained substantially the same friendship groups they had prior to incarceration did so for different reasons. For Ellie it was not just a matter of knowing only those people who had relocated in the new city with her, there was also the problem of not wanting to answer "stupid questions" posed by new friends. She did not want to explain to them what it was like to be an "ex-con." The others simply saw no reason not to renew old ties. Even the fact that Susan's old, and new, friends still expected her to do all their stealing for them, she could "stall them," by invoking certain criteria

which had to be met before she would steal for them. These criteria are as follows. Criteria number one is that the person expecting her to steal must prove that they are in need of her services:

....It depends on the circumstances. If it's someone that isn't working, and keeping a small infant on \$ 125.00 a month (Laughs), I might think about it. Yeh!--But if they're working and they can afford it--they want it they can buy it. (Susan)

A final safeguard is provided by criteria number two:

...I haven't done anything in the last couple of months. I haven't even been downtown in the last couple of months. (Susan)

She must be going shopping for herself.

Summary

Once again the majority (nine of seventeen) do not perceive any threat to their status within their friendship group. The important factor for the majority of these nine women is that they present themselves, and are perceived by their friends as respectable people. As such it does not matter what they did in the past because they are respectable people now. For the minority (Sharon, and Barbara), there is the even stronger recognition that official labels don't really mean anything. What is important is the ongoing relationships they have had with their friends before and after conviction.

Furthermore, even though seven of the women per-

ceive a potential threat to their identity they have not actually encountered in those situations in which they have revealed their legal histories. Of more importance, in this context, is the fact that they perceived the greatest threat not from their old friends (where they have maintained such ties), but from new acquaintances. In other words, those people who do not share their backgrounds, or who are unfamiliar with all of their personal histories are perceived as constituting the greatest threat to their respectability. Remember as well, that even though most of these women were expected (parole restrictions) and desired to establish friendship ties with people who had different interests and backgrounds than they had, they still established ties with people who had similar backgrounds (legally). The difference between "old" and "new" is that the new friends are perceived as "trying to make something of themselves," while the old friends "are still in the same space" they had always been. It is clear, however, that some of these women have sought friendship ties among similarly discredited people in order to avoid being discredited.

Finally, even though Susan perceives she has become stereotyped as a shoplifter, she has not discontinued her relationships with the people who expect her to steal for them. She simply "stalls" on their requests using her criteria of "need and convenience" as justification.

Chapter V

Employability

As indicated in outlining the theoretical orientation and issues for this study, women have not played as direct a role in capitalist economy as men (Smith, 1973). However, with an increasingly larger number of women entering the labour force the problems of finding jobs is becoming a real problem for them. Sex-role stereotypes persist even in the job market where laws forbid discrimination by sex. Of more immediate concern for this study is the problems women who have been convicted of criminal offences have in locating employment. They not only face the problems faced by other women in finding employment, they also must face the problem that some employers do not hire known criminal offenders. Indeed, as Schwartz and Skolnick (1968) indicate, some employers may not hire someone who has even the hint of criminal involvement associated with them. Even those persons known to have been acquitted of a criminal offence may be refused employment.

The negative affects of having a record would appear to be the greatest in the area of employability.

This is the only area in which women perceiving damage to their status outnumber those perceiving no damage. Of the seventeen people interviewed, nine perceived that their employability had been damaged. While only two of these women have actually encountered stigmatisation, seven believe they would have encountered it if they had informed their prospective employers of their legal histories. However, since the women perceiving status to be "Unaffected" outnumber the women perceiving "Potential Damage" they will be discussed first.

I--Unaffected:

The women claiming no damage to their employability do so for different reasons. Pam, Betty and Ann have been spared the agony of trying to find jobs on their own, and the potential threat of stigmatisation from employers; each of them had been seeking employment while on day-parole. Employers, therefore, were forewarned about their status. It is unknown if they would have preferred to keep their records secret. However, since obtaining parole is often contingent on first obtaining a job it is unlikely that these women would have resisted the opportunity to "get out."

Four of the remaining five women indicate that they were not apprehensive about their employment status. Barbara, displays the least fear of any of these women.

She comments:

I put it right on the application....I just put it down. I put it down anyways. If they want me, they want me. (Barbara)

"If they want" her the fact that she has a record will not make any difference. Neena, June and Jackie display a similar lack of concern about the effects of their legal histories on their employability.

(Her employer) knows I'm straight now, or I wouldn't be where I am.... (Jackie)

The eighth woman (Janet) has not sought employment since her release. She does, however, express some interest in seeking a job in the future. She would prefer work which could be done in her own home, but other types of work would not be overlooked:

Like, in the papers, you see things you can do at home, or maybe I might go out and get a job. Like in the summer there is a lot of cleaners that are looking for pressers. So I'd like to go back to work. (Janet)

The interview occurred in April, so that "summer" was still a few months away. It can be safely assumed, therefore, that obtaining a job does not rate as a high priority for her. She is much more comfortable staying home performing domestic duties for her boyfriend.

II--Potential Damage:

The threat perceived by these women is observed on two levels. First Joyce and Monique are concerned that they will not be able to pursue the careers of their

choice. Monique wants to be a bookkeeper, but fears that her conviction for fraud would prevent her from ever getting a job as a bookkeeper, while Joyce fears that her psychiatric history and her conviction for childbeating would prevent her from becoming a nurse. They comment:

I figured, "What if I take bookkeep?" You know? I'm taking bookkeeping. "Who's going to hire me with a fraud record?" You know? (Monique)

I'm trying to get back into nursing. But I don't know if they will accept me because of the type of charge I was up on.... (Joyce)

Secondly, all seven women (Joyce, Monique, Ellie, Patti, Susan, Lois, and Brenda) are afraid that employers might not hire them "...just for the principle of having a record" (Joyce). Judging by the Schwartz and Skolnick study (1968) their fears are justified.

III--Damaged:

Despite the fact that not all jobs require that the employee be bondable, the fear on the behalf of some former inmates that they will not be hired because they are not bondable persists. In some cases it is not justified, in others it is. Both Sharon and Shelly state that they were refused employment for this reason. Sharon comments:

If you've been in jail, or on parole, "Are you bonded?" What can you do?...But that's the way they bond you. If you've got a record, you can't be bonded. (Sharon)

IV--Improved:

Obviously none of the women perceive improvements in their employability. Most, in fact, perceive damage.

V--Responses:

As in other relationships and roles, the responses of the women to their perceived statuses vary. The two women actually encountering damage to their employability reject the criteria by which they have been refused employment, while those women perceiving a potential threat to their employability more often than not do not inform prospective employers of their legal histories. Those women perceiving no damage to their employability display an even wider range of responses and action. One of these women did not inform her employer of her record, while another did. In both cases, however, the women do not believe that their records affect their employability

As was indicated above, the response of the two women to have actually encountered stigmatisation was to reject the criteria by which they were refused employment. Specifically, they suggest that bonding practices are unfair. Shelly comments:

Some companies will be pretty sticky about it. That's why I haven't worked there since I did my--that foolish crime--I mean it's not really fair. (Shelly)

Neither woman, however, has attempted to hide her record

from employers.

I've never tried to hide that I was in jail.
That I id drugs.... (Sharon)

Honesty doesn't pay.

Apart from Sharon and Shelly only two other women voluntarily informed their employers that they had been convicted and sent to jail. Barbara did so because she did not believe that it made any difference for the type of work she was seeking (factory worker), while Monique did so even though she was fearful that her chances of getting the job would be diminished. Both women obtained the jobs they were seeking.

Eight other women, did not inform prospective employers that they had records. Patti, Ellie, Joyce, Brenda, Lois and Susan kept their records secret because they feared they would be discredited, while June and Neena kept their records secret because they perceived that there was no reason why they would have to reveal their records; they could do the jobs that were required of them.

It should be made clear, as well, that once some of these women did obtain jobs they did not, or would not allow other employees to know about their records. Joyce, Monique and Patti deliberately concealed their pasts because they perceived that their fellow workers would react negatively towards them. Indeed, Patti not only tried to

protect herself from possible embarrassment, but also tried to shield her mother:

Like I worked with my mum. We worked in the same place, and they were always saying, like, how much of a nice girl I was. But I know for a fact that, if they really knew, they sure wouldn't say that. They became talkers. You know? (Patti)

Not all of the women, however, had the opportunity to keep their records secret from prospective employers. Since Pam, Betty and Ann were on day-parole when they first sought work, employers had to be informed of their status. None of these women, furthermore, kept these jobs after they were granted full parole. Pam decided that because she:

...had to work six days a week...it was too much. I'd rather be home looking after the kids. (Pam)

She and Betty were able to stop working because by that time they had begun living with their new boyfriends who were able to assume financial support for them and their children. Ann gives no reason for not keeping her job.

Monique and Joyce also faced the prospect that they would not be permitted to pursue careers of their choice. Their responses to this situation are quite different. Whereas Monique decided to forgo her career in bookkeeping, Joyce attempts to demonstrate that she is worthy of becoming a nurse in spite of her medical and legal histories. They comment:

I figured, "What if I take bookkeep?" You know? I'm taking bookkeeping. "Who's going to hire me with a fraud record?" You know? So I just drop it. (Monique)

(My probation officer)...left out completely the presentence report, because that just isn't me anymore. You know? And--like, he's not going to mention anything about psychiatric--any psychiatric treatment, or whatever was done before. (Joyce)

Monique gives up the fight, while Joyce keeps fighting.

Finally Janet has not encountered stigmatisation because she has not sought work. The fact that she is considering working as a "presser" in the summer loses some of its significance when it is considered that the interview was recorded in early April and summer was still some time off. Furthermore, she says she would prefer to have a job which she could do "at home." She would prefer to remain isolated.

The reason she might want to remained isolated, however, is important. It is not because she fears being discredited by her legal history. Rather, it is her psychiatric history which she perceives discredits her.

Speaking of people in general she states:

They think that because you were in the hospital that you don't know what you're doing. (Janet)

Summary

As in the Foster, et al (1972), study, the greatest threat to perceived status is not within interpersonal re-

relationships, but in those relationships of an impersonal nature--employability. In other words:

Greatest social liability was perceived in those situations of an impersonal nature in which one's character tends to be inferred from public documents like court or police records rather than through personal acquaintance with the person. (Foster, et al, 1972, 202)

The responses the women display towards this situation vary. Those women perceiving their status to be "damaged" denounce the criteria by which they are discredited, but do not attempt to hide their records. On the other hand, those women who perceive a "potential" threat to their status attempt to hide their legal (and psychiatric) histories, or abandon plans to enter the careers of their choice. Finally those women perceiving no damage to their status were observed in some cases (June and Neena) to keep their records hidden from their employers--because they believed their records to be irrelevant--while in others (Barbara) they boldly reveal their records. It is uncertain, however, how those women who were on day parole would have reacted had they been able to keep their legal histories secret.

Chapter VI

Self-Conceptions

Previous research (Tittle, 1972) indicates that women leaving prison have lower self esteem than men. This same research also indicates that women's self-esteem is lower upon release than it was upon entering the institution. This would seem to indicate that the prospects for the seventeen women interviewed for this study would not be good.

However, the affects of incarceration would not appear to be as devastating as Tittle indicates. Only four of the seventeen women interviewed indicate any loss of self-esteem. Indeed, seven of them indicate that their self-conceptions have actually improved as a consequence of incarceration. Six others, furthermore, do not indicate that their self-conceptions have changed at all. This does not infer, however, that the thirteen women who indicate no loss of self-esteem do not have, in some instances, low self-conceptions. What it does indicate is that some perceive improvements while others perceive no changes in what may already be low self-conceptions. Let us begin with the women perceiving improvements in

their self-conceptions.

I--Improved:

The emphasis of the labeling perspective has been so overwhelmingly concentrated on describing the negative aspects of official intervention, that it sometimes leaves the impression that some people do not perceive any negative affects. The fact that some people may perceive improvements, furthermore, has also been overlooked.

The types of improvements noted by the seven women (Barbara, Jackie, Monique, Joyce, Ellie, Lois and Ann) are directly attributed to the fact that incarceration "gave them time to think about themselves." They comment:

I think I can look at myself better than I did before. (Barbara)

It more or less gave me the time to think about what I was going to do. (Lois)

In other words, it gave them a chance to be more self-critical than if they had continued as they had done before incarceration.

As a consequence of this self-criticism they indicate that they will be less likely to do certain things in the future which they had done in the past. For example, Ellie says she will never shoplift again, and Joyce says she too, will never steal again. As Jackie puts it:

I learned to face up to things. If I've done something wrong now I won't say, "I didn't do it." I can face up to it. Like, I'm starting to do a lot of things I didn't do before. Like

facing up to responsibilities. (Jackie)

Despite the fact that six of these women perceive their status in some of their roles or relationships to be either damaged (Lois and Ann) or potentially damaged (Ellie, Jackie, Monique and Joyce) they still perceive that their self-conceptions have improved. For example, even though Joyce perceives that employers might not hire her ". . . just for the principle of having a record," she still maintains that her self-image and her behaviour have improved. She says that:

It's made me grow up a lot. And I used to steal quite a bit before, and...I don't think I could steal a penny now....I think it really has changed me a lot for the better. (Joyce)

The imputations of disrespect may have importance consequences for relationships with others, but they still perceive improvements in their self-conceptions.

II--Unaffected:

While the six women (Pam, Shelly, June, Janet, Neena and Susan) do not overtly comment on the affects of incarceration on their self-conceptions, they do make statements in describing their relationships with others that imply that they do not perceive any loss in self-esteem. Furthermore, there is a concerted effort on their part to deny that the official label implies anything beyond the fact that they broke the law and were punished for doing so. As Neena puts it, to be a "crim-

inal" the individual must possess a "criminal mind." While she does acknowledge that there are such people, neither she nor most of the women who are imprisoned are criminals.

There's all different kinds in there (prison). There aren't too many criminals. How I mean that is there are people who broke the laws... their minds aren't really criminal. (Neena)

In one sense they are reacting against the possible imputation of disrespectable status. Indeed, Shelly and Susan have encountered stigmatisation in some of their roles. However, they do not accept that they are less respectable.

People don't care if you've been in prison. (Neena)

People accept you for what you are now, not for what you were in the past. (Pam)

We're just like everybody else. (Pam)

As we have seen, in some instances where these women have encountered stigmatisation, they imply that those persons or conditions which discredit them do so without justification.

III--Potential Damage:

The degree to which it can be stated that Patti and Betty perceive their self-conceptions to be damaged is exemplified by the fact that they no longer view themselves as self-confident and independent people. Both women indicate that they had been self-assured people

prior to incarceration. For example, Betty says her decision to do her first hit of "speed," although regarded now as a mistake, was her decision. She needed no coaxing.

...This one night, we knew we'd be working late the next day, and she said, "If you're going to work late, you might need this." It wasn't as if anybody really talked me into it. It was me that decided to do the hit. I did it. I was the one. (Betty)

However, since their release, both women indicate that they fear that they might not be "...completely healed" (Betty) as drug users. They feel unable to trust themselves around drugs and drug users for fear that they may again become involved in the activities which institutionalised them in the first place. Patti comments:

I find myself really worried still. You know? About doing certain things, because I don't want to get caught up in it again.

It is within this context that they recognize that they are more vulnerable now than they were previously. They lack confidence that they can manage their lives as self-assuredly as they did in the past. They depend on others to keep them away from drugs and drug users:

...I think that if I were ever around it (drugs) and if anyone comes on to me, like, if I didn't want to do it, he'd (her boyfriend) chase them away. (Patti)

It may be argued that they had naive conceptions of themselves and their actions prior to incarceration. The important point, however, is that despite the recog-

nitition that their past behaviour was "bad," they no longer assume they are as capable of making decisions as they previously were. It is for this reason that they have been discussed under the heading "Potential Damage." Until they are actually confronted with situations which necessitate the resumption of former activities, they can only surmise future actions.

IV--Damaged:

In only one sense can it be said that Sharon and Brenda have lower self-conceptions as a consequence of their legal histories. Both women indicate that they believed that they would be unable to provide the constant care and attention their children would require. Consequently they gave their children, at birth, to trusted family members: Sharon gave her children to her brother, and Brenda gave her children to her brother. They did it to "protect" their children.

Summary

Even though eight women perceive that their respectability has been, or could be damaged in other relationships or roles, they do not perceive any damage to their self-conceptions. This would seem to indicate that the labeling perspective's assumption that disreputable status in one role will affect self-conceptions is not

accurate.

Furthermore, seven women perceive improvements in their self-conceptions. This does not imply, however, that they found life on the "inside" a pleasant experience because they did not. It implies that they found the "inside" so unpleasant that they had to "rethink" what they were doing and where they were going.

Conclusion

The objectives of this study were twofold. The first objective was to test the labeling perspective's assumption that individuals possessing discreditable characteristics would perceive themselves to be discredited, or at least discreditable. The second objective was to test not only the labeling perspective's hypothesis that labeled people would assume the identity of the officially imposed label, but also the hypothesis that women depend on the assessments of others for their self-identity to the extent that they might not be capable of interpreting others assessments as unimportant or in error.

The emphasis of the labeling perspective has been such that it leaves the impression that official labels, such as "criminal," are perceived by the person so labeled as being necessarily and permanently negative descriptions. Ball (1970, 345), as well as Goffman (1963) and others have asserted that once the label is attached it is virtually impossible to escape totally from it. That is, the label will be forever applied by others to the person (who may then adopt it) possessing the discredited trait.

One recent study (Foster, et al, 1972), however, shows that the labeled person may not perceive being discredited. Further support for this finding is offered in the current study.

Data analysis shows that five women (Pam, June, Neena, Barbara and Janet) do not perceive that their legal histories discredit them in any of the five roles (family member, wife/girlfriend, mother, friend and employee) studied in this study. Furthermore, none of them perceive any loss in self-esteem. Furthermore, none of the seventeen women perceive that their legal histories discredit them in all of their roles. That is, each woman perceives that in at least one, usually more, of the relationships and roles examined in this study, their respectability has not been damaged. Indeed, several women (Betty, Jackie, Pam and June) indicate that they perceive improvements in their relationships with certain family members.

However, it is also true that several women, while they do not perceive being discredited by official--i.e. legal--labels, do perceive being discredited by their histories of mental illness. Lois, Janet, Ann, Barbara, Joyce and Pam all perceive that, in at least one of the roles examined here, their psychiatric histories damage their respectability. In addition to these six women, Neena indicates that her physical "handicap" is the

discrediting influence to her respectability.

The fact that these women perceive that these additional factors discredit them, while the legal factor does not (in most cases) indicates that stigmatisation is more likely to be perceived as the discredited trait becomes more visible, or more closely associated with the individual's psychological being or mental state. That is, the individual's master status could be their physical appearance, or their mental health.

Notwithstanding the fact that five women did not perceive themselves to be discredited in any of the relationships or roles examined, the fact remains that twelve women do claim loss of status in one or more roles. As such, it is important to remember that the criticism of the labeling perspective that is being offered here, as in the Foster, et al (1972) study, is that the labeling perspective has failed to make clear that not everyone regards official labels imposed by police and the courts as discrediting influences to their identity. In other words not everyone accepts the implicit values of the law and the legal process as legitimate expressions of their values.

The fact that these women perceived that they had not been discredited in at least one role has implications for the second objective of this study: The assumptions

made by the labeling perspective as well as certain hypotheses regarding the socialisation of women, that the assessments of others may (do) lead to a loss of self-esteem for the discredited person. Little attention has been directed towards showing that the individual does not simply respond to others assessments, but also interprets these assessments and acts upon these interpretations. The findings of the current study suggest that, for at least those women interviewed for this study, external assessments are not as crucial as Greenglass (1973) and others (Bardwick and Douvan, 1971; Weisstein, 1971), indicate. Only four of the seventeen women indicated that their self-conceptions may be damaged as a consequence of their legal histories. Furthermore, even though none of the remaining thirteen women indicate that their self-conceptions have been damaged--they remained unaffected or improved--only five of these women perceived that their relationships with others, or certain of their roles have also remained unaffected. In other words, eight women perceive no loss in self-esteem while perceiving a loss of status in at least one of their roles.

This is an important finding in that it suggests that these women are assessing themselves on some other basis than the criteria and assessments of others. Further investigation is warranted.

Furthermore, in most instances where stigmatisation is encountered--for whatever reasons--the criteria by which they have been discredited, or the people who discredit them are rejected. In that sense the techniques of neutralisation described by Mataza and Sykes (1968) have been employed by these women, and this aspect of the the labeling perspective has been substantiated. It is also further evidence that others assessments of self as "disrespectable" are not as important as self-assessments as "respectable;" a fact which Greenglass' (1973) analysis seems to discount entirely.

In regard to the women's cognizance of the importance of sex-role stereotyping on their public image, and the effects of legal stigma on this factor, three women say that it is, while three others say it is not a factor; eleven others make no comment. It is important to note that two of the women who perceive it to be a factor do so within the context of their intimate relationships with men, while the third says that, even though she has not encountered this kind of difficulty, the possibility does exist. On the other hand, those women who do not perceive this to a a factor, suggest that if a woman leaving prison has a low self-conception then she should not be surprised if others discredit her. As far as these women are concerned, it is more important to maintain self-respect and self-confidence.

It is difficult, however, to conclude, based on this limited data, anything more than some women will and some women will not perceive sex-role stereotyping to be problematic. That does not imply that, for those women who perceive it is not a problem, that it is not, in fact, a consideration used by others to determine their status. All that it implies is that these women are not aware that it is a factor in others' assessments of them.

Finally, the fact that all but one (June) of the seventeen women perceived that their respectability in some, but not other relationships or roles had been damaged by their legal status, psychiatric history or physical handicap, indicates that they treat each relationship and role as a separate entity. Each has its own demands and expectations. Therefore, each may be regarded as a separate reality. Because one of these realities has been damaged, it does not follow that any or all other realities are also damaged. Conversely, because one reality has not been damaged it does not mean that any or all other realities will also remain unaffected.

In conclusion it may be stated that the labeling perspective's emphasis on describing the negative consequences of official intervention is overstated, and over-emphasised. Five women do not perceive that any of their relationships or roles have been damaged as a consequence of official intervention in the form of arrest, conviction

and incarceration. Twelve others, furthermore, perceive that in at least one, usually more, role their status has not been affected. It may also be stated that the labeling perspective and certain statements regarding the importance of others in the maintenance of women's identity overstate the importance of others in maintaining self-esteem. Instead, it is suggested the individual's assessments of others' reaction toward self as interpreted by self, coupled with self's assessment and interpretation of self are more important in maintaining self-esteem. Others may discredit the individual, but the individual may interpret these reactions incorrectly, or as being unjustified.

This is not to suggest that there are not women, or men, who do not perceive that they have been discredited by their legal histories, or that sex-role stereotyping does not affect the way others react to them, and that some women will not recognise that these things do discredit them. Rather it is to suggest that these assumptions and hypotheses are overstated and overemphasised. They create an impression of an oversocialised individual, and an especially oversocialised woman.

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