

WORK, WELFARE & THE SPIRIT OF DEVIANCE

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THE PROTESTANT ETHIC

. Weber stated that Protestantism prepared the way for capitalism (1958). Though capitalism may be defunct, the Protestant ethic remains (Roszak 1969). The will to work, the desire to succeed are attributes of American society (Merton 1957). This claim has been criticized, but people do understand and respond to questions about success, under somewhat variant definitions (Hyman 1953; Gans 1968; Goodwin 1972a, 1972b; Deffa Fave 1974). Failure is not condoned by American society, and the onus must be borne by the individual (Feagin 1972a, 1972b; Cole & Lejeune 1972 348).

. These beliefs about the welfare recipient in society are important. "In modern societies, the deprived are assigned to the core category of the poor only when they receive (public) assistance" (Coser 1965 141). Welfare recipients constitute a visible group of persons who can be denounced collectively for lack of achievement. To be a welfare recipient in the United States means degradation for a category of people who are permanently without success (Garfinkel 1956; Haggstrom 1965 463). The relief system is geared to the manufacture of tales of poverty which satisfy a societal need (Gans 1942 280; Piven & Cloward 1971). In this sense, the welfare recipient, and others recognized in this category are "deviant".

THE SPIRIT OF DEVIANCE

. Since welfare recipients are defined as deviant by society and by the welfare system, welfare recipients must manage their own identities. They must either reject the deviant label or adjust to it.

The simplest way to deal with the deviant label is concealment.

For the stigmatized person, identity can be managed by justifying the deviance to one's self and others, while hiding the disreputable trait, and "passing" in the presence of an unknowing audience. "The individual tends to stratify his 'own' according to the degree to which their stigma is apparent and obtrusive. He can then regard those who are more evidently stigmatized by the same attitudes the normals take to him" (Goffman 1963 107).

. Another way to manage the welfare stigma is to discover what society will accept as a legitimate excuse for receiving public assistance. Parsons suggested that the "sick role" may be used as an excuse for failing to maintain role expectation (1958). A large sample of welfare recipients, when interviewed to determine how much the "sick role" is used, showed that "... defining one's status as illegitimate, and viewing that status as permanent, contribute to one's adopting the sick role" (Cole & Lejeune 1972 351).

. Reactions to the welfare label are diverse. Labeling the entire group of welfare recipients deviant denies the heterogeneity of the group. Most welfare recipients affirm the legitimacy of the dominant society's beliefs about poverty, by trying to set themselves off from other welfare recipients, by concealment, dissociation, and legitimate excuses.

. Deviants characterized by a spirit of repentance believe in the dominant ideology of society. These welfare recipients do not blame the system, but find it to be legitimate. They blame their condition on themselves. Because they believe that they are justly labeled, they keep a low profile in the welfare system, so as not to attract attention to their label.

. Other welfare recipients, characterized by a spirit of rejection, refuse to accept their label passively. They reject the dominant ideology and the stigma of the welfare label. They blame the sys-

tem which classes them as deviant, and deny its legitimacy. They are activists in the welfare system, and try to bring about change.

. Two questions arise: 1) Do these deviant spirits typify welfare recipients? If so, the deviant label has diverse effects, because many people are willing to accept the label by accepting welfare assistance, but deny the stigma associated with it. 2) What are the effects of the deviant label for the proposed classes of welfare recipients?

RESEARCH SAMPLE AND OPERATION

. Data were gathered through personal interviews with 103 mothers receiving welfare under Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC, or ADC) in a midwestern urban area of about 350,000 population. Subjects came from a stratified random sample from the 1972 AFDC rolls. Home interviews were conducted with 55 white and 48 black AFDC recipients. Each was assured that no information would reach the Department of Welfare. Over 95% of those originally contacted agreed to be interviewed.

FIGURE 1: COMPOSITION OF WELFARE ATTITUDE INDEXES

1.0 Index of active versus passive involvement.

1.1 The only way a welfare recipient is able to get all of the benefits he is entitled to is always to ask his caseworker about them, and keep bothering the Welfare Department until all of the benefits are obtained.

1.2 The only way welfare recipients are going to get more opportunities and money is by collectively protesting against the Welfare Department and Government for more.

2.0 Index of acceptance of the dominant ideology.

2.1 The reason people are poor is because they are lazy and don't look hard enough for work, or do not work hard enough to keep a good job if they get one.

2.2 The reason people are poor is mostly due to themselves.

3.0 Index for blaming the political and economic system.

3.1 Most problems that exist in the United States today can be blamed on the total system in which we live.

3.2 The structure of the government must be changed if the United States is to reduce the number of poor people.

3.3 We have a lot of poverty, not because the structure of our government is bad, but because there are too many crooked politicians running the government.

4.0 Stigma index.

4.1 Some ADC mothers have said that when they are with friends or people not on ADC, they feel embarrassed or uncomfortable about receiving welfare support. Others do not feel this way. How do you feel when you are with people who don't receive ADC? How frequently are you embarrassed or uncomfortable?

4.2 How do you think people in this community feel about people like yourself who are on the ADC program? Are they understanding, indifferent, fairly hostile, or very hostile?

4.3 Have you or your children had any difficulties or problems with people or businesses in the community that you think happened because you are a welfare recipient?

IS THE DEVIANT SPIRIT EMPIRICALLY BASED?

. If the deviant attitudes are empirically grounded, one would expect those showing a "spirit of repentance" to feel high levels of stigma associated with the welfare label, and to be involved passively in the welfare system. Those showing a spirit of rejection should reject the idea of welfare as stigma, and should be more involved in the welfare system.

. Welfare recipients possessing a spirit of repentance are expected to accept the dominant ideology, which holds the poor responsible

for their own fate. Those adhering to a spirit of rejection are expected to be much more aggressive, and are expected to try to gain all that they can from welfare. They are also expected to deny responsibility for their fate, and to blame the economic and social systems for their plight.

. We are now in a position to assess four hypotheses.

1) Involvement in the welfare system varies inversely with perceived stigma. The gamma statistic, measuring the association between stigma and involvement = $-.56$. Thus, stigma is felt differently with different kinds of involvement in the welfare system.

2) Involvement in welfare varies inversely with belief in the dominant ideology. The gamma statistic of $.20$ lends weak support to the hypothesized relation.

3) Involvement in welfare varies directly with system blaming. A gamma of $.61$ between involvement and system blaming supports the hypothesis.

4) Belief in the dominant ideology varies inversely with system blaming. The gamma statistic of $.02$ shows no relation between the dominant ideology and system blaming. To assess the index of belief in the dominant ideology, its items were run separately with involvement and system blaming. Both items of the belief in the dominant ideology are related to each other, as shown by a gamma association of $.71$. Each item is related to involvement in the predicted direction to the same degree. However, the relation between system blaming and the belief items is reversed.

EFFECTS OF STIGMA

. What are the effects of stigma on welfare recipients? The relations among involvement, belief in the dominant ideology, and system blaming were examined while controlling for the effects of stigma, using partial gammas. By examining the percent of change between zero order and first order gam-

mas, one can find the effect of stigma on the initial relations. Thus, the relation between involvement and the belief item is little affected by stigma, shown by an 18% decrease. Stigma has no apparent effect on the relation between belief in the dominant ideology and system blaming, since the change was zero. Finally, the presence of stigma acts to suppress the relation between involvement and system blaming, shown by a 30% increase. Stigma results from negative labeling. If feelings of stigma result from this punishment, all three patterns should be affected when stigma is controlled. Only one pattern of behavior is affected by controlling stigma, which acts to reduce the covariance of involvement in the welfare system and system blaming. Thus, stigma is a penalty for those who criticize and condemn the system but propose to make full use of it.

. Stigma is not felt equally by all deviants. In particular, stigma is meant to be used against those deviants who actively seek to make the system work for them, rather than against those who passively accept their status. Stigma seems to be a punishment for action. It does not affect the relation between system blaming and belief in the dominant ideology, because neither effects change in the system. In this sense, system blaming may be a form of name calling, to neutralize the effects of being caught up in a system in which one does not believe (Sykes & Matza 1957). No action is involved other than "cooling oneself out" (Goffman 1952). Where one's lack of faith in the political and social systems may affect one's involvement in the welfare system, stigma apparently acts to heighten the importance of this cause of action. Examining the second belief item (Figure 1, 2.2) supports this interpretation. It is more directly related to activity. Stigma is a reinforcement between

disbelief in the dominant ideology and involvement in welfare.

. By controlling for stigma, the size of the original gamma is reduced by a factor of .43. Stigma is thus an important part of this relation. The zero order gamma between stigma and the activity oriented dominant ideology item is .42; as one believes that people's lack of activity is the problem, one also feels more stigma. Yet, one may react to this stigma by increasing activity, by becoming more involved in the welfare system. Stigma is not a punishment, but serves as incentive to produce the very behavior which stigma is designed to suppress.

. We do have an anomalous finding. As one's belief that inactivity is the root of poverty increases, one also tends to high levels of system blaming. This could be resolved by saying that one would work if the opportunity offered. But this chance is not only a function of the person, but also of the opportunities presented by the system. The individual blames the system because it fails to provide such opportunities. This argument, although post hoc, is consistent with the data: the welfare system apparently provides a chance to be active. With this chance there is increased activity in the welfare system, there develops a greater disbelief in the recipient's inability. This trend is accented when stigma is imposed, perhaps in the attempt to show that the system is to blame.

DISCUSSION

. The results generally support the existence of two distinct types of deviant welfare recipients. This finding is most clear in the assessment of the problem index: belief in the dominant ideology. Here, the importance of an actual "doing" orientation appeared. Action is both an individual proclivity, and is also dependent on system supplied opportunities for action. If the larger system does not provide opportunities, system

blaming results from those with action orientations. When alternative activity is provided in the welfare system, it is grasped by those recipients with such an orientation. Stigmatization is not directed at people who cool themselves out, although they feel the stigma. Stigmatization is a tool used to suppress outward action against the larger social system. The negative relation between a general belief in the dominant ideology and system blaming is not affected by stigma. Such a belief is diffuse, and people react to defuse it further by using name calling to neutralize their position.

. We have constructed a dichotomy of deviants based on their spirit of acceptance of the deviant label. Deviants vary on a continuum from the spirit of repentance to the spirit of rejection.

. The argument is based on indirect evidence. Though the two spirits represent the focus of the study, we may be criticized for not dealing directly with them. But the spirits have been operationalized and tested. The hypothesized pattern of relations among belief in the dominant ideology, system blaming, and involvement was demonstrated and assessed. We may be too concerned with the patterning of relations at the expense of independent statistical tests of hypotheses. Finally, the magnitude of some of the observed relations is small. However, these factors were explicable in the present theoretical framework.

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