

The Impact of Labeling in Childhood on the Sense of Self of Young Adults

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## **Abstract**

Research studies on labeling of children have either focused on the effects of formal labels on the lives of children with exceptionalities and mental health issues, or the effect of informal labeling by parents, peers and teachers on teenagers. The effects of informal labeling in childhood and its implications in later life or for one's career choice have not yet been examined. This study adds to the growing research on informal labeling. The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine what negative effects informal labeling of children as deviant had on their lives. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with seventeen young adults, between the ages of sixteen and thirty years, from a post-secondary institution and an organization for homeless youth. The results showed an initial negative impact on the lives of the young adults during their childhood and early teenage years but as they progressed into their late teens and early adulthood, most were able to overcome their negative labels suggesting resilience. There were no significant gender differences in the impact of the labels. The implications of the study for policy makers and parents are discussed as well as some recommendations for parents and practitioners are offered.

**Key words:** informal labeling, sense of self, deviance, young adults, childhood

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## LABELING IN CHILDHOOD

### **Introduction**

In all societies there are rules for governing the lives of the people. The enforcement of such rules leads to the categorization of certain behaviours as deviant when the rules are not followed. Researchers and theorists in the field of deviance have intimated that the label “deviant” is ascribed to a person as a result of the reaction to another person’s behaviour (Becker, 1963; Hagan, 1973) or to borrow the words of Simmons (1969), “deviance, like beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder” (pg, 4). This implies that a person is labeled only when another person perceives his/her behaviour as deviant. Labels are ascribed formally through agents of social order or control and informally through the interactions between people who adhere to common rules (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967). Proponents of labeling theory (Becker, 1963; Erickson, 1962; Lemert, 1967) and other recent researchers in the field (Adams, Johnson & Evans, 1998; Hinshaw, 2005; Pryor, Reeder & Monroe, 2012) have highlighted the negative effects of labels on the labeled person; hence there is a need to investigate the effects on those children labeled as deviant.

My interest in conducting this study stems mainly from my observations of what transpires in my home country of Ghana. Children whose parents or teachers find them troublesome are called names or are constantly reminded of how troublesome they are by parents, siblings, other members of the extended family and even acquaintances of the family. They are often in trouble with authority figures, and frequently engage in confrontations with parents and other family members.

Although the issue of labeling of children has been examined extensively by many researchers in the field, this study adds to the research by examining the long term effects of negative childhood labels on the sense of self of young adults. A growing number of studies on formal labeling have been focused on children with exceptionalities or disabilities and mental health issues and the effects of such labels on the lives of children (Gates, 2010; Macharey & Von Suchodoletz, 2008; O'Reilly, 2007; St. John, 1991; Suchar, 1978). For instance, Urquhart, Sinclair, and Fraser (2007) conducted a study with children to determine their attitude and behavioural intentions towards their peers exhibiting symptoms of ADHD and whether their attitudes and intentions would be influenced by a diagnostic label. The results indicated that the children's attitudes were generally negative due to the characteristics shown by the children with ADHD and not the addition of a label. Wahl (2002), in his review of literature on children's view of mental illness, revealed that younger children did not have as clear an understanding of mental illness as older children did. This suggests that developmental processes in children, such as their cognitive abilities, can influence their reaction or attitude toward their labeled peers. He also noted that children with mental illness labels received greater negative attitudes from peers than those with other labels. Through a mixed methods approach, Green (2003) explored the effects of stigma by association in families of children with disabilities, more specifically cerebral palsy. The findings indicated that maternal distress increased when the mother perceived discrimination of their children. Also, children whose mothers perceived greater discrimination interacted infrequently with their peers at home and within their neighbourhood. These studies suggest that formal labels negatively impact on interactions with peers. Less attention has been given

to the impact of informal labels on peer relationships.

Studies on informal labeling have established correlations between the effects of informal labeling by parents, teachers or peers on children and youth's deviant behaviour and their engagement in delinquent behaviour (Adams, Robertson, Gray-Ray & Ray, 2003; Matsueda, 1992). The results revealed that labeling by significant others negatively impacts the lives of people. However, these studies have primarily focused on adolescents and youth and have not considered childhood labeling. The effects of informal labeling in childhood and its implications in later life or for career choice have yet to be examined. This study will address this gap.

Given the potential for lasting negative impacts of informal labeling on successful development and the lack of awareness of these potential impacts, this study will explore the long term effects of childhood labels 'bad' and 'troublemaker' given by family members on the sense of self of young adults and whether it has any implications for their career choice. One of the markers of a successful young adult is his/her occupational or professional status thereby creating the interest in examining the extent of influence of label on career outcome. The following literature review will more closely examine current understandings related to how labels are created, reinforced, and their impacts. The methods section includes a detailed description of seventeen participants from a local university and a local community-based organization for homeless youth recruited and interviewed, allowing their voices to be heard in the sharing of their experiences of being labeled in childhood. The results and discussion sections explore the role/hierarchy in the process of labeling, the reasons for being labeled, the impact of the label on identity, relationships, past decisions and behaviours, current decisions and career choice, risk

factors and protective factors. This thesis concludes with implications for parents/caregivers, teachers and policy makers, as well as suggestions for future research.

## **Literature Review**

### **Understanding Labels**

In order to understand how the labels given to people may impact their lives, it is prudent to understand first how the labels are created and reinforced within societies. Therefore in this section, I will explain how what is deemed deviant is determined, reinforced and integrated into society and why what is termed deviant may vary within and between societies. This will serve as a precedent for further exploration of labeling theory.

The labeling literature points to the idea that societies create rules for behaviour; what is considered as deviant or conforming behaviour is culture-specific (Schur, 1971). Becker (1963) argued that deviance is created by society in that rules are created by social groups, and the infringement or violation of these set rules leads to the ascription of the deviant label. Durkheim (1938) also referred to deviance as any behaviour or action which affronts the collective conscience of a people, which as a consequence attracts punishment. Further, the environmental context should be taken into consideration (Simmons, 1969) since what may be labeled deviant changes across time and places or locations. Brown (2010) explained that mobility through various social contexts revealed differing acts considered to be undesirable or deviant. Hence, anyone at any point in time can be labeled as deviant depending on the society in which he/she finds himself/herself (Becker, 1963; Brown, 2010; Clinard & Meier, 2004; Lemert, 1951; Simmons, 1969).

Although there are some rules normally adhered to by all members of a society, there are some rules constituted by specific groups and organizations that vary from what is deemed desirable by all. Hence the compliance to one set of rules could very well be the infringement on another set of rules within the same society (Becker, 1963, Simmons, 1969). For instance, a child born into a deviant community within a larger society will grow up having been socialized with the morals and values of that sect which will most likely infringe on the rules of the society at large (Lemert, 1951). His/her violation of the moral code of the society is a result of the different cultures existing within the same location. In sum, it is clear that a deviant label can be applied to anyone based on context and location and, through a social constructionist lens, we can further understand labeling.

### **Social Construction of Labels**

The notion of how society creates rules for behaviour is embedded within social constructionism or social constructivist thought. Social constructionism is referred to as a method of studying the production and maintenance of social order among human beings in society (Glass, 2007). While there is no one specific theory or school of thought of social constructionism, there are some central features identified as belonging to it (Glass, 2007; Lock & Strong, 2010). These tenets will aid in understanding of how societies make rules that differ from each other.

According to Lock and Strong (2010), one of the main tenets of social constructionism is the focus on meaning and understanding as the principal trait of human activities. With regards to meaning, the interest is on how language, which is symbolic, provides varying social experiences for people who speak the same language

as compared to other people who do not share the same language (Lock & Strong, 2010). There is an initial grasp of the language, and continuous interaction over time leads to understanding. Another feature of social constructionism is that meaning and understanding are embedded in social interactions such that through communication, meanings attached to symbols are agreed upon (Lock & Strong, 2010). They further explained that meaning-making is embedded within the socio-cultural processes of particular societies and that it varies across time.

An individual's knowledge or understanding of a thing is shaped through interactions with others and through the norms and values constructed socially and historically governing a person's life (Creswell, 2012; Moss & Petrie, 2002). Through socialization and our interactions with others we learn and get ideas about things and gain experiences. Harris (1995) refers to socialization as the process through which an individual becomes approved of in his or her society and further explains that through socialization individuals within a society tend to become similar to each other. A society or group connotes a culture. In a broader sense, individuals within a culture or group have their lives shaped through socialization by learning norms and values which are constructed historically.

In 1963 Becker wrote in "*Outsiders*" that "modern societies are highly differentiated along social class lines, ethnic lines, occupational and cultural lines and therefore do not often share the same rules" (p.15). He further elaborated that the challenges people encountered in their environments, their personal history and traditions encouraged the formation of different rules. Therefore the idea that language is symbolically- based allows people within the same community to communicate over time

and agree on what meaning to attach to an idea or object, and explains how what is deemed wrong or deviant in one society and within one society (eg. by social class) differs from another society and also how such ideas or views persist over the years.

Glass (2007), on the other hand, expanded on how social constructions, which are ideas that have been communicated, agreed upon and their ensuing meaning attached, contribute to the maintenance of social order in a society. He introduced the idea that social construction is intangible in that the social construction could refer to either notions or objects and these only gain meaning within a community as a result of interaction between members of that society who attach that meaning to the notion or object. Glass (2007) depicted a process through which the social order of a society is attained and maintained, following the tenets of social constructionism aforementioned identified by Lock and Strong (2010).

The noteworthy addition by Glass (2007) to how social constructions within a society are adhered to was the introduction of the concept of “rewards” and “sanctions/punishments”. Through interactions between members of a community, meanings are attached to ideas and objects through socialization or the continuance of the interaction. Over time, new members of that community, that is children, learn these shared and agreed upon ideas, values and beliefs. However, in order to ensure that these socially determined constructs are adhered to, rewards and sanctions are applied. Hence those who abide by them are rewarded and those who violate these agreed upon ideas are sanctioned, which leads to the re-enforcement of the constructions in the society. This view of rewards and sanctions further expands on how the things or behaviours regarded as deviant differ from community to community and also how the labeling of others

comes about. It shows that in maintaining the social order, the occupants of a particular society will sanction people who do not adhere to the agreed upon or shared ideas and beliefs through the labeling of individuals as deviant.

Having explored literature that is focused on deviance as a social construction, and how one comes to be labeled, the following subsections will explore labeling theory in greater depth. This will allow the examination of the sequential process of labeling, which delineates a reciprocal relationship between the labeler and labeled, explain how a person adopts a deviant label conferred on him/her which then becomes his/her primary means of identification, and the ensuing negative consequences for the labeled person. The effects of the labels on gender and family relationships will be addressed. In addition, the role of power in the labeling process is discussed to show the extent of influence of people in authority.

### **Labeling Theory**

Labeling theory suggests that labeling occurs when the behaviour of an individual is identified by another person as deviant or wrong (Becker, 1963; Hagan, 1973). It connotes a reciprocal relation between the actions of an individual and society's response to that act (e.g., theft and jail time). In other words, labels are ascribed formally through agents of social order or control (e.g., police) and informally through the interactions between people (e.g., parents, teachers, peers) who adhere to common rules (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967; Schur, 1971).

Research on deviance indicates that once an individual is labeled there is a greater likelihood that the person will become more deviant as a result of being labeled (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951). This view is expanded on in the Sequential Model of Deviance.

The Sequential Model indicates that there is a process through which an individual adopts a deviant status, which Lemert (1951) referred to as “self-defining junctures”. The first point or juncture when an individual is labeled deviant forms the basis of a continuing pattern in deviant behaviour (primary deviance). Additional junctures (secondary deviance) result in the person internalizing the label and integrating the label as part of his or her identity. This integration forms the foundation of Lemert’s argument for primary (first occurrence) and secondary deviance (subsequent occurrences).

Brown (2010) explained that there is usually a “downward mobility” once a label is attached to a person. For instance an individual who engaged in an act which violated the norms of his/her society may do so because he was exposed to that behavior through social interaction, was interested in it, or other personal matters influenced the engagement in the behavior. Once that person is labeled for that act, his public image is altered (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951). The continuous reciprocal relationship between the deviant act and the societal reaction results in the labeled person attaining a deviant master status (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951). Through societal reaction of isolation and rejection, the person is left with no choice but to persevere in the deviant ways since society does not afford him/her the opportunity to perform any other role aside from the deviant one conferred on him/her. This sequential model is presented in the illustration by Lemert (1951) of a classroom scenario where a boy engaged in a prank for which he was punished by the teacher and which subsequently led to the internalization of a deviant status by the boy showing the progression from primary deviance to secondary deviance.

Also some studies on aggression and bullying have depicted this continuous

reciprocal relation between parents and their children. For instance Vissing, Straus, Gelles and Harrop (1991) examined the effect of verbal aggression by parents on their children. Their findings indicated that children who were raised by highly verbally aggressive parents were more likely to be delinquent or have interpersonal problems and be physically aggressive. They elaborated that in general, children above the age of 6 years were prone to experience verbal aggression from parents but the frequency in aggression was high when it involved children who were 6 years or less. Also, boys experienced greater aggression than girls. Vissing et al. (1991) concluded that there was a reciprocal relation between the problem behaviours of children and parental verbal aggression. They illustrated this through a scenario similar to that of Lemert (1951) for the creation of the secondary deviance. They intimated that if a parent responded to a child's deviant behaviour by swearing at him/her, it would result in the child feeling bitter and angry and having to think of himself/herself as this name even though he/she would have the intention of changing the behaviour. This may cause further antisocial behaviour by the child to which the parents would respond with heightened aggression leading into greater risk of antisocial behaviour by the child. According to Vissing et al. (1991) there is the tendency for parents to become victims because their children come to know verbal aggression as acceptable and may therefore abuse their parents as well as their future spouses and children. They also mentioned that a verbally abused child internalized such names and acted in accordance to that label.

The literature on bullying also highlights the home environment as a cause of bullying and explains that a consequence of the use of both physical and verbal aggression by parents, children tend to bully their peers. For instance, Walter (2000)

noted that the punishment from parents is often impulsive and little provocations on the part of the child are likely to result in violent emotional verbal and physical outbursts on the part of the parents, after which the child is ignored for a long period. He further explains that positive encouragement and humour are uncommon to the bully and that the bully reacts violently to frustrations because he/she is unaware of other alternatives. They lash out at people they perceive as weak because they remind them of themselves and their inability to defend themselves against their abusers (Walter, 2000).

Most research in the field of deviant labeling have highlighted effects of labels given to individuals by agencies or organizations of social control (formal labeling), such as courts, police or security services, and health practitioners within medical associations (Breznia & Aragonés, 2004; Gates, 2010; Hayes, 1997; Macharey & Von Suchodoletz, 2008; O'Reilly, 2007; Tapia, 2010). Even though the exploration of the impact of informal labeling on individuals revealed similar effects, these studies were conducted mostly on delinquents implying that a formal label was already applied to such people.

For instance, Zhang (1997) addressed the issue of the informal labeling process and delinquency in his work on "Informal Reactions and Delinquency" and, consistent with Matsueda's (1992) labeling theory, found that informal labeling negatively influenced the life of the youth. The probability of a parent labeling his/her child was based on a prior delinquent behaviour of the child and this was most likely among Non-White younger youth whose parents had lower levels of education. A greater likelihood of self-labeling and self-degradation among the youth was found due to youths' own delinquent actions and labeling by significant others, resulting in a negative impact on their self-perception or self-identity (Zhang, 1997). Another pattern identified in the

literature was that the youths' perceptions of their parents' labeling created feelings of social rejection or isolation from family, friends and school (Zhang, 1997). However perceived labeling by teachers or friends resulted in feelings of isolation from the labeler. That is, the youth perceived isolation from friends as a result of being labeled by those peers and rejection from school if a teacher happened to be the labeler. Consistent with labeling theory, labeling by parents and teachers showed a significant increase in subsequent delinquent behaviour and perceived labeling by the parent led to higher involvement in delinquent behaviour among males than females (Matsueda, 1992; Zhang, 1997).

Nevertheless, other researchers discovered findings contrary to the results presented by Matsueda (1992) and Zhang (1997), which indicated that parental labeling was the highest predictor of delinquency among adolescent offenders. This research established that juveniles were most influenced to engage in further delinquent behaviour by labels from peers and teachers and not parents (Adams, Robertson, Gray-Ray & Ray, 2003). They hypothesized that due to the length of time spent away from parents, and the considerable amount of time spent in the company of their peers or in school, adolescents would be unable to keep secret their delinquency from friends and teachers. Regardless of whether parental labeling was perceived or real, it increased delinquency in youth when their peers exhibited a positive stance toward delinquent behaviour and when they were also involved in delinquency (Liu, 2000).

Another explanation provided by Adams et al. (2003) as to why labeling by peers and teachers rather than parents had a greater impact on the adolescents was that the response from parents, teachers and peers to primary deviance differed. Parents

responded inclusively while peers and teachers acted exclusively (Orcutt, 1973).

Inclusivity was demonstrated through parental efforts to better acquaint themselves with their children while friends and teachers expressed exclusivity through avoiding the delinquent peer and sending the young offender to the principal's office respectively (Goffman, 1963).

One more notable finding from this study was that, from a labeling theory perspective, the concept of secondary deviance may seem to operate as a function of informal labeling and not formal labeling. The work of Adams, Johnson and Evans (1998) provide a proof to this assertion although race was a contributing factor. They found that as a consequence of informal labeling, Blacks more than Whites were negatively impacted. They attributed this pattern of influence to the perceptions held by the labeled individuals about the credibility of the "labelers". Labeled individuals may view formal labelers as prejudiced or biased against them, hence there may be a failure to attribute to themselves any labels given by them. However, such biases are not associated with significant others. Thus, a label given by such a person has the likelihood of affecting the life of the labeled person. These studies reveal that informal labeling by people important to the labeled person influence or encourage greater involvement in delinquent behaviour.

However, there are some researchers who have misgivings about the tenets of labeling theory. The general idea which runs through the works of some of these researchers is the argument that labeling theory is not a theory that explains deviance in the general sense but rather it is an auspicious perspective of deviance (Goode, 1975; Simmons, 1965; Robins, 1975). The concern here is not that the labeling theory is

irrelevant to studying certain aspects of deviance but rather what these researchers found to be the inadequacies within the scope of labeling theory. For instance, Simmons (1965) stated that labeling theory had failed to explicitly consider experiential foundations of public attitudes toward deviant behaviour. In other words, labeling theory did not explore exactly how the attitude of people in society towards deviant behaviour came about.

Another concern of those critical of labeling theory is the notion that regardless of the context of the labeled person, societal reaction or reaction from others, increases engagement in deviant activities. This is one of the two assumptions Hagan (1973) addressed in his work “Labeling and Deviance: A sociology of the interesting” as the most exaggerated view of labeling theory. In his work, he reviewed empirical studies which had opposing results for the tenet that reaction from others intensified behaviour. Of the studies he reviewed, the one which gave much emphasis to his claims was conducted by Hackler in 1966 for the Opportunities for Youth Programme. It was a Seattle-based programme launched in 1964 to prevent delinquency and was designed to determine the therapeutic effects of manipulating the reactions of others to teenage boys in delinquent communities. The results showed that boys who were not delinquent “good boys” had a positive outcome from the programme but the same could not be said for the boys who were delinquent. This led to the conclusion that reactions from others had variant effects on differing types of people in the sense that the subject (individual) and situation (context) determined if a reaction would alter behaviour. The conclusion drawn from the first assumption leads into the Hagan’s (1973) second assumption which is that labeling theory fails to recognize that there are psychological differences that explain the

formation of deviant behaviour. This assertion is evident in the words of Becker (1963) “insofar as the category lacks homogeneity and fails to include all the cases that belong in it, one cannot reasonably expect to find common factors of personality or life situation that will account for the supposed deviance” (p.9).

For Hagan (1973), his interest was in the lack of linkage among psychological influences in addressing issues of deviance and the formation of solutions to the problem it creates. In accepting the impact of psychological differences associated with criminal behaviour and varying contexts in its tenets, the labeling theory suggests that based on the context and psychological predisposition of a person, a label would have varying consequences and as such provide foundations for creating efficacious solutions (Hagan, 1973).

Another area of interest to anti-labeling theorists is mental health. Gove (1975) examined labeling and mental illness by reviewing various studies conducted in mental health. In his work, he indicated that there was a lack of substantial evidence to prove that reactions from others are fundamental to the formation of the mental illness of a person and that such a summation is incorrect. He intimated that people in society do not easily label others as mentally ill and there is little evidence to support the victimization of such persons in society. He also negated claims that mental hospitalization creates secondary deviance. In his study, he found that mental health patients after hospitalization did not suffer prolonged negative consequences as the labeling theory suggests although studies following his work in 1975 have refuted such claims (Hinshaw, 2005; Link, Cullen, Struening, Shrout & Dohrenwend, 1989; Link, Struening, Rahav, Phelan & Nuttbrock, 1997; Wahl, 2002).

In defense of labeling theory, Schur (1971) argued that critics who claim labeling theory cannot explain some forms of deviant behaviour do not distinguish between primary and secondary deviance and focus on some specific initial deviant acts. He further stressed that labeling theory does not demand that a negative label be a precondition for any deviant act in particular. He concurred, however, that some particular types of deviant acts do not follow the labeling process. Also, Goode (1975) in his work *On Behalf of Labeling Theory* acceded that the theory faced some limitations but it should not be treated as catastrophically flawed. Likewise, Becker (1963) and Lemert (1951, 1967) both conceded that not everyone labeled persisted in the deviant role.

The above overview of the labeling theory revealed that labels, either formal or informal, are given mostly by people in authority implying that power plays an important role in labeling. Therefore understanding how individuals tend to gain power over others and how this can be determined by context is necessary.

### **Power**

The process of formal labeling denotes the role of hierarchy in the sense that certain people within society wield the power to make laws and enforce them. For instance in the home, parents make rules for their children and likewise, in the classroom, teachers make rules for their students to comply with (Becker, 1963). There is a general conception that certain sects or people within society make rules to which others must adhere and it is these particular people within the populace who determine what act is a norm violating behaviour (Becker, 1963; Brown, 2010; Simmons, 1969). From a simple perspective, Brown (2010) explained that through social interactions among members of

a community there are social comparisons which produce feelings of superiority or inferiority. Individuals then begin to differentiate between themselves and others, that is, us and them, by discrediting others based on a quality which they feel one possesses or the vice versa. This is what creates the power that allows them to propound rules for conduct. She elaborated on the idea that due to the social power wielded by certain people, their engagement in some conducts which should have attracted some sanctions are over looked and rather refer to such people as “eccentric” while the enactment of the same behaviour by another person results in the vilification of that person.

Another view raised by some labeling theorists is that modern societies are sophisticated. Hence there are various organizations, sects or groups within the same community who have differing standards and therefore a power struggle ensues in the attempt of these organizations to enforce their rules (Becker, 1963; Simmons, 1969). For instance, within a larger society, there are smaller societies which include the family, different cultures, religious bodies, law enforcement agencies and government who all have differing values and beliefs. Each of these groups would like to enforce their values and beliefs thus whoever wields more authority or power will be able to enforce his rules.

Class, ethnicity/culture, age, sex, geographical location all form the grounds on which power is differentiated (Becker, 1963; Brown, 2010). Simmons (1969) mentions that often it is the minority within a society who are made to follow the rules of the majority though this majority might not be a numerical majority. He added that the basis or origin of deviants in general is that they are held in contempt by powerful people such that depending on whoever wields that power, anyone at any point in time can be identified as deviant. For example, in a country, the exchange of power from a sitting a

government to another government can easily lead to the classification of a particular group of people as deviants. Gusfield (1967) also identified governmental agencies as procreators of law or rules within modern societies.

A recurrent theme in the literature reviewed so far is the negative impact of labeling. Therefore further discussion is needed to grasp the depth of the impact of labeling. Consideration will be given to how a label creates a stigma for the labeled person resulting in isolation or rejection from others, lowered expectations and further increase in deviant behaviour. Also how individuals with a deviant label may not continue on to further deviance is discussed.

### **Effect of Labels**

Labeling or name calling is a phenomenon which is prevalent in society. People are called names or labeled for various reasons. This can be a direct response to their behaviour while others may be due to certain stereotypes attached to them based on looks, race or illness and these names often have an impact on the labeled person, either positively or negatively. Research has shown that the labels given to people become the primary means of identification of the person by others. This often results in the stereotyping of such persons and has negative consequences on their lives (Gates, 2010; Simmons, 1965)

Labeling theorists have focused on the names or labels given to people due to the infringement or infractions of the rules of society and have intimated that the level of deviance of an individual is likely to increase when the deviant label is ascribed to him or her (Becker, 1963). This is what Lemert (1967) conceptualized as primary (first occurrence) and secondary deviance (subsequent occurrences). The likelihood of an

increase in deviant activity (secondary deviance) can be explained through the stigmatization experienced due to the attribution of a label. Research conducted on labeling effects indicates that there are stigmatizing effects of labels such as social rejection, role expectation and lowered expectation (Harris, Milich, Corbitt, Hoover & Brady, 1992; Link, Mirotznik & Cullen, 1991; Macharey & Von Suchodoletz, 2008; Milich, McAninch & Harris, 1992; Pryor, Reeder & Monroe, 2012).

### **Stigma of a Label**

Deviance and labeling imply that labels are ascribed to people who are perceived by others or members of a larger society as having violated the rules or on the basis of being different. Becker (1963) elucidated that a labeled person often gains a master status (primary means of identification) on the basis of having broken a rule. This person is perceived as different and considered capable of repeating the offence and therefore become stigmatized. Goffman (1963) referred to stigma as the undesirable traits or characteristics associated to a person as a result of a label. For example, Phillips and Gates (2011) stated that children with incarcerated parents are labeled and this becomes their means of identification. This depicts the notion of labeling and stigmatizing people on the basis of their differences and this is highlighted in the work of Brown (2010). Brown (2010) expounded that stigmatization of people within a society occurred as a function of differences between people. She indicated that in order for people to feel superior to others, they make comparisons on the basis of difference in anything, such as physical features or capabilities, and attribute undesirable characteristics to them.

The identification of a person by the deviant label leads to the creation of secondary deviance (Lemert, 1967) or the self-fulfilling prophecy (Becker, 1963; Brown,

2010; Foster & Ysseldyke, 1976; Harris et al., 1992; Hinshaw, 2005) through a process of isolation/rejection, lowered expectations and role expectation. For instance, Link, Struening, Rahav, Phelan and Nuttbrock (1997) documented in their work that male patients who had been receiving treatment for mental illness and drug addiction for a year still faced rejection after one year of treatment from people in society. Link, Cullen, Struening, Shrout and Dohrenwend (1989) also explained that the labeled person also expects to be rejected due to the ideas and beliefs that evolve during the course of their socialization with regard to the ramifications associated with the negative label. This culturally induced expectation of rejection makes a newly labeled person highly conscious and expectant of the rejection, lowers his/her self-confidence, and disrupts his/her social interactions (Link et. al, 1989). Coping strategies such as secrecy and withdrawal from people adopted by labeled or stigmatized persons to abate the experience of rejection further reinforce the rejection of such people.

For example, Macharey et al., (2008) reported that children with speech language impairment were stigmatized and rejected by their peers. Shea and Weiner (2003) also found that the negative labeling of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder resulted in a high level of emotional distress and rejection, or what they referred to as social exile. Research suggests that stigmatization results in mental health challenges or affects the psychological adjustments. Stigmatized persons, as a result of rejection, experience loneliness (eg. Bos & Balen, 2008; Macharey & Von Suchodoletz, 2008), low self-esteem, contemplate suicide, feel trapped, experience a sense of hopelessness and helplessness, and also engage in hyperactive behaviour (Bos & Balen, 2008; Kidd, 2007), which may lead to further stigmatization.

The label also connotes a role ascription to the deviant person because a stereotype is attributed to the label. For instance, if a person commits a theft, his master status becomes ‘thief’, hence there is a role expectation of him. This may result in the exclusion of such a person in social circles because there is the view that he will perpetuate the earlier offence again. Brown (2010) further expanded on the notion of role expectation and reported that the stereotype associated with a certain stigma results in the lowered expectations of the labeled person. They are not encouraged to achieve anything and neither are they expected to be successful. Thus the lowered expectations lead to low self-esteem (Brown, 2010). The expectation of a specific behaviour from a person due to a label may lead to a self-fulfilling prophesy. People are steeped in their ideas of how an individual with a specific label should act. Therefore, they relate to such persons in a manner which results in the labeled person acting in the way that people expect (Foster & Ysseldyke, 1976; Harris et al., 1992).

The social rejection, role and lowered expectations experienced by stigmatized people culminate in the internalization of such labels which then becomes the identity they respond to (Becker, 1963; Brown, 2010; Simmons, 1965). Phillips and Gates (2010) found that as a consequence of internalization, children tended to regard themselves as the negative meaning associated to the label, e.g., “child of incarcerated parent”. Lemert (1951) explained the internalization process through the depiction of the formation of secondary deviance. He described the creation of secondary deviance as a continuous reciprocal relationship between the individual’s deviant behaviour and the reaction of society. In his illustration of how one initial deviant act of a boy resulted in him becoming more deviant (secondary deviance), Lemert (1976) explained that when the

teacher associated a deviant label to him, it created some anger and enmity which may have led to a perceived role expectation for him. Internalization of labels is also indicative of self-blame/guilt (Kidd, 2007) because the extent of blame felt for a discredited status will likely influence the internalization of that label.

A label of deviant does not necessarily result in the self-fulfilling prophecy (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951). Becker (1963) supported this assertion citing findings in a study on “juvenile delinquents who hustle homosexuals” (p.36). Homosexuality in this instance was considered sexual deviance. Teenage boys who were homosexual prostitutes later did not become homosexuals themselves for a number of factors. First, due to their age, they were considered minors and if they were ever arrested by the police they would be regarded as exploited children and would be protected. A second reason offered was that the adolescent boys regarded their actions or activities as a means to an end, that is, a way to make easy or quick money. A third reason identified for the juvenile delinquents’ nonconformity to the self-fulfilling prophecy was the rules for engagement determined by the peer group. They were allowed to ply their trade as long as they kept it impersonal and did not get attached to any of their clients. An infringement on this rule was penalized by the peer group. This showed that circumstances surrounding the perpetuation of a deviant act and the rules of engagement within a group can serve as protective factors against an individual becoming more deviant. Becker (1963) further explained that the arrest of a person could determine the trajectory of his/her life. He explained that depending on the time in a person’s life of an arrest, he/she could choose a non-deviant lifestyle. In the face of dire consequences for his/her actions, the deviant individual may decide to change his/her life for the better and

be accepted into the mainstream society.

Lemert (1951) also explained that in order for primary deviance to escalate into secondary deviance (self-fulfilling prophecy), the individual labeled initially may already have some pre-existing personal fears that in combination with the label will lead to heightened deviant behaviour. He also indicated that the result of a traumatizing experience from a reprisal due to an initial deviant act will create secondary deviance. If these conditions do not occur, one is less likely to become more deviant as a result of a few misdemeanors for which an individual is labeled.

Another concept which can be explored to explain why not everybody who is labeled will continue on to greater deviance is resilience. Resilience is defined by Masten (2001) as “a class of phenomenon characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (p. 228). This implies that to be considered resilient one must overcome some adverse challenges in his or her life, past or present, which could prevent “normal” development (Masten, 2001). This also suggests that resilience is something that is achieved through one’s life course. Various risk factors such as low socioeconomic status, divorce, exposure to substance abuse, massive community trauma, domestic violence, incarcerated parent, early parenthood and protective factors which include healthy committed relationship, personal faith or connection to a church, connection to mentor or surrogate parent, good health, belief systems among others have been identified (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009; Masten, 2001; Notter, MacTavish & Shamah, 2008).

Although labeling has not been identified as part of the risk factors in resilience, the process of labeling and the impact it has on the individual can be considered as

challenges that one must overcome and therefore may need the protective factors highlighted earlier to prevail over the negative impacts labeling can have on his/her life. For instance, Notter et al. (2008), who studied rural women in trailer parks, noted that the women's ability to be resilient throughout their life course in the face of their challenges, such as domestic violence, divorce, substance abuse, incarceration and early parenthood, identified some protective factors adopted to overcome their challenges. They explained that for the women having support and turning away from unsupportive people served as strong protective factors. More specifically, for children facing adversity, the building of relationships with "mentors and surrogate mothers, having healthier committed relationships and personal faith or a connection to a church" (p. 617) and moving away from disruptive and unsupportive environments are important protective factors. Likewise an individual with a deviant label has the potential of derailing from the "normal" path of development due to the effects of that label such as isolation and rejection, lowered expectation, low self-esteem leading to the self-fulfilling prophecy which he/she must now overcome.

In addition to the direct impacts of a deviant label on an individual reviewed earlier, there are a number of studies that detail some impacts on the family relationships of labeled persons while others have examined differing gender impacts of labels. These will be examined in the following subsections to highlight what effects there are on the family relationship since this study is focusing on labeling done by family members and whether the negative effects of the labels can be distinguished based on gender to identify what patterns exist.

**Family Impacts**

There is evidence to show that there are negative effects of labels on family and sibling relationships, as well as other acquaintances (Pryor et al., 2012; Tuttle & Cornell, 1993; Vissing et al., 1991). Lemert (1951) and Vissing et al. (1991), in their explanation of the formation of secondary deviance, indicated that the labeled individual harboured feelings of anger and bitterness which encouraged further deviant behaviour. These feelings would certainly be directed towards not only the label but the labeler. Therefore there will be a loss of affection creating hostility between the labeler (parent, sibling, uncle, aunt, cousin) and labeled. Vissing et al., (1991) also explained that verbally abusive parents weaken the relationship between themselves and their children and are therefore unable to use other measures, aside from punitive ones, to control their children's behaviour since nonpunitive measures rely on the attachment between parents and their children. This implies that there is a loss of affection between the verbally abused or labeled child and his/her parents. Also, as indicated earlier, labels given by parents resulted in feelings of exclusion and isolation from family, peers and teachers (Zhang, 1997).

Also the labeling of one child within a family by either parent can influence the parent-child and sibling dynamics. This may be as a result of parental partiality or favouritism of the child without the label. For instance, although the label gifted is positive, a study conducted by Tuttle and Cornell (1993) indicated that the label gifted did not necessarily have an adverse effect on the sibling relationship. However, birth order appeared to have an impact. A positive relationship was realized between siblings when a firstborn child was labeled gifted by the mother whereas the labeling of the

second born as gifted revealed reduced closeness or warmth between the siblings. Tuttle and Cornell (1993) further explained that this problem can be attributed to the issue of conflict between family expectations of the firstborn and his/her actual abilities. We can hypothesize that there might be similar relevance of birth-order on the consequences of labeling in situations where older siblings are labeled bad or troublemaker. Studies on favouritism and parental preferential treatment have also revealed the negative effects on the parent- sibling relationships (Jensen, Whiteman, Fingerman & Birditt, 2013; Scholte, Engels, de Kemp, Harakeh, Overbeek, 2007).

The genders of siblings as well as birth order were determining factors in the impact of parental preferential treatment. For instance, Scholte et al. (2007) looked at the moderating effects of the quality of the sibling relationship on longitudinal association of parental differential treatment on adolescent delinquency. Their findings revealed that the sex of the siblings determined whether the impact of differential treatment was significant. The results showed that for same-sex sibling dyads, the poor quality of their relationship determined the involvement of the younger male siblings in violence and vandalism when they felt less favoured by their mothers. When these conditions were prevalent in female sibling relationships, the younger girls engaged in theft. They explained that the effect of the preferential treatment determined by sex may be due to the fact that siblings would compare their situation to the same-sex sibling and not an opposite-sex sibling.

Some children also face rejection within their families as a result of the medical label such as speech-language impaired (Macharey and Von Suchodoletz, 2008; Von Suchodoletz & Macharey, 2006). According to Macharey and Von Suchodoletz (2008)

parents in their study had noticed that their children were rejected by other members of their family. This stigmatization and rejection was also transferred onto the parents of the children by family as well. This transfer of stigma is what Pryor et al., (2012) referred to as stigma by association. They explain it to be the process whereby people, by virtue of association with a stigmatized person, either through kinship or companionship or on the rare occasion of being seen in the company of a stigmatized person, they are discredited or stigmatized.

### **Gender Differences and Impacts**

Research has shown that some children hold on to stigma coping strategies long into adulthood for the fear of stigmatization and rejection. For example, media reports in the United States revealed that the daughter of a drug lord kept the incarceration of her father a secret from close relations until a movie *American Gangster* was produced on the life of her father (Bernstein, 2007). The incarceration took place in 1975 when the daughter was only three years old; she kept a lifetime of secrecy. Also a study conducted in Jordan revealed that some girls whose fathers had committed moral crimes kept the incarceration of their fathers a secret even from their husbands (Al Garaibeh, 2009). The study revealed that in general, boys did not face the same challenges as girls did when their fathers were in jail. The girls were stigmatized and were not able to find suitors who wished to marry them but the same did not happen to the boys who had incarcerated fathers. The reason given for the lack of suitors is that the girls who had been married continued to experience the stigma of their father's incarceration after they were married thereby affecting other girls who were yet to be married.

The idea of gender differences in the effect of stigma has been explored in studies

with mixed results. Bos and Balen (2008), in their work with planned children in lesbian families, identified differences in the manner in which stigmatization occurred as well as the effect of stigma in both boys and girls. The boys reported that they experienced direct discrimination while the girls' perception of how they were stigmatized was gossiping. Higher levels of discrimination resulted in boys exhibiting hyperactive behaviour while the girls showed lower levels of self-esteem. Studies on stigmatization of obesity in children and youth have revealed that more girls than boys are stigmatized (Tang-Peronard & Heitmann, 2008). Girls experienced higher levels of rejection or exclusion from social interactions such as friendships and love relationships. They were also mostly teased and were physically and verbally bullied by their peers.

Halpern and Luria (1989) studied the effects of the labels gifted and gender-typicality on the judgments of adults of children's traits. Their results indicated that there was no gender difference in the effect of the label giftedness. Generally, gifted children were thought of as odd compared to non-gifted children. However, with children labeled as gender-atypical, gender determined who was considered more or less odd. Gender-atypical girls were considered less odd whereas gender-atypical males were described as more odd as compared to typical children.

Labeling has also been observed to have negative effects on the employment outcomes of labeled individuals. For instance, Davies and Tanner (2003) examined the long term effects of adolescents and young adults' brush with school authority and the law on their future employment. Their findings indicated gender differentials in the labels which had an effect on the employment outcomes of the adolescents. They revealed that girls' noncriminal activities, such as suspension and dismissal from school,

impacted greatly on their ability to secure jobs but this was not the case for boys. In providing an explanation for this difference, Davies and Tanner (2003) supposed that women continuously encounter varying job opportunities and therefore an expulsion or suspension can very well derail girls from having job opportunities in a wide variety of professions. They further stated that men lacking in credentials were more likely to gain employment doing manual labour with relatively good pay than their female counterparts, who usually sought employment in retail shops or low-wage offices. The reason for this may be that employers of high paying jobs may have interpreted such labels to mean the females are dissentious people with a bad work ethic.

Kidd (2007) did not find any distinction in the effect of social stigma on either males or females when he examined the experiences of homeless youth on the streets and in agencies in New York and Toronto. Blais and Forth (2014) also found no gender differences when examining potential labeling effects of psychopathy on mock jurors' decisions.

Although not all the studies reviewed documented gender differences in the impact of labels, the noted distinctions suggest that the experiences of stigmatization by boys and girls differ within cultures. There seems to be a form of gendered socialization which sometimes favours boys over girls.

### **Sense of Self and Identity**

A general overview of the literature on effects of a label on an individual highlighted so far indicates a potential influence on the sense of self/identity of a stigmatized person, therefore creating the need for further exploration and understanding. This section covers ideas on how an individual realizes his/her self-concept and explains

how this concept is greatly influenced by the views of others.

Self-concept can be defined as the notion one has about himself/herself or how a person perceives himself/herself (Ross, 1992). Individuals gain their sense of self through their interactions or experiences with the physical and social environment and this gained self-concept impacts their behaviour, which further influences their perceptions of themselves (Ross, 1992). The formation of an identity or sense of self develops from infancy and becomes more definitive with the introduction of language and the development in cognitive abilities. For instance, Ross (1992) explained that children become conscious or aware of themselves between the ages of 12 to 18 months by making inferences from the observation that when a child is placed in front of a mirror, he or she is able to identify himself/herself, or children being able to identify themselves in pictures. He further elaborated that though the sense of awareness gained by a child is perceived by the recognition of himself/herself in a mirror or picture, it remains unknown what he/she thinks of himself/herself. The introduction of language allows such ideas of self-concept to be expressed by the child.

Two distinctions can be made in the conceptualization of the sense of self, namely, the “existential self” and the “categorical self” (Lewis, 1986 as cited in Ross, 1992). The existential self is the self-awareness of an individual as a subject, the ‘I’ self, the idea that one exists unique from other objects and individuals in his/her environment. The categorical self (‘me’ self), which is the self as object, is basically how one knows himself or herself to be like and this notion of one’s self is gained over a period of time and includes features such as skin colour, age, size, gender, occupation, family membership, traits and status. This category is the means by which people classify

themselves or people classify other individuals. This concept of the categorical self sheds light on the reason or means through which a label has an impact on the sense of self of an individual.

The categorical self is reflected in Cooley's (1902) concept of the social self, which describes how labels can influence the identity of a person. Cooley (1902), like Ross (1992), intimates that the social self finds expression through the means of language. More specifically, he defined the social self as an idea or a set of ideas deduced from communicative life. He further expanded on this idea by stating that the "I" in general speech denotes some form of allusion to other persons and that the word "I" and what it represents is an aspect of language.

According to Cooley (1902) there is no sense of "I" without its corresponding sense of they, them, him, her, or you. In that, in saying "I" in any form of speech or thought, one is acknowledging the presence of others regardless of whether or not it is a private thought or public pronouncement of social responsibility that weighs on one's conscience. For instance, one cannot feel humiliation without a thought to others. He elaborated on how the "I" that represents an individual functions in the social world through his looking-glass self-concept. The looking-glass self-concept refers to how an individual would see his/her image reflected in a mirror and be either pleased or displeased based on the scale of judgment held in his/her mind. If the judgment scale is influenced by a person significant to the individual, the perception of the individual's beliefs, values, and behavior are more likely to become internalized and part of the individual's sense of self (Harter, 2008).

Harter (2008) also explained how symbolic interactionists such as Mead (1934),

Baldwin (1895) and Cooley (1902) emphasized that social interactions contributed to the formation of the sense of self. They intimated that the self is a social construction and, that language served as a medium through which this concept materialized (Ross, 1992). Children for instance, imitate the behaviours, values or ideals of significant others and in order to gain the approval of such important people they adjust their behaviour and begin to refer to themselves through the notions held by these salient others; hence these perceived appraisals tend to define one's self (Harter, 2008; Schur, 1971). This explains the process of how the informal labeling of children as deviant affects or influences their sense of self.

The general idea gleaned from the above examination of literature indicates that societies create rules for behaviour and those who violate the rules are sanctioned through forms of labeling. These ideas of conforming and nonconforming behaviour are passed on through socialization and therefore continue to govern a group of people. The purpose of the sanctions is to serve as a deterrent, however, the labeling theory suggests a sequential process which rather leads to a further engagement in further nonconforming behaviour. The label becomes the main means of identification for the labeled person due to stigma associated with the label resulting in isolation/rejection from society, lowered expectations, self-blame/guilt and emotional distress. The labeled individual tends to take on the identity of the meaning attached to the label. How an individual gains his/her self-concept also sheds light on how a label can be integrated into the identity of a person. An individual cannot think of him/herself without a thought to others; therefore whatever he/she would think of him/herself would be influenced by what others would say he/she is. Although it is clarified that not all who are labeled will

degenerate into further deviance, some factors such as the absence of fear attached to a label and trauma experienced due to a reprimand, other individual circumstances or resilience can halt further involvement in deviant activity.

### **Research Question**

The purpose of this study is to determine what negative effects labeling in childhood by family members as deviant (bad, troublemaker) have on young adults. The central research question is: what is the impact on the young adult's sense of self when a negative label was applied to his/her behaviour as a child? Sub-questions include the following: What is the role of hierarchy or power differentials in the process of labeling (the labeler and the labeled)?; Are there any gender differences in terms of the impact on the labeled child?; and What impacts does the label have in early adulthood and on career choice?

This study contributes to the growing literature on labeling, and more precisely, informal labeling of children. This study is a novelty in the field as there is a paucity of information regarding the informal labeling of children as deviant (e.g., bad, troublemaker, naughty) and how it affects their sense of self. This study will be useful to parents, teachers and other professionals working with children. It will enumerate the effects the labels have on the children and the pressure it brings to family life in order to abate the use of such labels and provide answers to families that are going through such situations.

The importance of this research to child and youth studies is noteworthy. Since the literature on labeling points to stigmatizing effects of labels, it is essential for more research to be focused in this area in order to provide help for families and children.

**Method**

The methods section encompasses a discussion of the processes and framework through which the research has been conducted. The importance of the specific approach employed in this study, the methodological framework and the methods of data collection and analysis, as well as some ethical concerns, have been outlined.

**Qualitative Research**

The qualitative method of inquiry was utilized in this study to discover the divergent experiences of young adults who had been labeled as children. Polkinghorne (2005) defines qualitative research as an inquiry- based method of conducting research where the purpose of data collection is to provide evidence about the detailed depiction of human experiences. Since this research is oriented towards learning about the life experiences of labeled children, a qualitative approach allows for the exploration of in-depth and detailed experiences. Creswell (2012) explains that a qualitative approach is employed in a study for the purpose of exploring phenomena that are not readily measurable or assessed. In other words, procedures outlined for conducting research involving the measurement of tangible objects or concepts are not useful in determining or grasping the lived experiences of people (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Polkinghorne, 2005). Qualitative research promotes or provides the opportunity for silent voices to be heard (Creswell, 2012), and therefore the use of the qualitative approach in this study served as a platform for those labeled as children to have the opportunity to express themselves.

### **Methodological Framework**

This study is grounded in phenomenology. Phenomenology has been defined in general terms as an inquiry to determine the essence of the shared experiences of people (Kupers, 2009). This idea was also captured by Creswell (2012) when he stated that the focus of phenomenological research is on detailing the common experience shared by the participants of a phenomenon. Lester (1999) further explained that a phenomenological approach highlights the significance of “personal perspective and interpretation” (p. 1). Phenomenology highlights the notion that this approach is concerned with interpreting the experiences of individuals of a specific phenomenon in order to capture the essence of their experiences to derive a better understanding of the phenomenon or concept.

The proponent of the philosophical underpinning of phenomenology is Husserl (1859-1938) and the core concept of this assumption is intentionality (Sokolowski, 2000; Creswell, 2012; Giorgi, 2012). Sokolowski (2000) elaborated on Husserl’s core concept by stating that intentionality in phenomenology means “the theory of knowledge and not the theory of human action” (p. 8) or in other words, not the intention to want to act. Intentionality simply refers to the conscious mind or all the thoughts of the mind. The idea presented here is that “every act of human consciousness or every experience of humans is intentional” in the sense that “all of human awareness is directed towards an object” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 9; Giorgi, 2012, p. 9). Giorgi (2012) explained that Husserl made an initial connection between consciousness and the world and further refined this concept to include the human body in consciousness. Hence phenomenology became “the relationship between embodied subjectivity and the world” (Giorgi, 2012, p. 9). Over time other thinkers developed their own versions of phenomenology.

The specific phenomenological method used to frame this study was the interpretive approach. The interpretive approach focuses on an individual's connection to the world and the commonalities or similarities that exist between the individual's connections to the world (Sokolowski, 2000). According to Sokolowski (2000) the idea illuminated here is that other individuals who experience the world will present different ideas or opinions of how things are and this is due to the intersubjectivity of experiences. In other words, one cannot possess all the ways of knowing something (Sokolowski, 2000). Therefore connecting the similarities among the individual experiences of a phenomenon will present a better understanding of the phenomenon. The framework chosen for this study also reinforces the importance of understanding the subjectivity of experiences and therefore the need to capture all these viewpoints to get the essence of labeling. The essence of this phenomenological study is that, it is giving meaning to the common experiences of young adults who were labeled deviant during their childhood (Creswell, 2012).

### **Recruitment and Participant Description**

Creswell (2012) suggested a relatively small sample size and a criterion purposeful sampling method for a phenomenological study. The criterion of the purposeful sampling method was used in this study for the attainment of only those participants who have experienced labeling as either "bad" or "troublesome" in childhood. The participants were recruited from a post-secondary institution and a community-based organization for homeless youth through the use of recruitment posters (see Appendices A&B). Authorization was obtained from the Director of the community-based organization for homeless youth and the Research Ethics Board in

order to recruit and conduct the interviews on site. Each participant received a ten dollar gift voucher from Walmart as a token of appreciation for the time taken to participate in the study.

A total of seventeen participants were recruited comprising eight females and nine males. Of the seventeen participants, seven were recruited from a post-secondary institution and the other ten from the community-based organization for homeless youth. This was a retrospective study therefore the age of the participants ranged from sixteen to thirty years with the average age of twenty. The participants identified with varying cultural groups. Four of the participants identified as Caucasian, three as Canadian, three as Aboriginal or Native, two as either Black and Jamaican and Black and Ghanaian, two as Asian, and two others identified as either Pakistani or Middle Eastern and European. One participant identified as being a mix of Hawaiian and Filipino (See Appendix C for a table summary of the participant description).

Participant one was female, twenty-four years of age and the middle child. She identified as a Black Jamaican from a single parent home (mother worked two jobs) who engaged in a lot of activities for fun as a child. Participant one was mainly labeled “bad” by her grandmother, aunts and older cousins yet seldomly by her mother. Her age at first being labeled was four or five years old. She was a post-secondary student.

Participant two was a post-secondary student, female, nineteen years old and the first born of two children. She identified as Canadian from a two parent family (mother secretary and father truck driver). She was labeled a “troublemaker” by the age of four years by her mother, subsequently by her mother’s best friend and by a classmate and her mother.

Participant three was a twenty-four-year old Pakistani male post-secondary student. He was the third born from a two parent family (mother a home maker and father own business). He experienced labeling initially at the age of six or seven years. His uncle, parents and entire family were responsible for his labels “mad” and “foxy”.

Participant four was a twenty- three-year old Caucasian female patron of the community-based organization for homeless youth. She was the youngest of four children from a two parent family (mother worked many jobs and father was in the army) who was labeled “bad” and “troublemaker” by her sisters as early as three years and subsequently by her aunt, mother, neighbours and teachers.

Participant five was also a patron of the community-based organization for homeless youth. He was a seventeen-year-old Caucasian male from a single parent home (father a roofer) and the first born of five children. Participant five was either seven or eight years when he was first labeled “bad” by his nanny and later by his uncles and foster parents.

Participant number six was a South Asian male aged twenty years, the eldest of three children and a post-secondary student. He was from a two parent, upper class family (mother a doctor and father a banker). He was labeled “bad” and “naughty” by his parents, younger brothers, uncles and aunts and the initial age at which he was labeled was six or seven years.

Participant seven was a nineteen-year-old Canadian male post-secondary student from a two parent family (mother a nurse and father worked at a Factory). Participant seven was labeled “bad” initially at age four by his parents and later by teachers.

Participant number eight was a twenty-year-old Canadian Native male patron of

the community-based organization for homeless youth, who was the younger of two children. Participant eight was labeled “bad” for the first time at the age of ten by his mother and subsequently by his mother’s boyfriends and teachers. He was from a single parent home (mother worked at a grocery store).

Participant nine was a Canadian female aged sixteen years, a patron of the community-based organization for homeless youth and the third born child from a two parent family (mother a homemaker and step father a truck driver). She was labeled as “thief” initially at the age of seven or eight by her mother and later as a “whore” by her mother, friends and ex-boyfriend.

Participant ten was a twenty-nine-year old Ghanaian male post-secondary student and the second of five children from a two parent family (mother a goods trader and father a teacher). He was labeled “bad” initially at the age of eight by his father and older sister.

Respondent number eleven was a patron of the community-based organization for homeless youth, nineteen years old male and the first born of four children. He indicated that he was a mix between Middle Eastern and European from a two parent family (mother worked at a grocery store and step father a mechanic). He was labeled “bad” by his mother at the age of five years.

Participant twelve was a seventeen year old Aboriginal female, the first of two children from a single parent home (mother on welfare and worked at a bingo hall) and a patron of the community-based organization for homeless youth. She was labeled “bad” initially at the age of eight years by her mother, grandmother, aunts and uncles.

Participant number thirteen was a Caucasian female aged nineteen years from a

two parent family (mother worked at gas station and father roofer), the older of two children and a patron at the community-based organization for homeless youth. She was labeled as a “troublemaker” and a “bad” child at the age of fifteen years by her mother, grandparents, principal and teachers.

Respondent fourteen was an Asian female aged twenty-two years from a two parent family (Mother a home maker and father owns a restaurant), the oldest of four children and a post-secondary student. She was labeled “bad” by her parents initially at the age of eleven or twelve years and later by her aunt and friends.

The fifteenth participant was a twenty-three year old male patron of the community-based organization for homeless youth from a two parent family (mother a medical secretary and father worked for a tire company) and the older of two children. He identified as a mix of Filipino and Hawaiian. He was first labeled at the age of seven as a “big troublemaker” by his parents, aunts, uncles and teachers.

Participant sixteen was a nineteen year old Native male, the first of two children and a patron of the community-based organization for homeless youth. He resided with his foster parents who collected welfare. He was labeled as “bad” at the age of six by his foster parents and subsequently by his foster grandmother, biological grandmother, teachers, father and aunt.

The seventeenth respondent was a nineteen year old Canadian female, the second of two children and from a single parent home (mother worked as a telemarketer) and a patron of the community-based organization for homeless youth. She was labeled initially as a “troublemaker” at the age of five years by her grandparents.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

The principal method of data collection in phenomenological studies is through conducting interviews (Creswell, 2012; Polkinghorne, 2005). The traditional method of conducting interviews is through face- to- face interactions using open-ended questions where the interviewer plans to obtain information from the participant or interviewee to gain an understanding of him/her (Bolderston, 2012; Creswell, 2012; Rowley, 2012). Interviewees are allowed to express their personal views, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes (Rowley, 2012). Gillham (2000) also argued that when the information to be gathered is sensitive in nature, a face-to-face interview is appropriate. Hence data for this study was collected through face-to-face interviews with the participants since the issue of labeling can be considered to be sensitive and also it enabled the collection of in-depth information. Semi-structured interviews were also used for the purpose of gaining in-depth information from the participants (see Appendix D). Semi-structured interviews contain preset questions which enable the same line of questioning for all the participants and also allow the interviewer to ask follow up questions depending on the response given by a respondent (Dearnley, 2005; Doody, 2013; Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). This implies that in semi-structured interviews the interviewer does not have to strictly follow the interview guide (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). The data collected in this study remained focused on the topic of interest and further clarifications were made to ensure detailed narratives of the experiences of the young adults. The length of the interviews ranged between thirty to sixty minutes based on the openness or willingness of the interviewees to divulge information but the maximum duration was sixty minutes.

Power dynamics also exist between the researcher and the interviewee (Creswell,

2012). Seidman (2006) explained that since the researcher is continually asking something of the interviewee, promoting equity in research between the researcher and the participant is important. Thus certain procedures proposed by both Creswell (2012) and Seidman (2006) were employed in this research in order to address and buffer any effects of power relations. The interviewees were allowed to determine the date and time of the interview. A mutually agreeable location was selected to ensure safety and confidentiality for the interview. For instance at the community-based organization for homeless youth, the board room was designated for conducting the interviews which ensured the privacy of the participants and at the post-secondary institution a research lab was booked for conducting the interviews. The participants were also given the opportunity to cancel an agreed appointment or withdraw from participation in the study at any point.

However, there was a limitation with this method of data collection. Data obtained was a participant reflective account which although reliable has some shortcomings. Polkinghorne (2005) further explained that even though self-reports are invaluable to qualitative research, the reflections of one's experiences are essentially limited owing to the capacity of recollection, as well as the tendency of an experience to change upon reflection. Since this is a retrospective study, importance was placed on this limitation during data collection in order that its effect on the information gathered was lessened. More specifically, for instance, after narrating some incidents which resulted in them being labeled "bad", participants were asked to describe how they had felt in the past and how they feel about it now. Also, research on autobiographical memory sheds more light on how memory develops in individuals and how it is stored and retrieved.

Autobiographical memory has been defined as the “explicit memory of an event that occurred in a specific time and place in one’s personal past” (Nelson & Fivush, 2004, p. 486). Goals or motives influence the organization of autobiographical memory as there exists an innate connection between these two components (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). For instance, Baumeister and Newman (1994) suggested that individuals, in an attempt to make meaning of their experiences, create stories or narratives out of their experiences and acknowledged it is important in research. They mentioned that the depiction of an event in the form of an in-depth story provides the closest illustration of the incident, and as such, maintains “the multiplicity of implications and potential interpretations” (p. 677) which can be drawn from the experience. Meaning making, identified as one of the uses of narratives, is the focus for this study. Participant narratives were used in understanding their individual experiences.

The development of the autobiographical memory is based on changes in various components such as cognitive and language and narrative (linguistic) abilities, adult memory talk, temporal understanding and understanding of self and others (Howe & Courage, 1997; Nelson & Fivush, 2004). However, there are two schools of thought on the onset of development of the autobiographical memory. The divergence in ideas is based on the initial component whose development is identified as the stage in an individual when the autobiographical memory emerges. One school of thought emphasizes the development of the cognitive self “me”, at the latter part of age two in children as the stage in development when autobiographical memory becomes apparent (Howe & Courage, 1997) while the other accentuates the unhurried emergence of autobiographical memory over the period of the preschool years through development in

language and narrative abilities (Fivush & Nelson, 2004; Nelson & Fivush, 2004). As the cognitive self develops, so does the autobiographical memory and this is due to the ability of the self to arrange and categorize personal experiences and how these are retrieved and restored over time (Howe & Courage, 1997; Fivush, 2011). This simply means that in general, as individuals mature, the innate ability to store more information in memory, that is the processes involved in long term memory storage such as “verbal and nonverbal language, gist extraction and knowledge” (Howe & Courage, 1997, p. 517), become more advanced. Thus autobiographical memory develops over the periods of childhood and adolescence (Fivush, 2011).

Based on the earlier views of when the autobiographical memory emerges and its increase in capacity over the years, it indicates that one’s recollection of past events especially in the early years will be hazy whereas experiences around adolescence will be recollected somewhat easily. This was true for most of the participants. Respondents who recounted incidents that happened when they were about eight years and under often stated that they could not recollect exactly what happened. Also since various components account for the development of the autobiographical memory, and these components mature over time, it implies that there will be varying degrees of the details of events and the ages at which people will remember about their past since individuals have differing developmental paces (Nelson & Fivush, 2004).

Fivush and Nelson (2004) also depicted a way in which individual differences in reminiscing about the past are fostered among children. They intimated that children who were raised by mothers who were very elaborate in reminiscing about the past would develop more consistent and elaborate autobiographical memories than children

with mothers who were less elaborative. This difference suggests that culture plays a role in shaping who an individual becomes since our memories are made up of our past experiences.

Fivush and Nelson (2004) mentioned that there is a bidirectional relationship that exists between how narratives about the past are constructed and how conceptions of the self are formulated. They explained that since the purpose of reminiscing was to make meaning of the self through time, how one thought of himself/herself would influence how they constructed their past and vice versa. The appearance and strength of memories of negative labels of the participants at ages less than eight is testament to the effect and importance they played.

### **Pilot Test**

Pilot testing the interview questions is an important practice in research. Creswell (2012) and Gillham (2000) explained that pilot tests are necessary to help refine the questions prior to the actual commencement of the collection of data. This affords the researcher the opportunity to pose the questions to an individual representative of the population to be sampled to ascertain whether the questions will elicit the desired answers (Gillham, 2000).

The interview guide for this study was pilot tested. One male and one female volunteer, representative of the population sample, were interviewed to determine the efficacy of the questions as well as serve as practice for managing an interview.

The female participant, although she had a different label from what the study sought, revealed information consistent with the labeling literature indicating that the interview guide contained relevant questions. This was the first pilot test and it provided

the opportunity to confirm the duration of the interview, which had been allotted sixty minutes. The need to ask many follow-up questions in interviews with participants who offered little information was also gleaned from this pilot test. The second pilot with the male participant revealed that some questions needed a little modification for better clarity in responses, as well as follow up questions being asked. This pilot also helped in confirming the duration of the interview. In general, the pilot tests also gave insight or indication as to the effectiveness of the interview questions and procedure.

### **Data Recording**

The audio-recording of the interview sessions, as well as a well-organized system of storing the data collected, is important when conducting research since it assists the researchers in analysis and allows for clarification of information (Polkinghorne, 2005; Al-Yateem, 2012; Creswell, 2012). There is also the need to keep back up recordings (Creswell, 2012). Therefore permission was sought and obtained from the interviewees to tape the sessions and interviewees were also informed that backups of the taped sessions would be kept in a lab with access by only the principal investigator and her supervisor. The recording of the interviews facilitated the verbatim transcription. As it has been highlighted by Al-Yateem (2012), audio tapes will help to validate the research, as well as enable the clarification of the data during analysis. However Al-Yateem (2012) reported that some participants do not respond very well to the introduction of a voice recorder; therefore participants were informed on the consent form that the recording of the session was solely for the purposes of transcription. The data were organized into files with dates, times and venue, and keeping the name of the participant confidential.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

A general process of qualitative analysis has been identified by various researchers although there are variations based on the type of qualitative approach (Creswell, 2012; Bolderston, 2012; Rowley, 2012). These processes include the transcription of the interview recording and organizing the data, familiarization with the data through rigorous reading, coding and organizing themes, making meaning or interpreting the themes. Bolderston (2012) admonished that the analysis phase should not be rushed in order to capture all important information. The practice of allowing another researcher to go over the coding and themes of the data is encouraged by Rowley (2012). Although analysis in qualitative phenomenological research follows this same process, the procedure proposed by Creswell (2012), which he states is a simpler version of Moustakas's (1994) approach, was employed to analyze the collected data.

According to Creswell (2012), the seminal phase of analysis is stating personal experiences of the phenomenon in order to focus on the accounts of the participants. This description of personal experiences or foreknowledge of the phenomenon is known as bracketing (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). I acknowledge that I have not personally experienced a label per se, but have been witness to other people being labeled or called names, which has influenced my interest in conducting this research. Also my current review of the literature has given me knowledge about labeling and its impacts, which may influence my interpretation of the data. Creswell (2012) admits that the idea of bracketing cannot be completely achieved but the practice allows a true representation of participants' views to be captured and interpreted by the researcher (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). Therefore by bracketing, there was an awareness of the biases throughout the

research process in order to present the evidence as it is. The horizontalization of data occurred in the second phase where important statements of how participants had experienced labeling were listed and considered as having equal worth. These important statements were then organized into themes. This was followed by “textual description” which is a description of what the participants experienced with labeling and quotes were used in this phase. The “structural description” of labeling, which is the consideration of the setting or context that the label is experienced, followed. Finally the essence of the experiences of the participants was captured when the textural and structural descriptions were incorporated to form a narrative of their lived experiences.

### **Ethical Concerns**

Regardless of the type of qualitative study conducted, there will be ethical issues to be addressed or considered during the course of the research (Creswell, 2012; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2005). Preceding any research study the attainment of approval from the institutional review board and any other organization that data will be collected from is important (Creswell, 2012). Hence this study was submitted to the Research Ethics Board at the post-secondary institution for approval (see Appendix E for certificate of clearance). Permission was obtained from a community-based organization for homeless youth, where data were also collected.

Informed consent is one area of great importance to the research process (Bolderston, 2012; Creswell, 2012; Jones, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2005). The informed consent process occurs prior to the commencement of data collection. This was to ensure that the participants were fully aware of what the study entailed and what would be expected of them, as well as any potential risks in order to allay any fears and anxiety

(Jones, 1996). Therefore all the participants were provided consent forms to be filled out and returned (see Appendices F & G for copies of the consent form). The purpose of the research was explained to the participants and it was also made clear to them that they were at liberty to withdraw their participation from the study at any time. They were informed of the possible risks to them and the measures put in place to assist them should the need arise, the duration of the interview and their permission to record the sessions were be obtained.

Confidentiality is also a key issue that needs to be addressed in research. This is explicated in the words of Jones (1996) when he states that the “individual has a right to privacy” (p.33). In order to attain and maintain participant privacy and confidentiality, the confidentiality of the participants was ensured by using dates and locations when organizing and filing the data rather than names. When conducting interviews, a participant has the right to recall or withdraw any information which he/she gives out (Bolderston, 2012). This was explained to and encouraged amongst the participants in this study. Participant permission was also obtained to include anonymous quotes in the research to which one participant declined.

All the important procedures described above aided in authenticating the study and enabled me capture the true essence of the children’s experiences through the memories of young adults and made their voices heard.

## **Research Findings and Discussion**

This study aimed to determine the impact on a young adult's sense of self when a negative label of 'bad' or 'troublemaker' was applied when he/she was a child. To attain this insight, in-depth interviews were conducted with 17 participants. Results are presented in this section and the importance of the findings will be discussed extensively.

### **Role of Hierarchy in the Labeling Process**

It is evident from the participants' responses that the adults or guardians that were providing care to them were the primary labelers. This was true for all the participants regardless of the type of relation or ties (blood, mother's boyfriend, foster parent) that connected the labeler to the labeled. There was always a downward direction of the label from the person of authority to the recipient. This is clearly understood from one participant's response:

Yeah, my grandmother [labeled me]. I had aunts, my mother not so much but like ... umm I think it was my mum I hid that side of me more so but like with my aunt or other cousins that would babysit me I, they knew how I was and they would tell me that they don't wanna watch me, I give too much trouble and stuff like that. (Participant #1, female)

On the whole the participants' responses indicated that the initial labelers were people in positions of authority or who wielded some power over them. This is consistent with labeling theory which purports that often people in positions of authority are the ones to

confer labels on others (Becker, 1963; Brown, 2010). This suggests that the respondents were engaging in behaviour that defied the rules encouraged by their family members, which resulted in them being labeled.

In addition, the participants indicated that there were instances where other individuals in their lives also used the label but were not adults or guardians in the position of providing care for them, such as their peers or younger siblings. However, this still shows the influence of an adult. It may be that the participant had either been labeled in the presence of these other individuals or they had been socialized by their caregivers to identify and label certain behaviour. As participant #2 (female) explained, a class-mate had called her a troublemaker because her mother had referred to her as such:

Yeah, like they would just call me like a troublemaker, actually a student in my class called me a troublemaker to my face. In grade 5. She said that her and her mum thought that I was a troublemaker and umm that's what her mum told her so ever since she called me that in the classroom... (Participant #2, female)

Another participant also stated that his younger siblings called him "bad" when he fought with them. More specifically:

Like if we [my brothers and I] are fighting, yeah they would just tell me [I'm bad] or something yeah in different languages not the same language. (Male participant #6)

Socialization is a process through which ideas about things are formed and experiences gained, and these ideas and experiences continue to persist among a group of people (Harris, 1995, Creswell, 2012). Wahl (2002, 2003) alludes to the fact that socializing agents such as family, friends and teachers are most likely to be the ones to inculcate

negative attitudes in children, specifically against people with mental illnesses. This may explain how the respondents' peers and younger siblings were able to identify their behaviour as deviant and label it as such. In sum the labeling process denotes a power dynamic in which the labeled is the recipient of harsh reprimands from the labeler who is either an authority figure or under the influence of an authority figure. Inferring from the discussion on the formation of the sense of self of a person, there is great importance on the socialization of an individual. Since his/her self-concept is formed based on the ideas held by his/her family members or other significant people, there is a greater value attached to the authority that caregivers have over children.

### **Reasons for Being Labeled**

The participants' reasons as to why they were labeled fell into one of five categories, namely attention- seeking behaviour, physical aggression, context of play, parent expectations and independence.

### **Attention Seeking**

The desire for the attention of an authority figure was one reason for behaviour leading to being labeled. The results showed more females than males engaged in attention-seeking behaviour. Participant #17 (female) explained that she used to act out to get the attention of her mother. She stated that:

My grandparents because like I was ... cuz my mum would be at work and like I was always really attached to my mum and I would get upset and I would get upset and I would act out when my mum was at work cuz I wanted her to be around. And I would just do things to act out to get my mum to like stay home. I

would just like break things and just do things that I wasn't supposed to do.

(Participant #17, female)

Another respondent reported that she intentionally taunted her brother to get attention:

If he was playing a video game and I wanted to play with him and he said no I might you know stand in front of the TV, throw something at him till he yells at me or gets upset and I'd go tell my mum that he beat me up or he hit me even though he did nothing and so that would result in him calling me stupid or annoying or whatever

Upon reflection, she expanded on the motive behind her actions:

I guess it's hard for me to I don't know because I knew I did it a lot of times for attention so I guess underlying, thinking about it, maybe I did feel sad sometimes and lonely that I was the only girl and I didn't really have much friends outside of my family so it was just always boys, boys, boys and I guess it was just I guess I felt lonely or maybe I didn't get enough attention at times so. (Participant #1, female)

However a participant divulged that he liked to get attention in general and not necessarily from his parents. This is captured categorically in this response:

... When I was growing up I would try to get a lot of attention. Yeah, see I would get a lot, I would try to get a lot of attention and being in trouble would get me attention so sometimes I would be and I would get attention and then ...

(Participant #7, male)

**Figure 1**

**Reasons For Being Labeled By Age Of Participant**

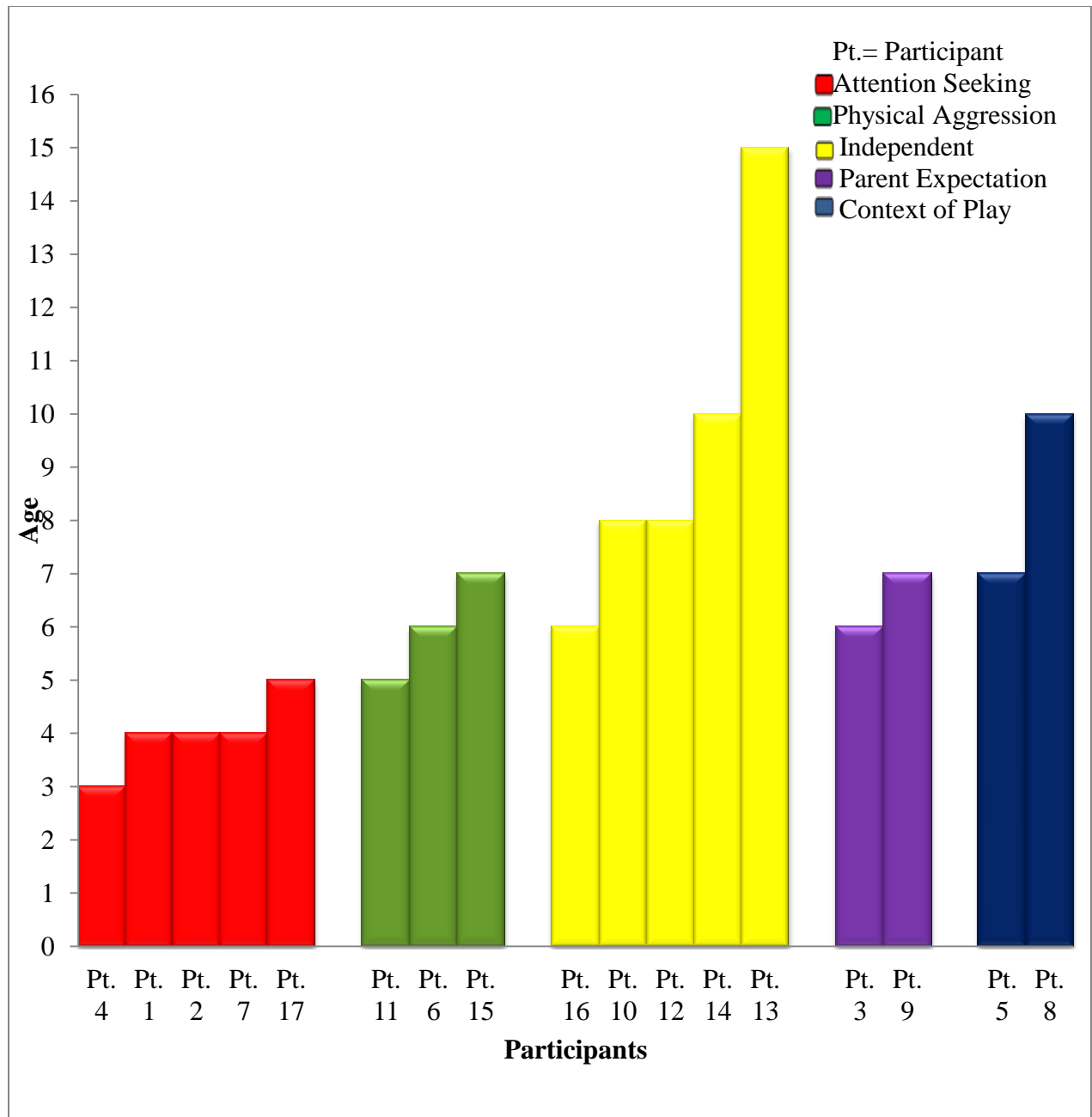


Figure 1 is a representation of the participants under the five categories of reasons for being labeled. The figure illustrates the initial age at which each participant was labeled. The graph indicates that participants who were labeled for attention seeking behaviour were the youngest among the five categories and those labeled for showing independent behaviour were the oldest.

Attention-seeking behaviour is a result of the insecure attachment of a child to a caregiver where their needs are either unmet or responded to half-heartedly (Turner, 1991). Waters (2011) also stated that children have a core need for attention. She further explained that babies and young children rely solely on the sensitive parenting of their caregivers for basic survival, therefore attention seeking is an innate behaviour. This suggests that the young adults within this category may have either experienced insecure attachments with their care givers or were just expressing their desire for attention.

The findings also reveal that there was a gender difference with more females (4) than males (1) engaged in attention seeking behaviour. This is in contrast to ideas presented in other research. For example, Turner (1991) explored the relations between attachment, gender and behaviour with peers of preschool children and revealed that insecurely attached boys were more aggressive, disruptive and attention seekers while insecurely attached girls were dependent, less confident and compliant. Shaw, Keenan and Vondra (1994) also examined the developmental precursors of externalizing behaviour of children at ages one, two and three years. Their findings revealed gender differences in the factors that predicted disruptive behaviour. The factors which predicted boys externalizing behaviours at ages two and three were unresponsive mothers, infant attention seeking, noncompliance and aggression while infant noncompliance was the predicting factor for both female internalizing and externalizing behaviour at ages two and three. This finding may suggest that boys are attention seekers since only boys' disruptive behaviour was associated with maternal unresponsiveness and attention seeking behaviour.

**Physical Aggression**

Being physical or engaging in fights was also a reason identified by solely the male participants for being labeled. This indicates that males are likely to be physically aggressive. As participant #6 (male) explained, he was called bad when he fought his brothers or cousins. He stated that "... I was fighting and she [mother] just called me bad. You're bad, you're naughty. In other situations ... when I fight with my cousins, their parents would yeah tell you, you're naughty". (Participant #6, male)

Likewise, another respondent revealed that he was labeled as a result of being physically aggressive towards others.

Yes, I was pushing my sister. Like it was like ... I was like 7 years old. I was pushing my sister and I kinda got in trouble for that cuz my sister was only 4 years old no, 5. Yeah she was 5 yeah and we were playing around and after I guess she bit me or something and I pushed her yeah. I pushed somebody.

(Participant #15, male)

He also indicated that he was involved in fights:

They know that I like to cause stuff like cause fights, cause this, cause that so that's why you know, I'm a big troublemaker right, they know me as that cuz I like to, I'm always getting in trouble, I'm always getting suspended or I'm always like trying to fight my parents. (Participant #15, male)

The results in this study revealed that only males engaged in physically aggressive behaviour and this is consistent with other research findings. Males are notably more aggressive than females and are usually physically aggressive while females are verbally aggressive (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz & Kauklainen, 1992). For instance research on

bullying has shown that boys tend to engage in direct bullying with open attacks on their victims while girls engage in indirect and more subtle forms of bullying such as spreading rumours, manipulation of friendships and teasing (Olweus, 1993; Wang, Iannotti & Nansel, 2009; Scheithauer, Petermann & Jugert, 2006; Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen & Trick, 2010; Carlyle & Steinman, 2007). This common trend exists due to the importance of physical aggression within the peer groups of boys and more subtle aggressive behaviour is important within girls' peers group (Scheithauer et al, 2006).

Old and current studies show the prevalence of gender role socialization among boys and girls (Kangethe, Lyria & Nyamanga, 2014; Mishra, Behera & Babu, 2012; Whiting and Edwards, 1973). These studies have suggested that in the socialization of children, task assignments for boys and girls vary which encourages the formation of different types of behaviour for males and females. The explanation offered is that girls are assigned roles such as caring for infants and household chores which keep them close to the home while boys are given work such as caring for animals which takes them away from the home (Mishra, Behera & Babu, 2012; Whiting and Edwards, 1973). These tasks may encourage nurturing and supportive roles among girls due to socialization with adults and babies. For the boys, socialization with peers may encourage rough play and the use of denigrating and demeaning exchanges because there is less interaction with adults.

### **Independence**

One other reason identified by the participants as a cause for being labeled was expressing their independence. They described engagement in activities which highlighted their individual interests or inclinations. As participant #2 (female) stated,

like I just wouldn't listen to authority figures like if somebody told me that I need to go sit over in the circle or something I wouldn't go like I wouldn't listen. I would just ... not listen at all when somebody asked me something I'd just like ignore them or ... both like I wouldn't listen to my parents umm and that's why they had to punish me like they did".

Another respondent disclosed that his love for football led to him being labeled "bad":

Okay so ... like I indicated earlier I enjoyed playing football so after school instead of going to fetch water, I'll carry the bucket, go to the playing ground and then just stay there, play football with my colleagues. Before I realize, they, they have come to take the bucket home and so when I go home they will describe me as being a bad child out of all the children that my parents had and I remember on one occasion my father had to lock me in the room and it was a traumatizing experience. And so that was what happened. It was as a result of playing football.  
(Participant #10, male)

This interviewee revealed that she was labeled due to the kind of friends she kept. There was the belief by her parents that she was involved in the activities her friends engaged in.

Because of the people I was hanging out with. This was in ... this wasn't even in [local city] so they were all in [a different city]. My parents thought I was bad and called me that. My schools even. Just that they thought that I was doing the bad things that they were doing. They were skipping school, they were partying, and smoking and pretty much it and picking on other people. (Participant #13, female)

An account rendered by this interviewee # 16 (male) illustrated how one's choice in music or the genre of songs proved to be reason enough to be labeled:

Like I was into heavy metal music for instance so that's the devil's music, you're gonna go to hell for that. (Male participant #16)

Independence in children is an individual personality trait which makes a slow and steady progress as children mature (Yang & Zou, 2005). According to Yang and Zou (2005) children's independence and personality emerge during pre-school years. They conducted a study with sixty-seven children aged three through five years with the aim of determining the stability and variability of independence in differing contexts by focusing on the three features of independence, namely self-assertion, self-reliance and self-control. Their findings revealed that self-assertion developed more slowly in children than self-control and self reliance. At the age of five years, self-confidence increased in children. They attributed this to the idea that children aged three and four years had limited experience or exposure and knowledge of the world. This explains why the initial age of the participants who were labeled due to expressing their independence started from the age six years upwards (refer to Figure 1).

### **Parent Expectations**

Parent-driven expectation is a category identified as a reason for labeling. The respondents who belong to this group came by their label not as a result of any specific action of theirs but rather the expectations of their parental figures. This is reported by a participant when she explained that her mother started calling her a whore without justification. She stated that "I don't know. It's because I started dating so she said I was a whore cuz I was dating". (Participant #9, female)

Similarly another respondent expounded that:

There is like one particular [event] and it was in my native language and it means that I am mad actually crazy something like that. It was, it was the time when I got failed for the first time in my school. In one of the courses in grade mm... 9 yes in grade 9. So I failed in one of the course for the very first time even though I was high scorer in school but that was the first time I got failed in one of the courses so that was the other time. (Participant #6, male)

An explanation for why these participants were labeled by their parents is highlighted by the labeling theory. Their parents' perception of them created an expectancy of their behaviour which led to the labels of "whore" and "mad". Bartusch and Matsueda (1996) reported in their work that parental perceptions of their sons' behaviour were often incorrect, thereby labeling them wrongly. This can be seen as what happened in the case of these participants.

### **Context of Play**

The last category to be discussed is the engagement in behaviour within the context of play. Here the interviewees revealed that they were labeled as a consequence of something they were involved in while playing. This is reflected in the responses provided by participant #5 (male) who stated:

I couple of times my nanny was cooking on the stove and I grabbed the pot and threw it on the ground and that stuff and yeah, I wasted a lot of food (small laugh). No, just that I thought it would be funny.

He also explained that he was called bad when he accidentally broke a window. This is gleaned from this response "I broke a window. I broke a window at my dad's friend's

house ... by accident. I had a pebble and I was bouncing it off the window and it just shattered but yeah I remember that cuz when I picked it up I cut my hand open”.

(Participant #5, male)

Lastly, respondent # 8 (male) shared a similar experience. He reported of an instance where he was engaged in play which resulted in him being labeled.

Well there was the pool incident. Me and my brother were outside hitting rocks with this hammer like big rocks just trying to break them because we um I don't remember what movie it was. I know that we had watched something where they were in jail and they were smashing rocks like they were all chained together just smashing rocks with sledge hammers or whatever so we were just outside playing and like we ended up doing that. But we ended up chipping the end of the hammer and he [mother's boyfriend] found out and then he asked us about it and we lied. We told him that we didn't do it but then he ended up I don't know how he knew that we did it then he ended up like freaking out bad like really bad but still like I denied it... (Participant #8, male)

Although play is instrumental in the general growth and maturation of children (Rentzou, 2014), the results revealed that two of the respondents were labeled for behaviour within the context of play and these were only boys. This may be a result of the type of play engaged in by the participants. They reported the use of aggression in their play. Benenson, Carder and Geib-Cole (2008) studied boys' preferential pleasure of physical aggression using a sample of 335 boys and girls aged four, five, six and nine years. The children rated how much they enjoyed “enacting and viewing on television physical aggression, non-physically aggressive male sex-typed roles and ambiguously

sex-typed roles” (p. 154). They reported in their findings that boys enjoyed engaging in physical aggression. This confirms the earlier idea that boys are more aggressive than girls.

The diversity in the accounts of the participants about the reasons for being labeled indicate that different behaviours can be deemed wrong under any circumstance depending on the observer of that act. This finding is consistent with labeling theory which suggests that an individual is labeled as a result of the reaction of another person to his/her behaviour, thereby making any behaviour eligible for being labeled as deviant (Becker, 1963; Simmons, 1969; Hagan, 1973). This is also determined by who has power since within the participants’ families, it is those who create the rules for behaviour who do the labeling. The idea of power within labeling theory suggests that the people who have authority within a group (family, community) define the rules for behaviour for which the violator is punished (Becker, 1963). Therefore within the homes of the participants, their parents had created rules which the children had violated.

### **Impact of Labels**

The findings and discussions on the impact of the label addressed the areas of identity, decisions and behaviour in the past, relationships and current decisions and career choices/ level of education.

### **Identity**

The young adults in this study were of the opinion that the labels became a part of who they were. The labels became their identity in the sense that they felt that was who they were. Some of the participants believed the incessant use of the labels contributed to

their internalization of them and explained how they thought they had adapted to the labels of either bad or troublemaker. Participant #2 (female) stated that:

Yeah, I always thought that, I always felt badly about myself. I didn't like myself growing up because I thought that I was a liar, a sneak, and stuff like that and I would always deny it, but I always knew on the inside that I kind of was. So I guess like I was just told it so many times that I believed it.

Similarly another interviewee accentuated that "Yeah, obviously I was young I think everybody feels like that when they get called "bad" constantly." (Participant #12, female)

When asked whether the label did make her feel like a troublemaker, the response given by participant #17 (female) was "Yeah, cuz they kept calling me that and I kept thinking well maybe I am and that's why they are calling me that". (Female participant #17)

In his response to the question of whether the continuous use of the label troublemaker ever made him feel and think that he was a troublemaker, participant #15 (male) retorted vehemently "Oh yeah, yeah of course, of course, of course".

Upon reflection he stated that he did not come to the realization of the fact that he thought of himself as a troublemaker early in his life. It dawned on him as he got older at about the age of 18 years.

A number of the youth also expressed their thoughts on how they felt the constant labeling had altered their thinking about themselves and how they identified themselves. They felt there was something wrong with them and they were bad people or troublemakers. As participant #1(female) intimated:

I guess because I'm older now cuz I am 24 umm in my teenage years it did affect me more so I did feel like the outcast of the family. I did feel like I didn't belong or I didn't fit in or nobody wanted me around so like I withdrew into myself a lot and locked everybody out kinda thing so I feel maybe umm maybe so in my teens but I've definitely grown out of that now. As I got older I more gravitated towards people who I knew also give trouble or bad were considered bad or umm misbehaved kinda thing so my friends were similar to me basically.

This notion is shared by another respondent who affirmed that she did feel there was something wrong with her after being referred to as bad a couple of times. She elaborated that from the initial age of three years when she was labeled "bad", she came to believe there was definitely something inherently wrong with her. This is reflected in her words:

Yeah like even now I have issues where like I feel like I am such a horrible person and I don't know why. Like I felt like there was something wrong with me, at that age around when it started and just growing up I thought that there was something wrong with me. Yeah, from 3 years up until now. (Participant #4, female)

Respondent #10 (male) also in expressing his thoughts on the same issue explained that he felt that there was something innately wrong with him although he did not understand why he was being labeled bad. He came to that conclusion because even though he was continuously being labeled it did not deter him from playing football so then ultimately the fault lay within him. This is highlighted in his response:

I thought about It ... but like I said I never understood it but I think at a point it weighed on me that probably there was something wrong with me. .. If there wasn't anything wrong with you, why at all would you even so much be interested in playing football when you do it and you will be punished? Despite the fact that you will be punished you still go there and then you play and so it was like I was being obstinate, I was being recalcitrant so inherently I felt there may be something bad about me but honestly I couldn't figure it out because all my friends were doing it so I, I didn't understand it still. (Male participant #10)

In like manner another interviewee gave his account of how he perceived himself as "bad". In his response he stated that:

Because of all the drugs I've done. Like they even blamed it on the music I was listening to, they even blamed it on the people I associated with, they blamed it on all my actions I was doing. Even when I was doing something good, they didn't appreciate it". He further expanded that "I was basically cursed. I felt like I was cursed. My whole life was something that even when I do something right, the person, nobody will actually appreciate that. So I had like it feels I have to be bad to make somebody to feel good". (Participant #16, male)

However two of the respondents did not internalize their labels at all. Their responses showed that during their childhood, there were times in their lives where they did not have any labeling experiences. They also disclosed that they did not think of themselves as the names/labels that they were called by. This is enunciated by one of the two interviewees. As one respondent noted: "No, I don't ... when people call me names

and stuff I don't really, it doesn't bother me. Like a name is a name. It doesn't hurt me" (Participant #5, male).

The other respondent gave a similar account. He reported that he lived with his grandparents for most of his childhood years and occasionally lived with his mother which was where he was labeled a couple of times. He further explained that a label or being called bad was another person's opinion therefore he did not let it bother him because everybody has one. In his view the fact that someone chose to call him bad did not mean it should affect his life but rather what mattered was if he regretted any behaviour himself because that would be his motivation for not repeating it (Participant #11, male).

The theme of separating behaviour from the individual also was raised by Participant #14. She explained that she identified herself as bad in the sense that she knew what she did was wrong but she did not think that she was a bad person. In her view, although she accepted that she was bad, she felt she was a normal child growing up and developing into an individual and not who her parents wanted her to become. This was captured in her response to the question "did the label ever make you think or feel that you were a bad person?":

No, I didn't no, I never thought I was like I knew I was bad but I never thought of myself as a bad person.

She elaborated that "Cuz I thought like it was just me like I'm growing up, I'm trying to be myself rather than my parents tell me who to be". (Participant #14, female)

To end, participant #7 also expressed a comparable view on the same on the issue. He divulged that the label "bad" did in fact make him feel like a bad person and a bully.

However he rationalized his actions by thinking that he had also been through similar experiences and he was not that bad. This is highlighted in his response:

Oh definitely, definitely. It made me feel, it made me feel bad, uh it made me feel like I was like a mean person, a bully who picked on people but then also a lot of the times what I would tell myself was that well it happened to you too and you are not even doing that badder someone said that stuff to you, you would be fine. (Participant #7, male)

The results revealed that in general the respondents internalized the labels of either “bad” or “troublemaker” which reflects Cooley’s looking glass self (Cooley, 1902) and the categorical self (Lewis, 1986 as cited in Ross, 1992). This implies that the participants integrated the labels into their identities. The participants were influenced by the notions that their significant others (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings) had about them through their social interactions and these ideas became manifest in their self-labeling and self-degradation (Zhang, 1997). Bearing in mind that the initial labelers were caregivers and therefore people wielding power in the lives of the respondents, the caregivers had greater influence on the socialization and the formation of the sense of self of the participants. This implies that the majority of participants are more likely to integrate the labels which will most likely influence their behaviour and decisions. This is because since the caregivers had authority over the participants caregivers determined what was right or wrong for them and therefore as the initial labelers, caregivers continuous interactions with the participants would most likely have influenced what the participants thought of themselves. Also the credibility of the labeler may be another factor accounting for the integration of the labels by the respondents (Adams et. al,

1998). The opinions of such important people in the lives of the participants may have been viewed as nonbiased, therefore influencing their ideas about themselves.

As explained earlier in the literature on labeling theory, not everyone who is labeled internalizes their label and continues on to further deviance. The labeling theory delineates a continuous process of action and reaction which leads to the internalization of the label (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951). The participants who reported that they did not feel or think of themselves as their labels had indicated that their labeling experiences were infrequent, therefore suggesting that there was not a continuous experience of labeling in their lives while those who internalized their labels had a continuous process of labeling. This finding, therefore is in support labeling theory.

### **Behaviour and Past Decisions**

The young adults in this study revealed that the labels influenced their behaviour and decisions in the past. They were mostly compelled to engage in further deviant activities because, as per their thoughts on who they were as individuals or who they identified as, they were either bad or troublesome, hence a greater involvement in unacceptable behaviour. As participant #2 (female) disclosed, she had to live up to the expectation of “troublemaker”:

Yeah actually because, ... like they expected me to do wrong anyways so if they expect me to do wrong I might as well just do it because, like I have to live up to my name. You know what I mean like if I’m called a troublemaker I can’t just sit there and be silent. (Participant #2, female)

Similarly, respondent #14 (female) revealed that she decided to engage in more negative behaviour because she was labeled bad and felt that was the behaviour expected from her by her parents. She indicated that such negative behaviour continued into the university.

I wouldn't say necessarily cuz I they labeled me bad, but since they thought I was bad I thought why not rebel more. Like you think this is bad, like there are worse things so that's why. Yeah, I think so even with like university, first year I did not pay attention to school because it was freedom. It was like a 100% freedom now so I was like I used that to my advantage so I'm like oh like you know since I am a like I did bad things, now I can do it openly so that kind of messed up my first year and then that affected my relationship with my parents even more so that was not good.

Participant #12 (female) explained that when she was in grades seven and eight she became friends with people who engaged in smoking weed and drinking. She stated that:

I when I was in grade 7 and 8 yeah. I don't know I just hang out with people that smoked weed and stuff.

Another participant also disclosed that the label influenced his choice of friends. He explained that it was a deliberate decision to become friends with his school mates who were only interested in fighting because he thought of himself as a "troublemaker":

Yeah. Actually, yeah. It influenced me a lot. All my friends wanted to do was just fight and fight and fight and I was like okay I'm gonna do it too. (Participant #15, male)

As respondent #16 indicated, the label influenced his view of himself which further affected his decisions and actions. Although he did not divulge details of what exactly he

did, when asked what decisions or actions the label influenced him to do, his immediate response was “Well jail for instance”. His understanding of his actions then was that he thought of himself as a bad person and therefore acted in ways which resulted in him going to jail. (Male participant #16)

Similar to the previous accounts, this interviewee also revealed that she internalized the label of troublemaker which resulted in her engagement in shoplifting and other negative behaviours. This is captured in her response:

I ended up like going through the shoplifting phase and I started smoking and doing drugs and stuff like that. (Participant #17, female)

One participant gave a mixed account of what the label influenced him to do. He intimated that the label influenced him both positively and negatively. He explained that the label influenced negative behaviour from him and at other times it influenced positive behaviour from him:

Yes, I think, I think it really impacted decisions I’ve made in the past. Sometimes ... it would make me really think before I do things so I would say well last time I did this I got in so much trouble so I probably shouldn’t do this. And what I would also do too is I would look at people who aren’t getting in trouble. So groups my friends who weren’t getting in trouble and then groups who were which I would be in and then I would say okay I wanna be like those guys I don’t wanna be like this so I would, it would help me really think before I make decisions or think that would be the biggest thing it did. Also sometimes it would make me think okay I’m getting lot of attention. Everyone is laughing when I do this maybe I should do it again. Right so maybe I should laugh at the teacher in

class cuz everyone seemed to like that right so it would impact me in a good way sometimes and sometimes in a bad way just because I don't know if it's more the labeling that would or just the response from the labeling that I would get. I'd say that still

In light of his account, there is the notion that the label did influence some positive decisions and actions. He had earlier reported of playing football after school and being called bad and punished regularly which made him rethink his decision about continuing to play football. Participant #10 (male) in his response affirmed this notion:

Yeah, actually my whole being today I, I will say I owe it much to that [labeling experience] because later in grade 4 and I think I've commented on this. I, I realized that no, I had to stay at home, help my parents then get more time for my books and I did it in the last term and I was amongst the top 2 in the class and I thought the feeling was so good so I decided that no, I think now I, I'll just study.

Some of the respondents indicated that although the impact of the label was negative, it did not degenerate into further deviant behaviour. Rather it affected their behaviour in such a way that the decisions they took hindered their personal progress. Participant #3 reported that he had been labeled "mad" for failing his exams in grade 9 and as a result affected him in his academic work. He stated that:

...I guess I'm always, I always used to complete my work late so it made me realize that I was very slow in everything always lazy so I was able to complete my work at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. Instead of doing it before or whatever it is. (Participant #3, male)

Participant #4 (female) also shared a similar experience. She indicated that she deliberately put less effort into classes where the teachers had called her troublemaker:

No. Those classes I put less focus in because I just didn't want to be in there. I didn't like being called that like I don't think it's right for teachers to call students that because they are there to help us.

There were some young adults who also indicated that the label had no impact on their decisions or behaviours. The young adults in this category were a mix of those who had previously revealed that they had either internalized their label and those who had not internalized their labels of either bad or troublemaker. Participant #6 explained that the label did not influence any decision he took with regards to the people he made friends with or his behaviour:

No I didn't, I'm not sure how that happened but no it didn't change I don't think it changed but like I hang out with the best people like I hang out with.

(Participant #6, male)

He further elaborated that he had supportive parents who had taught him what was right from wrong so that was what influenced his decisions. Another participant stated quite briefly that he did not let the events of any day influence his decisions or actions in the subsequent days and therefore the label had no impact on him in that sense. This is highlighted in his response:

No, not really I just think of every new day as a new day. (Participant #5, male)

Lastly, respondent #11(male) also asserted that the label had no impact on any decisions he took or his behaviour. When asked whether the label had influenced any actions or decisions in the past, he simply stated no.

Of the three participants who belonged in this category, two were the respondents who had indicated that they did not internalize their labels and had experienced

infrequent labeling. The third, who had internalized his label like them experienced infrequent labeling experiences. He reported that he was called bad when he either fought his brothers or cousins which he said was not very frequent. This is captured in his response:

No, not often but only, only if there is fights, when there's fights between [myself and] my brothers. (Male, Participant #6)

The reason why he internalized his label and the other two did not may be attributed to their protective factors. From the responses above, the two who did not internalize showed a sense of self-worth and optimism while the participant who did integrate the label reported that he had supportive parents telling him what was wrong from right.

The findings indicate that the labels generally encouraged the engagement in further deviant activities, which is congruent with the labeling theory. The labeling theory stipulates that there is an increase in the likelihood of an individual engaging in further deviant activity (Becker, 1963, Lemert, 1951). This increase in nonconforming behaviour may reflect a state of mind or the label being integrated into the identity of the participants. The participants may have felt compelled to act in more undesirable ways because they recognized themselves as such.

In contrast, two of the respondents reported that the label served as a deterrent to engagement in further deviant behaviour. The idea of action and strong reaction deterring negative behaviour is present here (Lemert, 1951). For these young adults getting in trouble for their actions served the purpose of curtailing their behaviour. They had indicated that getting in trouble for their actions contributed to their decisions not to engage in further deviant behaviour.

In Lemert's (1951) explanation of how one integrates a negative label to become more deviant (secondary deviant), he suggested that the labeling process must be frequent and consistent in order for this to happen. For the three participants in the current study, the label reportedly did not influence their behaviour and decisions. This lack of influence may be attributed to their infrequent experiences with labeling as is reported by participant #6 "No, not often but only, only if there is fights, when there's fights between [myself and] my brothers". The inconsistency in the use of the label and the entire duration of the labeling experiences in their lives enabled them make decisions and act without the influence of any label. This finding suggests that infrequent experiences with labeling may function as a protective factor that stalls the integration of the negative labels into one's sense of self.

Also, protective factors that are present in their lives can account for their ability to act without the influence of the label "bad". Protective factors such as supportive parents, optimism, perseverance, and self-worth have been identified within resilience research (Smokowski, Reynolds & Bezruczko, 1999). The accounts of these three respondents suggest that they were either optimistic and had self-worth or had supportive parents, which may have served as a buffer against the influence of the labels.

### **Relationships**

The participants also revealed that the labels influenced their relationships. The young adults reported that the labels of either bad or troublemaker impacted their family relations, friendships and their relations with people in general. The majority of the participants shared a similar experience of family disputes and bad blood between

themselves and their family members. They explained that as a consequence of the label and its ensuing actions and reactions from themselves and their labelers or family members for that matter, the family relationship and bond became strained. As participant #10 (male) explained, he became very fearful of his father:

My father yes .... It affected the relation between me and my father because I at a point I became so much afraid of him. I became so much afraid of him even at the mention of his name I was running ... for a cover because it was daily experience me going to play football so if he was coming home, it was expected that he will do something to me so I became so much afraid of him.

He went on to expand on the measures his father took to rectify the estranged situation:

Even later, when I grew up I think it took, it took a long time for me to become so close to him. And I think that he himself realized that I was ... he himself realized he liked me probably but because of the football, and at the time, at that time later in life I had stopped so he himself had to put in measures to draw me closer to himself. And so I remember, I indicated earlier that he is a teacher so after school, he'll have to call me, let me do something for him in his presence, then sometimes I mean out of all the siblings he will call me, give me food so he, he himself was putting in extra measures too so I, I sensed that yes, it did affect our relationship. It affected our relationship. (Participant #10, male)

Another interviewee also disclosed that her family members withdrew from her. The relationship between them degenerated after being labeled as a “troublemaker” by her mother. She stated that:

Well like a lot of my family like my grandparents just ended not talking to me and my dad didn't even know my mum kicked me out until cuz he like worked all the time so sometimes he'd be away for like weeks or whatever. So when he'd come back he was just like where is my daughter? (Participant #13, female)

Another participant #16 did not mince his words when asked whether the label had influenced his family relations. He stated candidly that he hated his family members who had labeled him:

I was never close with those people. I hated them. I still do to this day. The only person in that family I love is my mother and my sister, my step father.

(Participant #16, male)

From the earlier discussion on the impact of labels on the family relationship, it was determined that when a parent was the labeler, there were feelings of isolation and rejection from family members that weakened relationships between the parent and child. In addition, there would be feelings of anger and bitterness towards the labeler by the labeled (Lemert, 1951; Vissing et al., 1991; Zhang, 1997). This is consistent with the findings of this study. The results revealed that the label negatively influenced the relationship between the majority of the respondents and their family members. As noted earlier, due to the internalized labels, the behaviour of the young adults had become worse which may have further aggravated a bad situation. They experienced a loss of affection or withdrawal, conflict/fights and separation from parents and family members.

A few of the respondents explained that the label influenced the sibling dynamics in that their siblings had privileges which were denied them. This led to arguments and/or loss of affection between them and their parents. As respondent number #2

(female) stated, her mother showed a bias towards her younger sister which resulted in her feeling unloved by her parents because she was labeled as the “troublemaker”:

She let my sister just like do anything and it's like she made my sister her favourite and me like she just didn't like because I was a troublemaker and like I was a troubled child so she just didn't like me and, I didn't like her. I thought she loved my sister and my dad loved my sister. My dad wasn't home much so he didn't really see much and then my mum, cuz he was working, and my mum, kinda took over and my dad wasn't too religious. He just went along with her, he just went along with what she did so.

Another participant gave a comparable account of how his younger brother had privileges that were denied to him which resulted in arguments with his parents. He gave this account:

... It led to a lot of fights between me and my parents because I felt like they were always picking on me and not my brother just because I was the one always getting in trouble before and stuff so it led to a lot of fights with my parents for them not letting me do this or this or [brother's name] my brother he gets to do this but I don't because I got in trouble. I mean that's not fair so it led to a lot of fights I would say. (Participant #7, male)

He further expanded on how that influenced his relationship with his brother both positively and negatively:

Actually yeah, it, it affected my relationship with him because cuz he's my younger brother. He would so he would look up to me but he would also learn from what I did wrong and then so there would be times where I wanted him to do

things were probably wrong that and he wouldn't do them because he would see me get in trouble for doing these things and so that would lead to him not doing it and me getting mad at him and then we would fight sometimes so it... it, it hurt us in a negative way but then also helped ... me to, me to build my relationship with him. Because it was my parents getting mad at me so then I would just go and talk to him because I won't be allowed to see my friends, I wasn't allowed to hang out with anyone so I would talk to him and we would hang out all the time just because I was in trouble and I wasn't allowed to do other things. (Participant #7, male)

This interviewee also divulged that her younger siblings had privileges and were favoured by their parents. She intimated that the label and their expectations of her as a first child resulted in her creating a distance between herself and her parents. She stated that "yeah, I don't really talk to like my parents about anything". (Participant #14, female) She further elaborated on how that impacted her emotions towards her siblings:

Yeah cuz like I get mad at them for getting everything that I never got. Like if I was late coming home, my parents would freak out everything. My siblings if they don't come home like if they come home late they, they don't care. So like since they know I was a bad child, they always expected so much but since they're good, they think oh they can never do anything bad. (Participant #14, female)

The participants who disclosed that the label affected the parent sibling dynamics were first born and they revealed that their younger siblings had privileges or there was differential treatment among the siblings by the parents, which further aggravated the

situation. This finding is reflected in the work of Tuttle and Cornell (1993) who reported that the label “gifted” though positive, only had a negative impact on the sibling relationship when the younger child was labeled gifted. Hence birth order was a contributing factor. One of the measures used by Tuttle and Cornell (1993) was parental partiality and that factor can account for the preferential treatment by the parents of their second born children in my own research. Also, the expectations from their caregivers can be identified as a cause of both the labeling and parental partiality. In contrast to these findings is research on favouritism and parental preferential treatment. For instance Scholte et al. (2007) indicated that younger siblings resorted to delinquent behaviour when they felt less favoured by their mothers even though the existing relationship between the siblings was a determining factor of influence in their study. Another finding from their study which is consistent with this research is the same-sex dyad. Siblings of the same sex were reported to have been affected by maternal preferential treatment. The participants who reported an influence on the parent sibling dynamic had same-sex siblings.

Some of the young adults, five to be exact, revealed that the label influenced their relationship with people outside of their families. Some indicated that the labels affected their friendships while others reported that it affected how they related to people in general. Participant #3 (male) described how the label “foxy” impacted his relationships:

Like initially it did to my personality that’s what I’m saying I was discouraged to do anything so I was discouraged to participate in any school activities even, even if it was academic. But since it was I was discouraged by not participating in any

stuff so I was discouraged not to be social, not to mingle with the colleague and whatever it is so I was discouraged in that.

Similarly, interviewee #9 (female) also revealed that her relationship with her friends was often strained and lost due to her label:

Sometimes it's hard to make friends cuz then they find out like people were calling me names and sometimes they start calling me that and then they are not my friend anymore. (Participant #9, female)

This participant also explained that the label greatly affected his relationships. He recounted how the label from his childhood influenced his actions, which further negatively impacted his social interactions with people. He also attributed his lack of friendship as a child to his economic status. He gave this account:

Well because like no one wanted to be around me because of what I've done. It all started in my childhood. If like say if I lived in a good home, yeah I still I probably would still have some issues but not as much as I'm living with today because of all the stuff I was around and dealt with. And I'm still labeled as a bad child. I'm always gonna be labeled as a bad person. I've got a criminal record. I almost killed 4 people with a dangerous weapon. That's gonna stick with me for the rest of my life so basically for the rest of my life I'm still gonna be labeled as a bad person. (Participant #16, male)

He further elaborated on his experience:

Yeah, like I didn't have any friends because I had nothing. I felt like well I'm being bad so I don't deserve this you know even though like every time ... I even made my own money for instance. I was probably like 8 years old, out shoveling

driveways to make money. My foster mum would take it from me. Oh you're bad you don't fucking need this. You know like you don't deserve this you know.

(Male participant #16)

Another respondent revealed that the label troublemaker made her withdraw from people. She was of the notion that she was going to hurt someone. This is captured in her response:

Yeah cuz I always felt I was gonna hurt that person and do that person wrong.

(Participant #17, female)

Emotional distress and rejection is another impact of labeling identified by researchers in the field (Macharey and Von Suchodoletz, 2008; Shea & Weiner 2003). This was also evident amongst some of the young adults in this study. They experienced rejection from their peers due to their labels and others were emotionally distressed about socializing with people and making friends. There was a feeling of ineptitude and fear which prevented them from getting emotionally close with people

In contrast, there were a few of the young adults who reported that the label did not have any impact on their relationships. They disclosed that although their parents and care givers were displeased with them, it did not have any adverse effect on their relationship. As participant #12 (female) explained, her grandparents and mother were upset with her but it did not strain their relationship:

No, it never changed anything. It was good but like they always like they get mad obviously because I was acting up like I was a kid in essence so but like it never changed anything.

Respondent #11(male) also explained that being labeled bad by his mother did not have a negative effect on his relationship with her or other family members. He explained that the relationship between himself and his mother was already strained therefore there was no love lost between them due to the label. Finally, another participant also simply stated “No, I don’t think so” when asked whether the label influenced his relationship with his family or if it affected his relations with others. (Participant #15, male)

This finding is in contrast to literature that suggests that there will be a negative impact on the family relationship (Vissing et al., 1991; Zhang, 1997). Although these participants reported that they had been labeled by their parents, it had no bearing on their relationship. It may be that although their parents had been initially upset, their anger was short lived and therefore it did not have any great impact on their relationship. However, the results presented indicate that for majority of respondents the label does have an adverse effect on their relationship with family, peers and people in general.

### **Current Decisions and Career Choices / Level of Education**

The young adults in this study gave a mixed account of the significance of the labels in their current decision-making, career choices and level of education. There were a number of the participants who revealed that the label had influenced them to take positive decisions regarding their career choice and their educational path. For most of these respondents, their account showed a leaning away from what they understood to be their deviant past labels and embracing a future without such labels. They explained that they no longer considered themselves as either “bad” or “troublemakers” and strove to achieve better lives for themselves. Participant #1 (female) explained that the label has

become a constant reminder of what she does not want to be. This is highlighted in her response:

No, I think that the only impact it would have on me today is just to know what I don't want to be like and what to avoid kinda thing. I mean it still shocks some people that I have changed like when I catch up to them and whatever so ... I don't really see, I think it's just impacting me in terms of what not to do kinda thing or what to avoid more so than any kind of negative thing in my life.

She also reported that her experience has informed her decision to study child and youth studies at the university and to pursue a career in social work which will involve helping troubled teenagers:

Yeah, my education definitely because a lot of like you know some of my mum's boyfriends or other people would say like I'm gonna become nothing, I'm gonna end up pregnant at 15 and have you know what I mean? So it was ... it was determination to prove them wrong kinda thing that kept me going towards post-secondary education and career choices like I am trying to go into social work so I'm taking Child and Youth studies right now and I think that I would want to help kids who were like me to get on a better path so definitely its impacted me.

(Participant #1, female)

This participant also gave a similar account. She intimated that her past experiences have had a significant impact on her life choices presently. She divulged that she is looking forward to a career as a parole officer to assist teenagers at risk. She stated that:

Yeah, I had to go through, counseling and like social working, as a teenager to, my mum actually forced me to go because I was made to go to family counseling

and me as an individual in order to ... like get me through whatever I was going through and it inspired me to become like a social worker myself so, like right now I'm in sociology but umm, I was thinking of going like I've just changed recently what I wanted to be. Through like a criminology course and I was thinking like a parole officer now so, for like trouble youth and kids and stuff so.

(Participant #2, female)

Another participant also explained that he wants to go back to school and to pursue a career in engineering and make a better life for him. He stated that he no longer thought of himself as a troublemaker.

How do I feel about it now? That I wish I was never a troublemaker that I wish that I actually finished my school and now I'm struggling to go back to school. I'm struggling to finish my education. I'm struggling because I want to get an education so I can have a better life. I want to become an engineer. So I want to go to school for that. Mechanical engineer for aircraft but I won't be able to do aircraft because yeah of some reasons. But you know engineer cars, changing engines in cars, I don't know yeah. (Participant #15, male)

This interviewee also described how the label impacted him to turn his life around and become studious. He explained that his experience ensuing from the label earlier in life culminated in his decision to turn over a new leaf, which has led to him pursuing post-graduate studies.

Yeah, actually my whole being today I, I will say I owe it much to that [labeling experience] because later in grade 4 and I think I've commented on this. I, I realized that no, I had to stay at home, help my parents then get more time for my

books and I did it in the last term and I was amongst the top 2 in the class and I thought the feeling was so good so I decided that no, I think now I, I'll just study.

(Participant #10, male)

Participant #7 (male) also explained that the labeled past plays a highly influential role in his life today. He intimated that it is a continuous deliberate effort on his part to erase the label troublemaker and to paint a positive image of himself:

Definitely I try to avoid situations that I'd gotten into in the past and try to make them proud. So I don't like, I hated getting in trouble and I got in trouble so much that now I try to make it up to my parents. So I try to help out with the dishes, I try to make them think of me as good, as better as... improved and whereas my brother I find cuz he never got in trouble he talks back to them, he doesn't look to help out a lot, he says some things that make my parents really upset so it really helped me just change the way I was and I still think about it constantly because I'm trying to push that away from me, get away from the label. (Participant #7, male)

He also expanded further on how it impacted his educational path:

I think it has. I think it has because when I was getting in trouble my marks were always good but a lot of people said I won't be able to do it if I ... Like doing all these bad things and so it made me wanna show them that, you know what, I'm past that. I can do this because I'm not that person anymore. I'm not the troublemaker kid and it also like changes when I meet people now or when I go to school and talk to teachers I wanna portray myself as someone who is a positive

person to those around rather than a negative person and a troublemaker.

(Participant #7, male)

Among the participants who divulged that the label had influenced their current career choices or programme of study, only the females wanted to work in professions that had a direct link to their experiences such as parole officer and social worker. The males chose professions that did not have a direct link to their past experiences. This can be accounted for by the differing roles into which girls and boys are socialized. As suggested earlier, girls more than boys are socialized to take up caring roles and other domestic chores in the home (Mishra, Behera & Babu, 2012; Whiting & Edwards, 1973), making it more likely that girls will choose nurturing professions. Also overcoming their labels was recognized as a factor which contributed to this phenomenon. Being able to overcome their labels and choosing professions like social work to assist other children with similar stories as theirs or being able to leave that past behind to focus on a new future shows resilience. The literature on resilience speaks to the issue of individuals overcoming adverse challenges in order to have an individually-defined successful life and certain key factors, such as personal faith and distance from source of harm, have been identified as mediums through which people overcome such threats (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009; Masten, 2001; Notter, MacTavish & Shamah, 2008).

Some of the respondents, five in number, also explained that they had become captives to their labels. For some of them the label was holding them back from attaining their future careers and for others it had resulted in them dropping out of school.

Although they aspired to achieve certain things for themselves, they felt it was

unattainable. As participant #8 (male) explained, the behaviour and label bad has served as the demotivating factor in his life preventing him from finding a job. He stated that:

It's actually really bad motivation wise because now I find myself like when I go, like when I go hand out resumes and when I wanna go look for a job and stuff like that I'm always scared that they're gonna like pull up do a background check or something stupid and they are gonna be like, this kid did this? Like that stupid we don't want this guy working here. In like grade 8 for example I stole a chocolate bar from Walmart. I ended up being caught and they ended up driving me home in the police car. Didn't get charged or nothing but that's still on my record. If an employer pulls that out and sees uh, this kid stole from Walmart, we don't want him working here. Like that kind of stuff, motivation like I'll just start thinking, then I'll start thinking of worse things possible just because of stupid little things that have happened in my past and I'll just say damn and I won't even end up doing it like no way. I don't wanna go there hand out resume no. Just like because if that happens it's gonna be awkward and I don't want that to happen.

(Participant #8, male)

Similarly this interviewee also reported that she wants to take up a career in social work but she is plagued by her past experiences which hold her back. This is highlighted in her response:

Like I always wanted to be like a social worker or something but in my head I keep telling myself I can't do that because I've been into drugs and like I can't help myself so how can I help other people with their problems when I can't even help myself. (Participant #17, female)

She again reported that she behaved poorly with teachers and cut class:

Never with the law, but I ended up dropping out of school and never, like always skipping class and never really going to school and fighting with my teachers and stuff. I ended up getting kicked out from [name of school]. (Participant #17, female)

This respondent highlighted the increasing degenerating effect of the label in his life and educational path. In his assertions he mentioned that from an early age he was either pulled out of school as a form of punishment by his foster parents or suspended by the school. He stated that:

Yeah, they keep me home from school because I was bad .Both. I was either suspended or my foster parents would keep me home and make up a lie saying oh he's sick he's not coming in today even though I'm sitting like I'm being punished basically. (Participant #16, male)

He believed that these incidents and further worsening effect of the label culminated in him dropping out of high school in grade 12:

Grade 12 but like in elementary school like I wasn't in school as much. Because like when I acted out they knew like that was my escape. They knew like it was my freedom so they would take that away from me. They would leave me home. (Participant #16, male)

He attributed his final withdrawal from school to drinking and drugs:

No I dropped out because partying. I was drinking and doing heavy drugs. (Participant #16, male)

This interviewee revealed that she started smoking weed and drinking because integrated the label troublemaker into her identity and hence could not determine what was right from wrong. She gave this account of her experience:

Cuz just like for that many years it gets stuck in your head and then you don't realize what you're doing after a while if it's bad or not like I don't know I know like I didn't really realize what I was doing bad like what I was doing bad and then I guess now I don't really realize that I'm actually doing bad things still and all that. (Participant #12, female)

Also a common pattern identified among these participants was the current experience with labeling. They reported that they had been labeled either "bad" or "troublemaker" by their caregivers and other people in their lives in recent times. Participant #4 (female) indicated that she had been labeled by her mother at December of the previous year.

Oh yeah, growing up like up until I moved out now December 8<sup>th</sup> last year I was called it [bad] all the time...

Another respondent gave this account:

My mum, because I don't know, I was drinking all the time, doing drugs and all that so my mum kinda just doesn't, she always calls me bad and she says I'm ruining my life and I'm gonna be a failure and this and that so. (Participant #12, female)

Feelings of low self-esteem and incompetence have been identified as effects of labeling by researchers in the field of labeling (Bos & Balen, 2008; Brown, 2010; Kidd, 2007). This is as a result of the lowered expectation they face from others and their own perception of their abilities due to the integration of such labels. The findings revealed a similar pattern. The results show that the labels continued to have negative effects on a

number of the participants. The labels held a section of them back from achieving or attaining their future careers and the others divulged that they held the labels responsible for their dropping out of school or their lack of performance in school. This was as a result of their own fears and feeling of incompetence to attain those goals and also a lowered expectation of themselves.

The continuous experience with labeling also offers an explanation as to why these young adults are struggling with their labels and feel trapped by them. It has already been established that people who have been labeled experience negative effects such as lowered self-esteem and have feelings of incompetence (Brown, 2010; Kidd, 2007). Therefore an incessant experience with labeling even in recent times suggests more reason why the respondents felt they could not achieve their goals.

Finally, there were a number of the respondents who explained that the label did not have any influence on their current decisions, career choice or education, either positive or negative. Some shared their thoughts on their future plans and aspirations but insisted such choices were being made devoid of any pressure or influences from the labels earlier conferred on them and which they had either internalized or not. As participant #5 (male) explained, he was responsible for the mistakes he made with his education and not the label “bad”:

... It's kind of my decision on what I wanted to do in school and I kind of messed up a bit. I'm trying to finish off though. Finish off grade 12 but I'm working on it, slowly but surely.

Another interviewee also explained that the label has not influenced his decision concerning his educational path. He divulged that he was trying to get admitted into the

seniors programme to get a General Education Diploma (GED) in order to further his studies at a College taking a course with a more hands on approach. (Participant #11, male)

Similarly respondent #9 revealed that she was going back to school after a year of absenteeism:

... Well actually I wasn't going to school at all this year and just yesterday I registered for school so I'm gonna start going to school soon. (Participant #9, female)

Her explanation for dropping out was:

Cuz I had a boyfriend. And he broke up with me now so I have nothing to do so I might as well just go to school. (Participant #9, female)

To conclude, participant #13 (female) reported that being called "troublemaker" in the past has had some impact on her decisions although no direct bearing on her current educational or career choices. She stated that it has influenced who she associates with: "Stay away from certain people that are causing trouble, hurting other people."

To the question of whether the label has impacted her career choice or education, she indicated that she only stopped going to school in order to have a baby:

Well, not really. The only reason why I stopped going to school recently was because I have my son. (Participant #13, female)

Again this can be attributed to the previously mentioned idea of less frequent or inconsistency in their labeling experiences and the mild forms of punishment given to them (Lemert, 1951). This is because respondents within this group had either internalized their labels or not. For those who had not internalized their labels, infrequent

labeling experiences has been attributed to it. The label therefore does not have a lasting effect on who they become. Resilience is also another factor which can explain their resistance to the labels in their present decision making and behaviour. It may be that having overcome the labels, they had no bearing on what they did presently.

### **Contributing Factors to the Labeling**

As mentioned earlier, a pattern recognized among the majority of the young adults in this study was the presence of certain factors that contributed to their labeling experience in two ways. These factors consisted of mental health issues and individual personal aspects such as strict religion-based rules, poor role models, and abusive environment. For some, such factors greatly impacted their engagement in more deviant activities aside from the influence of the labels. The other respondents emphasized that the factors led to their initial deviant behaviour that was in turn, labeled. They explained that the involvement of these aspects in their lives, in addition to their labels, heightened their downward mobility into engagement in more unacceptable behaviour. As participant #1(female) mentioned in her account, she experienced a lot of bullying when growing up and this affected her behaviour at home, which resulted in her being labeled “bad” by her family members. She stated that the bullying was perpetuated by both teachers and students. In the end her behaviour got worse. This is captured in her response:

It was, I felt really bad like I would go home and cry all the time and I think that’s why even when I would give trouble like my mum would just overlook it because she knew that I was having issues at school because it wasn’t just the students it was also the teachers who were racist and it was blatant like... so I think that,

that definitely negatively affected me and then I would I guess lash out at home and so I think my mum that's why she kind of overlooked sometimes my behaviour but I don't know if she told my aunts or other people who would watch me what was going on so they would label me or whatever ...

She further explained that:

... my negative behaviour got really bad when a teacher called me stupid because I couldn't read good and umm we had like spelling words and I asked her what the word was cuz I couldn't read it and I remember she told me I was stupid. And I don't know it just a switch went on in me that I just didn't care about anything or anybody anymore and from that point on I would just get in trouble. (Participant #1, female)

Another respondent highlighted the abusive environment he grew up in and the dangers he was exposed to which contributed to his involvement in drinking and doing drugs. He reported that:

They would, they would basically fight all the time and be violent or like they would curse and swear at each other or like basically treat me and my sister like we were fucking animals. You know like my childhood wasn't the greatest. Yeah, on and off like they would like dare me to drink like alcohol. My foster mum and mainly my foster mum and my foster sister. Those 2 will be feeding me drugs and alcohol. Like I remember me and my foster brother sitting upstairs in his room smoking a joint with his friends you know. Like I was only 7 years old getting high off my brother who is like 13 years old. So my life has been around drugs and alcohol so I've been an alcoholic for like for straight good 6 years. But

that's drinking like a fish not drinking like every like once a month... (Participant #16, male)

He also explained that he had other mental issues to contend with:

See I got mental issues my sister doesn't. My sister has anger problems but like I'm living with anxiety, I'm living with depression, I'm living with PTSD, I'm living with ADHD, bipolar disorder and a split personality disorder so they see me as the devil. Like I was into heavy metal music for instance so that's the devil's music, you're gonna go to hell for that or. (Participant #16, male)

This participant also identified mental health as a contributing factor to his behaviour that resulted in him being labeled in school as well:

It wasn't really for no reason, more or less my ADHD. I was on... I was taking [name of medication] when I was in public school and I refused to take it so that was another thing ... (Participant #8, male)

He also indicated that a personal problem with his girlfriend impacted him to start doing drugs:

...It was the only thing that really got me into like doing drugs and like actually being like sure like fuck it like why not. I'll do it , I've got nothing better to do was because the girl that I was with before this girl that I'm with now I ended up getting her pregnant. She was she was 16 and I was 18. She ended up getting an abortion and like that, that sucked like so bad I ended cuz at first she told me that she wasn't going to keep it and that's what I wanted. I wanted her to get rid of it at first and then she came to me, she was like no like I'm keeping it, like I can't do that and then I was like okay. ... So I started getting attached and I was like

okay like I'm like I was actually excited. Then she ended up coming to me one day and she was like I'm getting an abortion today and I was like wait what are you kidding? (Participant #8, male)

This interviewee, participant # 2 reported that she attempted to run from home a couple of times and her reason for doing that was her mother's strict religious rules and her prior label of "troublemaker" which affected their relationship:

Like cuz I didn't want to be a part of my mother's life. Like I did not like her, she was way too ... like religious for me, like she had these certain set of rules that everybody had to follow in the family and if you didn't then like you just had to. Like if you didn't you'd get punished. And that punishment could be anything. So, yeah so I just wanted to get away from her cuz she kept dictating who I could hang out with, she kept, like trying to control every single thing I did and she let my sister just like do anything and it's like she made my sister her favourite and me like she just didn't like because I was a troublemaker and like I was a troubled child so she just didn't like me and I didn't like her. I thought she loved my sister and my dad loved my sister. (Female participant #2)

Another participant also reported that from an early age he was influenced by a certain group of boys he wanted to emulate. He saw them as his role models and therefore acted in ways that they did which contributed to him being labeled as a troublemaker. He stated that:

Probably as early as grade 1 I'd say. Because there was a couple of boys older than me who I thought were really cool so I started by just getting some shoes that they had like not exactly but so say they would wear sneakers, I'd buy a pair of

sneakers, white sneakers, so I'd be like them. They wore chains, so I bought a chain right and then I so then I saw they would talk they would eat lunch outside of school which sometimes you weren't allowed to do so then I would try to do that and stuff so it was stuff like that and they would swear sometimes and then I started to like hear the words and say some words and stuff so, I would say that's what I started grade 1. (Participant #7, male)

Lastly, respondent #17 (female) also mentioned that she needed her mother's attention and the lack of it over the years made her engage in other activities to gain her attention.

Because she didn't like how I was acting and I wasn't going to school because like I was like depressed and everything because I didn't have my mother's attention as much as like I needed it. Because I've been through a lot and I never really got to have my mum by myself and I always wanted that to just like talk to her and I never could cuz she would always put something else in front of me like her boyfriends or her friends and stuff like that. Like she, she kicked me out when I was 18. I had to move out and she was like before then she had boyfriends and I wouldn't like her boyfriends and like still to this day like if her boyfriend is in a bad mood I can't go over and see her and like just stuff like that and like I feel that my mother doesn't want to see me and doesn't want me around.

The results from the study showed that certain factors such as mental health and other personal factors such as abusive environments, substance abuse, strict religious norms and rules, and anti-social role models contributed to the initial behaviour that resulted in the participants being labeled or it influenced their behaviour into further deviance. These aspects can be considered as risk factors in the sense that there were

adverse challenges in the lives of the young adults. These challenges may have served as obstacles during the life course of the young adults which they had to overcome in order to change the trajectory of their lives, proving the nature and extent of their resilience. However, not all the threats identified within this study fall within traditionally identified risk factors in resilience literature (e.g., strict religious rules). In contrast, resilience theory highlights the exposure of children and youth to threats such as low socioeconomic status, divorce, exposure to substance abuse, massive community trauma, domestic violence, incarcerated parent, early parenthood and anti-social role models, which makes them susceptible to negative outcomes and which they are able to overcome (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Masten, 2001; Notter et. al, 2008).

### **Protective Factors**

The participants identified features which they believed enabled them to overcome the risk factors they encountered in their lives. They attributed their success to having one or more of the following: personal faith; showing their self-worth; being optimistic and positive; external support; support from parents; distance from source of label; and positive role models. The present status of the young adults as either student or patron of the community-based organization for homeless youth did not determine who overcame their label. From each of the two sites where data were collected, five of the young adults indicated that at certain stages in their life course they encountered these protective factors, while five others reported a continuous presence of some of these features in their lives. Participant #1 (female) reported that having a personal faith in God at about the age of seventeen years helped her to overcome the label “bad” and its implications for her life and to become a different person. She gave this account:

That's when I ... found God (laughs) and basically I just said He changed me completely so I mean I let go of all the hurt and the pain and the anger and all the bad things that happened to me and my attitude and did a 360 completely so that's what changed.

She further explained that her determination to succeed urged her on:

Yeah, my education definitely because a lot of like you know some of my mum's boyfriends or other people would say like I'm gonna become nothing, I'm gonna end up pregnant at 15 and have you know what I mean? So it was it was determination to prove them wrong kinda thing that kept me going towards post-secondary education. (Participant #1, female)

Another respondent # 15 (male) also mentioned that his personal faith in God is what impacted a change in his life. He stated that he became a Christian at nineteen years and that's what changed him. When asked why he no longer thought of himself as a troublemaker his remarks was "Because I smartened up. I became a Christian." He elaborated that he succeeded in overcoming his demons with the help of the church clinical team.

Participant #7 described the important role his parents played in his overcoming his label. He stated that his parents always encouraged him to behave well and make good decisions. He had this to say:

I would, I would probably say my parents because what would happen is that my teachers would say I'm bad, my parents would go home and say I'm bad but then my parents always ... be there to say you're bad. You're doing these bad situations, people think you're bad so fix it. And so they would try that, they

would encourage me to be polite. My mum was say thank you, say please and thank you, uhh offer them something to drink, uhh tell them to come sit down, take your grandpa's coat, do all these things. So they were always really giving me ways to be ... to change my label I guess you could say as bad so I definitely say my parents were the reason that I stopped doing those bad behaviours.

When asked about when he began to change, he indicated that it was going to high school. He changed schools in order to get away from his old friends he used to get in trouble with and have a fresh start. He also mentioned that his determination to prove his self-efficacy motivated him:

I think it has. I think it has because when I was getting in trouble my marks were always good but a lot of people said I won't be able to do it if I ... like doing all these bad things and so it made me wanna show them that you know what, I'm past that. I can do this because I'm not that person anymore. (Participant #7, male)

This interviewee also mentioned that he received support from his teacher who helped him to prevail over the label bad. He explained that his intentions to change his ways began around 10 years and this culminated with the advice from his teacher who was also a neighbour who encouraged him to focus on his studies. This he believes helped shape his life. This is highlighted in his response:

I, I should say I came to that realization at age, I think age 9, 10. I can't put my but I, I was in grade 5 then. Later part in grade 5... what I observed was that I was becoming more bonded with my colleagues in school rather than those at home and then fortunately for me some of my colleagues I was playing with at home

came to my school so from grade 5 upwards we were all together in school and so I thought then why not just play in school with these people then after school that will be, that will be it. And I, I think I also mentioned this earlier in grade 4, latter part in grade 4, my, my teacher was advising me and so I thought normally people see their teachers as role models so I thought that no, this man may have seen something good in me that's why he was advising me. And so now on one hand I have my friends in school that I can play with, on the other hand my teacher is advising me so why don't I listen to his advice, play only in school with my friends who in any way, I will play with at home. So why don't I just stop the one at home and play in school and just enjoy it and be free. (Participant #10, male)

Similarly this respondent also mentioned that he received support from teachers and friends at certain points in his life which helped in his prevailing over his label. He stated that:

Oh yeah oh yeah, I'd always have a teacher, friend, somebody that would be helping me out in the long run. (Participant #5, male)

He had also previously indicated that he did not think of himself as a bad person because he did not let the opinion of others get to him. He had a positive outlook on himself:

But like I said I don't really care what people say. It's what I think about myself. Everybody has the right to their own opinion. I think of myself as awesome. (Participant #5, male)

Participant #2 (female) described her moving away from home as the turning point in her life. She divulged that the separation from her mother and others who had labeled her in

the past has contributed to her ability in overcoming the label of troublemaker. This is captured in her response:

Yeah, like I know that I've changed as a person. Even in the past year, like I think that like having like to live on my own and to not have them around like my parents and the people who have called me that like throughout the years, having them not in my life makes me see myself differently, so I see myself a lot differently than I did as a kid and I act a lot differently like I would never do half of the things that I've done umm, I just think that umm, it cost me, like them calling me names like that have caused me not to like myself and then, that caused and not liking myself caused me to act out towards others because if you don't like yourself then how are you supposed to like other people so.

Similarly this interviewee also stated that she moved away from the source of her label and it has helped her to overcome her label. She stated that "I stopped talking to a lot of people cuz I've moved a lot so I haven't lived in [name of city]". She also disclosed that the birth of her child has helped in overcoming the label. Her response to the question of why she no longer thought of herself as a troublemaker was "I don't have to worry about that I have a son now I care about. I just hope that he's not crazy when he's older".

(Participant #13, female)

Last, this participant divulged that the label did not influence her present decision and career choice due to a culmination of factors. She was separated from her mother and step-father by FACS at age fifteen so her interaction with her mother who was the initial source of the label "whore" was truncated. Her entry into high school also signified an end to labeling by her peers. She stated that "Actually since I've been in

high school, no one has really called me any of those names. It was only in elementary school. As soon as I got to high school it all stopped; it was really weird”. (Participant #9, female)

For the young adults who were able to overcome their label so that it did not influence their current decisions and those that it did influence their current decisions but positively, they intimated that they achieved this through personal faith, distancing themselves from the source of label, receiving support from others, determination, having positive attitude/disposition, and family support which are considered protective factors in resilience.

Similarly, protective factors are key features identified in the field of resilience which account for the ability of individuals to triumph over the dangers they are exposed to during the course of their lives and have successful outcomes. For instance Zimmerman, Stoddard, Eisman, Caldwell, Aiyer and Miller (2013) in their study “Adolescent Resilience: Promotive Factors That Inform Prevention ” highlighted three protective factors which had been instrumental in designing two interventions. They described how the combination of these features in intervention programmes has been successful with youth at risk. These three features included racial/ethnic identity, caring relationships with adults and participation in organized activities such as church and extracurricular activities in school. Also Smokowski, Reynolds and Bezruczko (1999) conducted a study using the autobiographies of disadvantaged adolescents to ascertain the development of youth resilience and the protective factors involved. Individual attributes such as being optimistic, perseverance, determination and showing their self worth, support within the family (positive role modeling and motivation) and support outside the

family were the main factors discussed in the study. Notter et al. (2008) as indicated earlier, mentioned that personal faith, distance from disruptive source and having support were the factors that helped the women in the trailer parks to overcome their challenging situations. These findings are consistent with the results of this study.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, the informal labeling of the participants had an initial negative impact on the lives of all but two of the participants. Regardless of the type of behaviour deemed unacceptable, the reactions from the significant others (parents, aunts, uncles, boyfriend of mother) of the young adults had an initial negative effect on them. The reactions influenced the identity of the participants in their childhood and teenage years, which had adverse effects on their decision making, behaviour and relationships. This may be due to the significance and authority of the caregivers in the formation of the sense of self of the young adults. However most of them were able to overcome the label in their late teens and early adulthood suggesting resilience or the absence of contributing factors such as mental health and infrequent labeling experiences.

There was no substantial, observable gender disparity in the effect of the labels. An interesting discovery within this study is the fact that the current status of the participants of either university student or patron of the community based organization for homeless youth did not determine who overcame their label or not and who did not internalize their label. Each individual's specific factors determined that outcome. This study also provides evidence of informal labels on parent-sibling dynamics. The reason some participants were not influenced by the labels in their early adulthood may be due to resilience, the absence of other contributing factors such as mental health and other

individual circumstances such as infrequent labeling experiences or not integrating the label into their identity at all. However those who were not able to overcome the perceptions of others about themselves continue to identify themselves through their negative labels and this continues to affect their actions presently. This can be attributed to the fact that they have been labeled bad or troublesome recently and continue to struggle with what the label means in their lives. Also some of these participants still struggle with mental health issues which make them vulnerable to labeling, since it leads to engagement in behaviour for which they are continuously being labeled.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The findings within this study hold a number of implications for policy makers, parents and society at large. To start, one implication of the findings is that informal labeling or labels from significant others, specifically parents and other care givers, had initial negative consequences on the lives of the labeled. This appeared to be due to the authority they had in shaping the self –concept of the young adults since they were pivotal in socializing them and therefore in determining their rules for behaviour. The effects of the labels were sometimes irrevocable, but the majority overcame the label, showing resilience. This suggests that the continuous labeling of children as “bad” or “troublemaker” constitutes verbal abuse and must therefore be discouraged among parents and caregivers. Also, parents need to be made aware of the power they have in influencing the sense of self of their children so they are more intentional about what they say or teach their children. Protective factors such as support from parents and other mentors or role models, participation in organized activities such as church and extracurricular activities, and optimism (Smokowski et. al, 1999; Zimmerman et. al,

2013) should be encouraged in the lives of children struggling with labels. However, for the few that could not overcome their labels, further research should be undertaken in order to create appropriate preventive measures.

An implication for policy makers is ensuring that parents and teachers are educated in order that they are able to distinguish between a badly behaved child and a child who suffers from a mental health issue. This should enable them to seek assistance from the right source to aid with caring for that child and to provide the proper support they need rather than labeling them, since mental health was identified in this study as a contributing factor to increased negative behaviour or the initial labeled behaviour (Masten, 2001; Notter et. al, 2008).

One major recommendation is for health workers to encourage participation in parenting programs for expecting couples where they can be made aware of the extent of influence language has in shaping children's lives and be encouraged to be supportive of their children.

A recommendation for health workers is that due to the impact on family relations, children, on the whole, must be encouraged to seek assistance from school counselors when there is a need so that those who have been labeled can get help. Also the school counselors should liaise with family counselors to help the family as a whole. Support from family, school and community at large is essential in helping children experiencing such situations beat the odds of a negative outcome.

### **Limitations**

This study adds to the scarce research in the area of informal labeling and its impact on the identity and future outcomes for young adults who were labeled as

children, and addresses some gaps within the literature. There are, however, some limitations which future studies may address. In this study the data were not analyzed based on culture. Future studies could examine cultures within different countries to determine if there were any cultural differences in the behaviour that was labeled as deviant or the way in which the label was integrated into a child/youth's sense of self (Reese, Haden & Fivush, 1996; Fivush, 2011). In addition, this may bring to light other factors which could not be addressed within this research. For instance, in examining a collectivist versus an individualistic society, the impact of a label may have more negative effects on the labeled, in a collectivist society due to the close knit ties than in an individualistic society. Again, in specifically examining a collectivist society like Ghana, lineage may play a greater role in determining the impact of a label on a person. In Ghana where lineage is traced either matrilineally or patrilineally, the lineage of an individual determines who has authority within a family and therefore may determine the labeler as well as the extent of influence the label has on a child.

A second limitation of this study is the sample recruited for the study. While a strength of this study was that young adults from one post-secondary institution, specifically a university and an organization for homeless youth were included, the sample may not be representative of the experiences all young adults who have been labeled as children. Future studies may wish to recruit from other organizations or colleges and the general public to have a broader view and understanding of the concept of informal labeling.

A third limitation of this study was the lack of any formal steps to check the reliability of my study creates a limitation for this study. The limitation of not having a

reliability check is that my personal biases may have influenced the interpretation of the data since I used my own interpretive lens. However, I feel that this potential bias was greatly reduced through the extensive discussions on the data and its interpretation I had with my advisor.

A fourth limitation is the difficulty in differentiating between the effects of the label and the behaviour. Indeed, labeling theory explains that a label is ascribed to a person as a result of the reaction to his/her behaviour by another person. Implying that a behaviour will precede a label. Also, labeling theory further explains that a label increases the likelihood of engagement in further deviant behaviour which Lemert explained as the formation of the secondary deviant. This is consistent with the findings from my study since the majority of participants indicated that they were mostly compelled to engage in further deviant behaviour due to the label. Therefore, future studies may examine the differences in the effect of a label and the effect of behaviour.

The final limitation of this study is that the examination of behaviours labeled did not include a distinction between the behaviour which is as a result of underlying genetic trait such as mental health and behaviour which may be as a result of external influences. Future research should examine this distinction.

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## Appendix A

**Were YOU called**  
**Bad, Trouble Maker**  
**etc**  
**as a CHILD in your**  
**Family?**

**Volunteers needed:** to participate in a study, which explores the impact of negative childhood labels on the identity (sense of self) of children and young adults

.

**Participation in this study will involve a confidential 60 minutes interview**

## **PARTICIPANTS WILL RECEIVE A \$10 GIFT CARD FROM WALMART FOR THEIR TIME**

### **Requirements**

Students studying at (name of institution) between the ages of 16-30 who have had a negative label applied to their behaviour in their early childhood for example “bad”, “trouble maker” as a result of a particular behaviour

**For more information please contact**

**Rosemary- [rs11tq@brocku.ca](mailto:rs11tq@brocku.ca)**

Supervisor: Dr. Heather Chalmers [hchalmers@brocku.ca](mailto:hchalmers@brocku.ca)

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics Brock University **[REB #13-129]** 905.688.5550 (ext 3035)

### **Appendix B**

**Were YOU called**

**Bad, Trouble**

**Maker etc**

**as a CHILD in your**

**Family?**

**Volunteers needed:** to participate in a study, which explores the impact of negative childhood labels on the identity (sense of self) of children and young adults

.

**Participation in this study will involve a confidential 60 minutes interview**

**PARTICIPANTS WILL RECEIVE A \$10 GIFT CARD  
FROM WALMART FOR THEIR TIME**

**Requirements**

Patrons of (name of organization) between 16 – 30 years who have had a negative label applied to their behaviour in their early childhood for example “bad”, “trouble maker” as a result of a particular behaviour.

**For more information please contact**

**Rosemary- [rs11tq@brocku.ca](mailto:rs11tq@brocku.ca)**

Supervisor: Dr. Heather Chalmers [hchalmers@brocku.ca](mailto:hchalmers@brocku.ca)

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics Brock University **[REB #13-129]** 905.688.5550 (ext 3035)

**Appendix C**

## Participant Description

Participant	Gender	Age	Status	Culture	Birth Order	Mother's Occupation	Father's Occupation	Initial Age of Label	Label	Labeler
1	F	24	Student	Black Jamaican	Middle Child	Travel Agent	N/A	4/5	Bad	Grandmother Aunts, Mother Cousins
2	F	19	Student	Canadian	First Born	Secretary	Truck Driver	4	Troublemaker	Parents, Mother's friend,  Classmate & Her mother
3	M	24	Student	Pakistani	3 <sup>rd</sup> Born	Home maker	Own Business	6/7	Foxy and Mad	Uncle, Entire

										Family, Parents
4	F	23	Patron of Communi ty-based Organizat ion for Homeless Youth	Caucasi an	Young est of 4 Sibling s	Worked Many Jobs	Army	3	Bad	Sisters, Aunt, Mother, Neighbour s, teachers
5	M	17	Patron of Communi ty-based Organizat ion for Homeless Youth	Caucasi an	First of 5 Sibling s	N/A	Roofer	7/8	Bad	Nanny, Uncles, Foster Parents
6	M	20	Student	South Asian	Eldest of 3 sibling s	Doctor	Banker	6/7	Bad and Naughty	Mother, Father, Brothers, Uncles and Aunts

7	M	19	Student	Canada n	Oldest of 2 Childr en	Nurse	Factory	4	Bad	Parents and Teachers
8	M	20	Patron of Communi ty-based Organizat ion for Homeless Youth	Canada n Native	Young est of 2 Childr en	Grocery Store	N/A	10	Bad	Mother, Mother's  Boyfriend, Teachers
9	F	16	Patron of Communi ty-based Organizat ion for Homeless Youth	Canada n	3 <sup>rd</sup> Born	Home Maker	Truck Driver	7/8	Thief and Whore	Mother, Friends, Ex- boyfriend
10	M	29	Student	Ghanaia n	2 <sup>nd</sup> Born	Self- Employed Trader	Teacher	8	Bad	Father, Sister

11	M	19	Patron of Communi ty-based Organizat ion for Homeless Youth	Middle Eastern and Europea n	First of 4 Childr en	Grocery Store	Mechani c	5	Bad	Mother
12	F	17	Patron of Communi ty-based Organizat ion for Homeless Youth	Aborigi nal	First of 2 Childr en	On Welfare and Works at Bingo Hall	N/A	8/11	Bad	Mother, Grand- mother, Aunts, Uncles
13	F	19	Patron of Communi ty-based Organizat ion for Homeless Youth	Caucasi an	Oldest of 2 Childr en	Gas Station	Roofer	15	Troublema ker, Bad	Mother, Grand- parents, Principal and Teachers

[illegible]

17	F	19	Patron of Communi ty-based Organizat ion for Homeless Youth	Canada n	2 <sup>nd</sup> of Two Childr en	Telemark eter	N/A	5	Trouble maker	Grand parents
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**Appendix D**

## RESEARCH GUIDE

Demographics:

Age

Gender

What position do you occupy in the sibling order?

When growing up what was your:

- Mother's job
- Father's job

As a child what did you do for fun?

Probes:

- Did you play any sport
- Were you in any clubs
- Did you take any music lessons
- Did you read books, magazines
- Did you play computer games
- Were you on the internet – what did you do or look at

What form of spirituality do you subscribe to?

1. Do you remember how old you were the first time a member of your family called you a name (eg. bad) or applied a negative label to a behaviour of yours?
2. Can you describe where you were when this happened?

3. Can you describe to me the incident(s) that led to you being called that name for your behaviour?
4. Can you tell me who it was and what name (he/she/they) called you?
5. Was it the only time that this person ever called you that name or he/she often called you that name for any behaviour he/she considered wrong?
6. Can you describe to me what happened in the other instances?
7. Did he/she/they call you other names as well?
8. Were there other people in your family who repeated any of these names for behaviours they considered wrong?
9. Can you give me some details as to who it was, where, when and how it happened?
10. Did other people outside of your family also call you names?
11. Can you tell me who it was and the incidents that led to it?
12. In recent times have there been instances where people have repeated any of the names you had been called during your childhood for a behaviour they perceived as wrong?
13. Can you describe these instances for me?
14. Can you recount any instances where you were in serious trouble at home, school or with the law?
15. Did you think about why they called you those names?

Probes:

- Did you think you had actually done something wrong?
- If not, did you think you were wrongly accused

- How did that make you feel at the time?
- How do you feel about it now?

16. Did it ever make you think or feel that you were the name they called you?

17. Were there times when you felt it was expected of you to do something that you thought was wrong?

18. If so, can you describe those moments if there were any such instances?

19. Is this label still in your head?

20. If not, what have you done to not believe the label?

Probes:

- Did you engage in religious activities?
- Did you have supportive friends, parents, siblings or teachers?

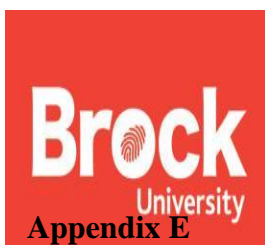
21. If yes, does the label or has it influenced any decisions you have made and if so, how?

22. Describe any ways in which this label affected how you related to other people?

23. Do you think of yourself as the name you were labeled with?

24. Does this label continue to have any impact if at all on you today; more specifically your I. Relationship with your family

II. Career choice or level of education



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**Brock University**

**Research Ethics Office**

**Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035**

**Email: reb@brocku.ca**

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**Social Science Research Ethics Board**

**Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research**

DATE: February 10, 2014

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: CHALMERS, Heather - Child and Youth Studies

FILE: 13-129 - CHALMERS

TYPE: Master's Thesis/Project STUDENT: Rosemary Solomon

SUPERVISOR: Heather Chalmers

TITLE: Labeling in Childhood

### **ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED**

Type of Clearance: MODIFICATION

Expiry Date: 1/30/2015

The Brock University Social Sciences Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named  
~~research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to~~  
the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted  
from **2/10/2014** to **1/30/2015**.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a  
minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are  
required to submit a Renewal form before

**1/30/2015**. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

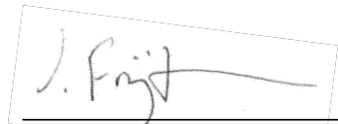
To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at <http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms>.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jan Frijters, Chair

Social Sciences Research Ethics Board

**Note:** Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.

## **Appendix F**

### **Consent Form**

Date: 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2013

Project Title: Labeling in Childhood

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Heather Chalmers, Professor

Department of Child and Youth Studies

Brock University

9056885550 ext 3191, hchalcmers@brocku.ca

Student Principal Investigator (SPI): Rosemary Solomon

Graduate Student

Department of Child and Youth Studies

Brock University

rs11tq@brocku.ca

## **INVITATION**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine what effects the labeling of children as deviant has on them with a primary focus on informal labeling. You are invited to participate in an interview to give an account of your personal experience with labeling in childhood and how that has either affected or not influenced who you are (sense of self/ identity). That is, to find out if the label affected how you thought and behaved or it did not have any effect on you at all. Participation in this study is voluntary and at any point the decision to participate or not participate will be kept confidential. The decision to withdraw participation from this

study can also be made at any time during the interview without any penalty. This research is being conducted in fulfillment of a Master's thesis.

### **WHAT'S INVOLVED**

As a participant, you will be asked demographic questions (eg., gender, guardian's occupation, if you subscribe to a form of religion, position in the sibling order etc). You will also answer specific questions pertaining to your personal experiences with labeling in childhood and how that may have impacted your sense of self (eg., "Do you remember how old you were the first time a member of your family called you a name or applied a negative label eg. "bad" to a behaviour of yours?"). You are permitted to take a break halfway through the interview if you wish to do so. The interview session is expected to last approximately 60 minutes. As a participant, you are at liberty to withdraw from the research at any point in time without fear of any penalty. The interview session will be held in a quiet and private room at (name of university). The interview session will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription and analysis. You will be asked at intervals during the interview whether you still want to continue to ensure you are comfortable with the interview process.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS**

The scientific community will benefit from this research. This study will contribute to the growing literature on labeling and more precisely, the informal labeling of children. This study may be new in the field as there is a lack of information regarding specifically the

informal labeling of children as deviant and how it affects their sense of self. You will get the opportunity to have your voice heard and also be able to examine how the childhood labels may have affected your life. You will receive a \$10 gift card as a token of appreciation for your time.

There also may be risks associated with participation. The interview questions might trigger some feelings that may cause you some emotional and psychological stress. Should you become upset, there is the option to either stop the interview or skip the question. In addition, you will be given a list of support services namely Distress Centre of Niagara and personal counselling and student health services at Brock University to seek help should the need arise. Please note that all your responses will be kept strictly confidential and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without the fear of any penalty.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information shared will be kept confidential. Your name will not be included or associated with any thesis or report resulting from this study; however permission will be sought to use quotations anonymously. The audio tape will be used for the purposes of recording the interview session and transcription. The data collected will be kept in locked filing cabinets with only researchers identified earlier having access.

Data collected during this study will be stored for five years in locked filing cabinets. After the five year period, the data will be confidentially destroyed. Access to this data will be restricted to the principal student investigator, Rosemary Solomon and the faculty supervisor, Dr. Heather Chalmers.

### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may skip any question or stop your participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. That is, you will still receive \$10 gift card as a token of appreciation for your time. Should you choose to withdraw from this research you will be asked whether your information collected to the point of withdrawal be included in the study or be confidentially destroyed. If you should decide to withdraw from the study after the interview has been conducted, please contact the principal student investigator via the email address provided above.

### **PUBLICATION OF RESULTS**

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available to you via email. The results will be available in April 2014

### **CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE**

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the principal student investigator, Rosemary Solomon, using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University [file # 13 - 129]. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca).

### **CONSENT FORM**

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I give my permission to use anonymous quotes in reports, publication or presentation resulting from this research

☐ I **do not** give my permission to use anonymous quotes in reports, publications or presentation resulting from this research

Please provide your email address below if you wish to receive a summary copy of the results of this study:

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### **Support Service Numbers**

Distress Centre of Niagara      905 688 3711

Student Health Services      905 688 5550 ext 3243

Student Counselling Services      905 688 5550 ext 3243

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records

## **Appendix G**

### **Consent Form**

Date: 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2013

Project Title: Labeling in Childhood

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Heather Chalmers

Department of Child and Youth Studies

Brock University

9056885550 ext 3191, hchalcmers@brocku.ca

Student Principal Investigator (SPI): Rosemary Solomon

Graduate Student

Department of Child and Youth Studies

Brock University

rs11tq@brocku.ca

## **INVITATION**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine what effects the labeling of children as deviant has on them with a primary focus on informal labeling. You are invited to participate in an interview to give an account of your personal experience with labeling in childhood and how that has either affected or not influenced who you are (sense of self/ identity). That is, to find out if the label affected how you thought and behaved or it did not have any effect on you at all. Participation in this study is voluntary and at any point the decision to participate or not participate will be kept confidential. The decision to withdraw participation from this

study can also be made at any time during the interview without any penalty. This research is being conducted in fulfillment of a Master's thesis.

### **WHAT'S INVOLVED**

As a participant, you will be asked demographic questions (eg., gender, guardian's occupation, if you subscribe to a form of religion, position in the sibling order etc). You will also answer specific questions pertaining to your personal experiences with labeling in childhood and how that may have impacted your sense of self (eg., "Do you remember how old you were the first time when a member of your family called you a name or applied a negative label eg. "bad" to a behaviour of yours?"). You are permitted to take a break halfway through the interview if you wish to do so. The interview session is expected to last approximately 60 minutes. As a participant, you are at liberty to withdraw from the research at any point in time without fear of any penalty. The interview session will be held in a quiet and private room at (name of local organization). The interview session will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription and analysis. You will be asked at intervals during the interview whether you still want to continue to ensure you are comfortable with the interview process.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS**

The scientific community will benefit from this research. This study will contribute to the growing literature on labeling and more precisely, the informal labeling of children. This study may be new in the field as there is a lack of information regarding specifically the

informal labeling of children as deviant and how it affects their sense of self. You will get the opportunity to have your voice heard and also be able to examine how the childhood labels may have affected your life. You will receive a \$10 gift card as a token of appreciation for your time.

There also may be risks associated with participation. The interview questions might trigger some feelings that may cause you some emotional and psychological stress. Should you become upset, there is the option to either stop the interview or skip the question. In addition, you will be given a list of support services namely personal counseling at The Raft, Distress Centre Niagara to seek help should the need arise. Please note that all your responses will be kept strictly confidential and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without the fear of any penalty.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information shared will be kept confidential. Your name will not be included or associated with any thesis or report resulting from this study; however permission will be sought to use quotations anonymously. The audio tape will be used for the purposes of recording the interview session and transcription. The data collected will be kept in locked filing cabinets with access only by researchers identified earlier.

Data collected during this study will be stored for five years in locked filing cabinets. After the five year period, the data will be confidentially destroyed. Access to this data

will be restricted to the principal student investigator, Rosemary Solomon and the faculty supervisor, Dr. Heather Chalmers.

### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may skip any question or stop your participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. That is, you will still receive \$10 gift card as a token of appreciation for your time. Should you choose to withdraw from this research you will be asked whether your information collected to the point of withdrawal be included in the study or be confidentially destroyed. If you should decide to withdraw from the study after the interview has been conducted, please contact the principal student investigator via the email address provided above.

### **PUBLICATION OF RESULTS**

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available to you via email. The results will be available in April 2014

### **CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE**

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the principal student investigator, Rosemary Solomon, using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University [file # 13 - 129]. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca).

### **CONSENT FORM**

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I give my permission to use anonymous quotes in reports, publication or presentation  
resulting from this research

☐ I **do not** give my permission to use anonymous quotes in reports, publications or  
presentation  
resulting from this research

Please provide your email address below if you wish to receive a summary copy of the  
results of this study:

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### **Support Service Numbers**

Distress Centre of Niagara

905 688 3711

(Name of local organization)

905 984 4365

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

