

## Applying Labelling Theory to Selected Short Stories by James T. Farrell

Afra S. Alshiban\*

Al Imam University, Saudi Arabia

**Corresponding Author:** Afra S. Alshiban, E-mail: [afraalshiban@yahoo.com](mailto:afraalshiban@yahoo.com)

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### ABSTRACT

For decades, “societal reaction theory” or “labelling theory” has provided the most significant explanation for deviant behaviour, particularly in the case of juveniles. The theory argues that once a stigma is attached to an individual, an irreversible process occurs whereby the labelled individual begins to identify as deviant and to embark on a deviant career. Hence, rather than deter bad behaviour, stigmatisation and shaming serve only to amplify it. Although the labelling perspective is rooted in sociology, we find proponents of some version of labelling theory in other disciplines, even in literature. The present study posits that in the short stories of Irish-American writer James Thomas Farrell entitled “Big Jeff,” “The Fastest Runner on Sixty-First Street,” “Young Convicts,” and “The Scarecrow,” labelling processes emerge as essential elements in a comprehensive understanding of each story. All four stories are the least critically acknowledged works by the author even though they demonstrate the author’s remarkable talent for illuminating the social and psychological factors associated with deviant behaviour among juveniles.

### INTRODUCTION

James Thomas Farrell (1904-1979) was a prolific writer, producing more than 250 short stories and 25 novels. He also lectured, travelled, and received honorary doctorates. His scholarly output expanded to nonfiction, including historical and critical writing (*A Note on Literary Criticism* in 1936, *The League of Frightened Philistines* in 1945, *Literature and Morality* in 1947, *Reflections at Fifty* in 1954), and essays on social criticism. Despite his impressive oeuvre, he is remembered today, if at all, for his *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, often called “Farrell’s best works” (Branch 16) and “acclaimed as modern classics” (Landers Inner Cover Page). This emphasis on Farrell’s trilogy of novels about a troubled youth from Chicago’s South Side does little justice to the author of *The Silence of History* (1963) and *A Brand New Life* (1968). More importantly, a focus on the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, according to critic Jack Robbins, “may have had the effect of discouraging serious critics of literature from paying sufficient attention to [other] novels and stories” (ix).

Farrell was a genius, a literary giant, equal in calibre to Dos Passos, Hemingway, and Faulkner. His naturalistic fiction introduced characters professed by critic Joseph Warren Beach in 1941 to be “among the memorable people in English fiction” (qtd. in Landers ix). Farrell’s novels provide the reader not only with life-like characters, but also a clear

picture of American life as experienced by Irish-American immigrants of the working class in the early twentieth century. It has often been said of Farrell’s fictitious works in general that “they were ‘sociology’ as much as art” (Landers ix). His biographer, Robert Landers, claims that his sense of realism “was such that it almost seems as if he must have been there” (180). When *Young Lonigan: A Boyhood in Chicago Streets* was first published in 1932, the cover cautioned readers:

This novel is issued in a special edition, the sale of which is limited to physicians, surgeons, psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, social workers, teachers, and other persons having a professional interest in the psychology of adolescents. (Farrell *Young Lonigan* Book Cover)

The story about Chicago’s seedy South Side with its extensive use of slang, racial slurs, and sexual frankness was considered too raw for the reading public. One reviewer remarked that “it might be of interest to social scientists who like their case histories fictionalized” (Landers 110). The fact that the introduction was written by Farrell’s friend, the sociologist Frederic M. Thrasher, an authority on gang behaviour, only confirmed the warnings.

*The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan* (1934), the second of the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, was also cautioned against for its hardboiled realism. Lewis Gannett of the *Herald Tribune*

called it “A Gangster’s Boyhood,” adding that “the book is rough, tough, and foul-mouthed, like the slum boy it pictures, and sex-obsessed but disgustingly convincing. It is rather a clinical portrait than a work of art.” Gannett’s remark did not go unnoticed, and the following day, John Chamberlain wrote a reply in his column in the *New York Times* defending the novel: “The adjective ‘clinical’ is usually applied in a derogatory sense, as if to say, ‘This is not art.’ However, if a work of art consists of presenting material in its most effective—i.e., its most artistic—form, then ‘*The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan*’ is a work of art” (qtd. in Landers 124). Most critics shared Chamberlain’s opinion, calling Farrell’s work “accurate and convincing,” especially since it addressed topics seldom approached in fiction (Landers 125). Literary critic Ellen Skerrett praises the author’s fidelity to facts, commenting: “With his interest in human character and behavior, his eye for detail, and his intimate knowledge of city life, Farrell could have been one of the University of Chicago’s great sociologists” (128).

Farrell’s reputation soared during the Depression when realism was highly valued. However, interest waned as the 1930s ended. He began to be viewed as “a pessimistic determinist, negative and unwholesome” (Branch 10). Some critics even remarked that he was trapped in his boyhood, while others perceived his writing as repetitious and graceless. Still others called him “a notebook writer, a photographic realist who literally reports facts or case histories” (Branch 10). Robert Fyne claims that when realism went out of fashion, so did Farrell, “as different forms of fiction quickly emerged” (90). Alan Wald similarly maintains that Farrell’s reputation plummeted when critics began to view him as “a prisoner of naturalism” (260).

Farrell biographers, Edgar Branch and Robert Landers, suggest that the writer’s political views in the 1930s also contributed to his unpopularity. Although Farrell was actively involved in the politics of his times, he opposed the Communist Party USA and attacked the communist-dominated League of American Writers (Branch 7). In *A Note on Literary Criticism*, Farrell defends the integrity of art against the corruption of political propaganda, an attitude that:

... made several enemies who established an unjust and unfounded literary party-line about his work. *Studs Lonigan* was characterized as credible but limited fiction... and Farrell’s subsequent books were often dismissed as obsessive and clumsy reworkings of the same materials. some of these critics went on to become respected shapers of literary reputation in the 1940s and 1950s. who came to embrace a high modernist/New Critical aesthetic. (Landers 125)

Charles Fanning agrees with Branch and Landers, remarking that no American writer to date “has been worse served by the critics than James T. Farrell” (3). It was not until the late 1970s that Farrell gained some recognition when he received honorary doctorate degrees from multiple universities. He was also awarded \$7,500 from the National Endowment for the Arts and received the University of Chicago Alumni Association’s Professional Achievement Award in 1979. Fanning calls for a reconsideration of his

work, especially the *O’Neil-O’Flaherty* pentalogy, “which bore the brunt of critical ostracism and misreading” (“Rediscovering James T. Farrell” 3-4). Equally important, as the current study argues, are his short stories, which received relatively little attention, even though the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy and the *O’Neil-O’Flaherty* pentalogy both evolved from short stories, “Studs” (1929) and “Jim O’Neill” (1932), respectively. Farrell, in fact, valued the short story so much that he credited this particular genre for his career in fiction, confessing:

I began not as a novelist, but as a short story writer. For more than two years after I had decided to become a writer, I worked to write publishable short stories. Long before I had completed the first volume of the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, my short stories had received recognition. Ezra Pound tried to get me a publisher for four of my stories which he himself selected. Had he succeeded, *Young Lonigan* [1932] would not have been my first book. (Farrell “Preface” xiii)

In his Preface to *The Short Stories of James T. Farrell*, Farrell applauds realist writers who began to articulate the experience of ordinary people in American society, namely, immigrant groups, the poor, and the working class who “had hitherto received false and patronizing treatment, or no attention at all” (xix-xx). Farrell admired this approach to fiction and, in a manner similar to his predecessors, produced 250 realistic short stories that “embody scientific methods” and “treat character as the product of environment” (Farrell “Preface” xx). Literary critic Jack Robbins commends the stories’ subject matter, narrative style, characterisation, and “depth of understanding of concrete situations in the human condition” (viii). Robert Lovett, another critic, also praises the stories, viewing them as remarkable “sketches of characters and episodes” (“Introduction” xxxii), and Fanning calls them “strong” (“Introduction” xxi).

Despite the positive reviews, the short stories have seldom been considered seriously, even though they offer the reader a rare glimpse into the psychology of adolescent boys and girls. In *An Honest Writer*, Landers quotes Farrell as saying of his own fiction in general:

In my fiction. I am concerned with the concrete processes whereby society, through the instrumentality of social institutions, forms and molds characters, giving to the individual the very content of his consciousness. Insofar as my stories deal with boys growing up, the exploration of the psychology of boyhood affords me a better opportunity to reveal these processes concretely than does the depiction of adults. (qtd. in Landers 245)

Farrell was by no means exaggerating. Wald explains that the author was profoundly influenced by the Freudian psychiatrist Paul Schilder, especially his conviction that “human character is a social product” (252). Another, more prominent, influence on the writer was the sociologist Frederic M. Thrasher, who did extensive research on juvenile delinquency (more on Thrasher later). It is for this reason that the bulk of Farrell’s fiction, particularly his short stories, centre on the experiences of adolescents in their daily environments (Wald 252). To demonstrate this point, the present

study examines four of Farrell's short stories entitled "Big Jeff," "The Fastest Runner on Sixty-First Street," "Young Convicts," and "The Scarecrow" in two particular short story collections: *Chicago Stories* (1934) and *The Short Stories of James T. Farrell* (1945). The choice fell on these works in particular because in all four the author showcases the consequences of stigmatisation and shaming on juveniles. Thus, he proves that deviant behaviour is socially created. In "Big Jeff," for example, an overweight Jewish boy takes to robbing, hustling, and pimping because he is perceived as "innately immoral, devious, and fundamentally different from other people" (Bernburg 189). In "The Fastest Runner on Sixty-First Street," the son of Polish immigrants is stereotyped as possessing undesirable traits associated with Polish people, leading him to project his feelings of inadequacy onto African-American youths, whom he considers to be lower on the social scale. Farrell's adolescents in "Young Convicts" also experience stigmatisation. Even though their behaviour consistently falls short of any serious crime, the attachment of the delinquent label has profound implications in the classroom, at home, and on the streets. The shamed individuals in these three stories are teenage boys, while in "The Scarecrow" the consequences of branding a teenage girl suggest that even females are not exempt from the power of words. These four short stories are Farrell's least critically acknowledged works, even though they demonstrate the author's remarkable talent for illuminating the social and psychological factors related to juvenile deviant behaviour.

In selecting the four stories for discussion, I have been guided primarily by the sociological theory termed "societal reaction theory," better known as "labelling theory," which postulates that once an individual is labelled as a deviant, he/she can never escape the deviant role. That is, one drinks because one is labelled an alcoholic; one acts crazy because one is designated a psychotic; one steals because one is labelled a thief; one acts as a sexual deviant because one is labelled promiscuous. Hence, shaming or labelling individuals encourages the very behaviour being specified in the label. Sociologist and anthropologist Walter Gove explains this as "a profound and frequently irreversible socialization process" whereby the labelled individual acquires an inferior status and develops a deviant worldview (7). The new self-concept, according to criminologist Johannes Knutsson, gives "rise to deviant careers in which the individual, little by little, develops a deviant identity. He has become what people have said he was from the start" (10). Although this labelling perspective is rooted in sociology, we find supporters in psychology, psychiatry, anthropology, criminology, and even the literary field. Hence, this interdisciplinary study applies the labelling viewpoint to Farrell's fiction to provide a better understanding of each story. Farrell's fictional juveniles are all social products. Their self-concepts are based entirely on how others view them, thereby making these individuals extremely vulnerable to labelling.

### The Labelling Perspective

The labelling perspective on deviant behaviour centres on the association between social stigma and delinquency.

Social scientist Charles Horton Cooley is credited with laying the groundwork for the theory in 1902 when he theorised that a person's self-image is a reflection of other people's opinion of him/her, as revealed in the person's daily interactions. Cooley called this concept the "looking-glass self" (152). Thrasher expanded on the idea in his epic work on gang behaviour entitled *The Gang* (1927), which examined the negative effects of labelling on young juveniles. Thrasher believed that gang formation was due to collective commonalities shared by the members, specifically, similar cultural and religious backgrounds and also being branded with official labels. Coincidentally, it was Thrasher who wrote the introduction to Farrell's *Studs Lonigan*, as noted earlier, and then confirmed by sociologist James Carey, who calls Thrasher "Farrell's friend" (190).

In 1934, philosopher, sociologist, and psychologist George Herbert Mead advanced the labelling perspective further by introducing a field of inquiry called "symbolic interactionism." This field assumes that self-understanding occurs in the individual through an interchange between the person and his environment. Hence, an individual develops his/her self-concept through countless interactions with others (Mead 5). Austrian-American sociologist and criminologist Frank Tannenbaum supported Mead's view and, four years later, examined it in light of deviant labels. Tannenbaum noted that when community members begin to identify an individual as troublesome, they give that person a negative label, "a definition that [he/she] is evil," even if the person's peers engaged in similar activities. Over time, the individual will assume the given label and act accordingly:

The person becomes the thing he is described as being. Nor does it seem to matter whether the valuation is made by those who would punish or by those who would reform. In either case the emphasis is upon the conduct that is disapproved of. The parents or policeman, the older brother or the court, the probation officer or the juvenile institution. Their very enthusiasm defeats their aim. The harder they work to reform the evil, the greater the evil grows under their hands. The way out is through a refusal to dramatize the evil. The less said about it the better. (Tannenbaum 20)

Tannenbaum's "dramatization of evil" thus became the best explanation for deviance in sociological textbooks and the basis for what officially came to be known as "labelling theory." Fundamental to this theory is the assumption that societal factors are responsible for encouraging delinquent behaviour (mostly among adolescents); therefore, an individual is considered deviant only when community members label him and his behaviour as "evil" (Tannenbaum 21).

In 1967, criminologist Edwin Lemert expanded on the labelling perspective by identifying two primary stages of deviance central to the recent work of labelling analysts—primary deviance and secondary deviance. Primary deviance, according to Lemert, is an act of misconduct committed by most juveniles when they reach a rebellious age and therefore has little or no influence on self-image. In contrast, secondary deviance manifests in the offender when society reacts to his misconduct by labelling him a deviant, produc-

ing an altered self-image (Lemert 273). Hence, it is via secondary deviance that identity problems emerge.

Social psychologist Howard Becker viewed the entire labelling process as selective, noting that targets are almost always the social and political “undesirables” in society (10). In his *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, he maintains that “social groups create deviance by labeling [particular people] as outsiders.” Consequently, “deviant behavior is behavior that people so label” (Becker 9).

Simply put, “the labelled” individuals act out role labels assigned to them by “the labellers,” whom American sociologist Kai Erikson identified as the “audience.” Erikson believed that the social audience (labellers) play a pivotal role in promoting deviant behaviour “since it is the audience which eventually determines whether or not any episode of behavior or any class of episodes is labelled deviant” (Erikson 311). This perspective is noteworthy as it shifts key attention away from the deviator to the reactors, blaming them for the individual’s misconduct. Erikson’s viewpoint was advanced in 1971 by American sociologist and criminologist Edwin Schur, who divided the “audience” into three categories. The first is society at large, “from which emerge general reactions to (and therefore labelings of) various forms of behavior.” The second consists of a person’s peers “by whom he is constantly ‘labelled’ in numerous ways,” and the third, “audience,” comprises government officials and organisational agents of control (Schur 12-13).

Today, only two forms of labelling are acknowledged by labelling theorists—formal and informal labelling (Adams 171). The first alludes to labelling delivered by figures of authority like court officials, judges, and/or the American Criminal Justice System; the second refers to labels given by “significant others,” namely, parents, teachers, and peers (Schur 12). Both will influence behaviour.

In the 1960s and 1970s, labelling theory gained considerable ground and became the best approach to understanding deviant behaviour. However, in the 1980s, the theory lost credibility when “empirical tests had failed to provide consistent support for the proposition that labeling reinforces deviant behavior” (Bernburg 187). The theory was also criticised for failing to recognise different personality traits. Some called the approach “too narrow,” arguing that labelling analysts “are so preoccupied with the social psychology of deviant identity and with the impact of labeling upon the individual deviator that they unwisely neglect structural and systemic ‘causes’ of deviance” (Schur 17). Moreover, many argued that “since the deviant’s behavior is caused by the reaction of his environment, he is without responsibility for it” (Knutsson 13). In recent years, though, theoretical developments relating to the “criminogenic effects of labeling” have helped the theory make a comeback (Bernburg 188).

### Farrell’s Short Fiction and the Labelling Perspective

The labelling school’s social-psychological focus emerges with exceptional accuracy in Farrell’s “Big Jeff,” “The Fastest Runner on Sixty-First Street,” “Young Convicts,” and “The Scarecrow,” where a third-person omniscient narrative is employed to chronicle the influence of labelling on teen-

agers. In “Big Jeff” (1931), labelling materialises as a central factor in the social processes that create deviance. Farrell presents a portrait of a fourteen-year-old Jewish-American boy who “was always easy to laugh at” (Farrell “Big Jeff” 203). Jeff is overweight, nerdy, socially awkward, and physically weak—typifying the stereotypical image of the pubescent Jewish boy. His physical appearance leads the other boys to tag him as “Jeff the fat Jewboy,” “Jeff the fatass of Fifty-Eighth Street,” and other labels that identify him as different (Farrell “Big Jeff” 203). Jeff tries to ignore the labels and to embrace his labellers instead, but they shun him and continue the name-calling. The narrator says: “Jeff wanted to be like the other kids. wanted to be one of them”; however, his efforts prove futile (Farrell “Big Jeff” 204). His grades suffer as a result, and he never passes in school. Jeff “got bigger and bigger. and his classmates got smaller and smaller. the teachers wanted to sock him. they said he would end up in jail. maybe on the gallows” (Farrell “Big Jeff” 204). Jeff’s poor school performance supports labelling theorists’ assertion that “labels affect educational achievement” (Hoffmann 172). Also in keeping with the labelling viewpoint is Jeff’s character transformation from a harmless fourteen-year-old youth to a devious con artist. The story ends with an adult Jeff committing suicide after contracting syphilis from one of the prostitutes he regularly beds, seeming to prove Giza Lopes and his fellow criminologists correct in stating that “labelling early in life has a tremendous influence on the offender in adulthood” (456).

Sociologist Ross Matsueda suggests that self-concepts are influenced by others’ perceptions of the individual (1578). In Jeff’s case, the instant he identifies as being different, his self-image alters, and his criminal career takes off. He first steals money from home: “Jeff stuck his hands in the old man’s pocket. even cheated his own mother,” then he hangs around poolrooms (notorious places for felons), and finally associates with seedy characters. One such character is Big Schmaltz, who “got hot” at the sight of Big Jeff and his “big fanny” and decided to lure him into the bushes to indulge in illicit activities (Farrell “Big Jeff” 203). When a policeman spots the two, Schmaltz flees the scene; Jeff lingers behind and is arrested and charged with sexual misconduct. He is formally labelled as a felon, fined, and released.

Although Jeff is formally labelled a delinquent by the criminal justice system, it is the informal labelling by his teachers and peers that pushes him to further delinquency. Their judgments are significant because they are the people he deals with daily. Criminologist John Hoffmann maintains, “If parents, peers, and adults think of an adolescent as delinquent and he or she incorporates such an image as a key part of the self, then more delinquent behavior is likely” (182). This point is revealed when the narrator says: “Big Jeff got wise. Big Jeff started using his Jewish noodle. Big Jeff started gyping everybody. he stole marbles. candy. money. Jeff stole everything” (Farrell “Big Jeff” 205).

Tannenbaum finds such behaviour understandable, since a labelled individual:

Has gone slowly from a sense of grievance and injustice, of being unduly mistreated and punished, to a rec-

ognition that the definition of him as a human being is different from that of other boys in his neighborhood, his school, street, community. This recognition on his part becomes a process of self-identification. The young delinquent becomes bad because he is defined as bad. There is a persistent demand for consistency in character. (Tannenbaum 17-18)

Jeff adopts the deviant role from adolescence through adulthood, showing “consistency in character” (Tannenbaum 18). Additionally, his criminal activities escalate as he matures, evident when he becomes a pimp, standing on street corners and beckoning men to pay for coitus. He also exploits his sex-workers and sexually assaults them, and when he contracts syphilis from one of the prostitutes, he exacts his revenge: “Big Jeff slept with his last whore. diseased her. and smiling pretended to sleep. stole her money. bought a gun. and the gravediggers cursed all holy hell when they lowered his crated body” (Farrell “Big Jeff” 207).

A noteworthy point is that Jeff’s actions appear to be consistent with anti-Semitic stereotypes, specifically, malice, greed, and miserliness. Farrell’s depiction of his Jewish character is consistent with sociologist William McAuliffe’s assertion that stereotyping “an unwilling recipient” results in the “internalization of the public image and a consequent intensification of the behavior in question along with adoption of other aspects associated with the social role” (211). In the end, Jeff becomes an actual personification of the negative Jewish stereotype—he is hateful and vengeful.

What happens to Jeff is the result of shaming and/or branding at an impressionable stage of life (early adolescence), which Tannenbaum maintains “encourages delinquent and criminal careers” (19). Even Becker suggests that labelling someone as deviant at a young age “sets in motion several mechanisms which conspire to shape the person into a deviant adult” (34). Farrell also employs ellipses throughout his story to emphasise Jeff’s unhealthy transition from harmless adolescent to harmful adult. “Big Jeff,” therefore, is a useful portrait of an individual significantly affected by pervasive stereotyping and labelling.

A similar consequence of labelling occurs in “The Fastest Runner on Sixty-First Street” (1948), where stigma is attached to a fifteen-year-old Polish-American boy named Tony Rabuski. The story is mentioned here because it shows Farrell exploring another aspect of labelling theory, namely, that “disadvantaged groups are more likely than other groups to experience labeling” and they “may be more vulnerable to informal labelling as well” (Bernburg 191). Tony is “the toughest boy in school” and also “the poorest,” and he “would often come to school wearing a black shirt, because a black shirt didn’t show the dirt the way that other shirts did, and his parents couldn’t afford to buy him many shirts” (Farrell “Fastest Runner” 219). Tony exemplifies the stereotype of the poverty-stricken immigrant’s son who is dirty, dim-witted, and penniless, thus leading his peers to label him as “Polack,” “Dirty Polack,” and “Dumb Polack” (Farrell “Fastest Runner” 219, 220, 221). Schur explains that in the 1920s and 1930s, these stereotypes of Polish-Americans received almost continual support from the mass media and

the social discourse (31). Farrell appears aware of this point, hence, his story about a boy of Polish descent who becomes the object of shaming.

“Fastest Runner” takes place at the time of the 1919 Chicago race riots and details the events that lead to the tragic death of fourteen-year-old Morty Aiken, the best and fastest runner on the South Side of Chicago. Morty is introduced as a highly celebrated athlete, admired by all and loved by his parents: “He was a streak of lightning on his feet and on the ice, and that made him feel somehow different from other boys and very important” (Farrell “Fastest Runner” 219). Tony, in contrast, feels different for other reasons. He is the outcast, the labelled, who is “laughed at” and called names. The narrator maintains:

Ever since he had been a little fellow, Tony had often been called a “Polack” or a “dirty Polack.” In his slow way, he thought about these words and what they meant. When you were called certain words, you were laughed at, you were looked at as if something were wrong with you. Being a Polack and being called a Polack was like being called a sonofabitch. It was a name. When you were called a name like this, you were looked at as a different kind of kid from one who wasn’t called a name. Morty Aiken wasn’t called names. (Farrell “Fastest Runner” 219)

Wishing to be more like Morty, Tony befriends the star athlete, telling him one day: “Kid, you run de fastest, I fight de best in de whole school. We make a crack-up team. We’re pals. Shake, kid, we’re pals” (Farrell “Fastest Runner” 219). The two shake hands and become inseparable. However, Morty’s association with Tony ultimately leads to his death, when in his attempt to catch a coloured youth for Tony to bully Morty enters a black neighbourhood and is caught by an angry black mob who slash his throat in retaliation for their unjust treatment by white folks.

In the story, Tony, a victim of labelling his whole life, projects his feelings of inadequacy onto the coloured boys, whom he views as lower on the social scale than he and, therefore, even more deserving of being stigmatised and shamed. By convincing himself that he is not the undesirable, but the blacks are instead, he gains a sense of power: “Tony didn’t want to be called names. He also wanted to have as much fun as the kids had who weren’t called these names. He began to call names. And there was a name even worse than Polack—‘nigger’” (Farrell “Fastest Runner” 221). This projection allows Tony to transfer his self-loathing onto the most vulnerable individuals in the community at the time—African-Americans. Consequently, Tony becomes a labeller too. On this particular point, Becker states, “The person labeled an outsider. may not accept the rule by which he is being judged and may not regard those who judge him as either competent or legitimately entitled to do so”; thus, he makes his own rules (1-2). This assertion clearly applies to Tony, who rationalises his actions by convincing himself that labelling others is the only way he can gain access to the “white” community.

“Young Convicts” (1931) is another fictional construction of the consequences of labelling and details yet another

aspect of labelling theory—the glorification of the deviant identity. Although the majority of adolescents labelled as delinquent object to the label, some bask in their delinquent identities and thrive on being called troublemakers (Schur 22). Hoffmann maintains: “A characteristic of labeling that is frequently ignored by researchers is that delinquency is often attractive to some youths because it is fun and exciting” (180). Farrell illustrates this point in “Young Convicts,” where a group of youths steal, skip school, destroy property, lie, and vandalise because they want to “brag about it” (Farrell “Young Convicts” 177). In this tale, Farrell depicts central themes of crime causation espoused by many labelling theorists, namely, peer influence, poverty, poor academic performance, low-income family functioning (low socio-economic status and large families), and prior delinquency (Loeber and Dishion 87).

The story begins with a detailed account of family life for Farrell’s six adolescents, all offspring of poor Slavic immigrants residing in a neighbourhood plagued by “antisocial lifestyles, unemployment, and ample opportunities for crime” (Loeber and Dishion 90). Their fathers, mothers, and older siblings work in nearby factories: “At six, seven, eight o’clock, rain or shine, morning after morning, all became part of the long line plodding to work.” The boys, on the other hand, go to school but learn nothing because they often skip classes to commit petty crimes. The narrator describes their home life as follows:

Home to each of the kids in the gang was much the same. A wooden shack, one or two stories high, with an outside privy that smelled you out every time you wanted to take a leak. Dark bedrooms, old beds, dirty sheets, two, three, four, and five sleeping together in the same bed, and on cold nights there was always a fight for the blankets. A mother and a father who were generally overtired from work, and from raising a family. And the mother and father didn’t speak English. And once every week, two weeks, three weeks, the mother and father would get drunk. They would curse and fight, throwing things at one another, until the police came with a paddy wagon. These kids’ homes were alike. (Farrell “Young Convicts” 177)

The boys’ chaotic home lives strongly correlate to their delinquency. Psychologists Rolf Loeber and Thomas Dishion argue that “family factors—such as family size, quality of parental supervision, parental drinking habits, employment history, and criminality—are more impressive than any single factor, particularly regarding male delinquency.” Hence, children from large families characterised by instability, inadequate parental supervision, chaos, conflict, and weak family ties “are at much greater risk of becoming delinquent than children from families without these features” (Loeber and Dishion 71). It is understandable, therefore, that Farrell’s juveniles hated their homes.

They also hated school and their teachers. The teachers complained to one another that they wished to be relocated to another school with “a better class of pupils than these incorrigible Polacks” (Farrell “Young Convicts” 177). The boys would skip classes and head to the railroad yards or the stockyards, “going over the fences and leaving with anything

removable that could perhaps be sold” (Farrell “Young Convicts” 177). They revelled in their wrongdoing and could not wait to grow up and attempt hold-ups like their older counterparts. One night, egged on by Tony, their leader, they robbed a gas station. A few days later, they robbed another. This activity continued, as they “enjoyed the fruits of their robbery in candy, cigarettes, and movies” (Farrell “Young Convicts” 178). Tony, in particular, delighted in their successes: “He saw himself as a young Al Capone” (Farrell “Young Convicts” 178).

Tony’s attitude confirms the claim of labelling theorists that labels can be appealing to certain individuals (Hoffmann 180). Tony, who lies and steals, gets “sneaky thrills” because he is “part of a performance that enhances [his] self-concept as [a] competent person who can get away with behaviors that others consciously avoid.” By robbing, conning, and lying, he gains superiority over others. He is thus stronger and more capable than other adolescents because he can get what he wants (Hoffmann 180). Tony’s confidence then balloons to a point where he becomes too ambitious for his own good, ordering his gang of misfits to rob a chain restaurant. When the boys succeed, Tony tells them to rob the same restaurant a second time. However, their luck runs out and they are arrested.

Judge Katherine Henderson in the Juvenile Court is appointed to their case. In court, the boys, accompanied by their poorly dressed parents, await trial along with other felons. The judge hurries through each case, releasing some, placing others on probation, and sending others to the Juvenile Detention Home, all the while telling the immigrant parents “they were responsible for the delinquent conduct of their children” (Farrell “Young Convicts” 179). For Judge Henderson, all these cases are alike; the juvenile problem is unsolvable.

In “The Labeling of Convicted Felons and Its Consequences for Recidivism,” criminologist Ted Chiricos and colleagues argue that “those formally and informally labeled are significantly more likely to recidivate, than those who are not” (547). Tony and his gang are perfect examples. They are formally labelled as delinquents by the criminal justice system and informally labelled “incorrigible Polacks” by their teachers, thus ultimately identifying themselves as “Young Convicts.”

A final point regarding “Young Convicts” is that it expands on the labelling perspective to include groups. On this point, criminologist John Braithwaite maintains: “One of the great contributions of labeling theory, is in showing how stigmatization fosters subculture formation.” By ostracising outcasts, stigmatisation encourages a search for others of a similar fate (Braithwaite 26). Braithwaite’s argument is supported by fellow criminologist Jon Bernburg, who argues that deviant groups are a source of social support wherein deviant labels become accepted, “while at the same time providing collective rationalizations, attitudes, and opportunities that encourage and facilitate deviant behavior” (67). In Farrell’s story, Tony and his gang are clearly outsiders; consequently, “they band together and create deviant subcultures that provide social support for deviant behavior” (Braithwaite 21).

Farrell's concern with the social psychology of the deviating individual continues in "The Scarecrow" (1930), the last story selected for discussion here. This tale about a promiscuous fourteen-year-old girl who becomes the target of name-calling due to her sexual deviancy stands out because it shows the author yet again expanding on the labelling process, this time to include females. Criminologist Ted Chiricos and colleagues maintain that labelling theorists have substantially overlooked the relevance of sex for labelling outcomes. Seldom do critics mention "how labeling effects for women would be different from those for men" (Chiricos et al. 550). Sociologists Dawn Bartusch and Ross Matsueda support this view, arguing that "females may be more sensitive to the perceived costs of labeling, such as informal sanctions, stigmatization, and shaming by significant others" (150). Bartusch and Matsueda add that when parents become unaffectionate toward a female, delinquency increases, especially as "sexual intercourse" (161). "The Scarecrow" impressively illustrates these points through the consequences of informal labelling on a female.

Farrell's teenager, referred to only as the Scarecrow, resides with her single mother in a shabby apartment on Chicago's East Side. Physically, she is described as "scrawny" with "thin features and a "bony, angular body." Morally, she is a girl who is willing to bed any boy with a hint of sexual curiosity (Farrell "Scarecrow" 9). Consequently, she is branded a "disgrace," "harlot," "slut," and "a filthy little whore" by her pious mother, who complains: "I don't know what they can see in you. You're nothing but a homely, bow-legged little beast. But then, I suppose pretty girls don't have to make whores out of themselves for every little bum that comes along the street" (Farrell "Scarecrow" 10).

When the Scarecrow fails to react, her mother's rage only intensifies. She beats her daughter with a rubber hose, spewing: "Go ahead now, cry! Cry, you dirty whore!" (Farrell "Scarecrow" 10). Exhausted, the mother retires to her bedroom and the Scarecrow to her own room. Once in bed and half asleep, "She dreamed that she was the beautiful wife of a handsome millionaire. surrounded by beautiful servants, and she stood in all her beautiful majesty, sentencing her mother to horrible tortures, because she was a mean old witch and a cruel thing" (Farrell "Scarecrow" 11).

Her dream is soon ended by the sound of the front door slamming as her mother, who works as a night-shift ticket-collector at an Illinois Central Suburban Station, leaves for work. Alone, the Scarecrow begins to fantasise about "sleep[ing] all night [with Wayne]" because the evening before she had slept with Kenneth, and his feet were too cold. Accordingly, she invites Wayne over, leads him to her bedroom and engages in coitus with him. Once done, the Scarecrow combs her stringy hair and paints her face with cheap cosmetics. She then puts on her ten-dollar dress and accompanies Wayne to a party. The narrator here says that Wayne felt very important that night because "even though she was ugly. she was another notch in his belt, and he could tell the boys at Tower Tech about it" (Farrell "Scarecrow" 12).

When the two arrive at the party, all the guests chime in to say, "Hello, Scarecrow!" One guest announces: "I have here

with us. the best-known virgin in all the grammar schools of Chicago." Another remarks that "the dirtiest joke he had ever known of was the Scarecrow" (Farrell "Scarecrow" 13, 15). The boys then taunt each other about whose turn it was to be with the Scarecrow. Ostracised and shamed, the Scarecrow drinks until she is completely intoxicated. She then takes her dress off to reveal the bruises caused by her mother's abuse. However, instead of gaining sympathy, all the guests laugh at her bony figure, and one comments: "She's so dumb, she's been in the seventh grade for three years now." The guests then depart leaving the Scarecrow alone in an overcoat "shivering in front of the building" (Farrell "Scarecrow" 21).

Farrell's story is consistent with labelling theory, which claims that low socioeconomic backgrounds prompt informal labelling, and shaming (especially by parents) amplifies bad behaviour rather than deters it (Matsueda 1578). The Scarecrow lives in squalid conditions, she is malnourished, her undergarments are soiled, and her mother works a menial job—all common indicators of poverty. Additionally, the more she is shamed, the worse her behaviour becomes, a point her mother notes when she says: "I tried with all my power to make a good girl out of you, but it's no use" (Farrell "Scarecrow" 10). Hoffmann notes, "Some adolescents consciously take on the role that they perceive from others. When the role includes such traits as "bad," or "troublemaker," some youths live up to this role and engage in delinquent behavior" (173). This assertion is particularly true of females since "labelling effects are stronger for women" (Chiricos et al. 547).

Criminologists Melvin Ray and William Downs further explain that females are more likely to be affected negatively by labels than their male counterparts are because "females are expected to be more attentive to interpersonal relationships than men. [Consequently] labels may exert more of an influence on behavior for females than males" (171). Also, "stigmatized females may internalize their perception of their devaluated status, resulting in low self-worth" (Bernburg 194). In the case that Farrell presents, the Scarecrow lives up to the role of sexual deviant and acts out the given label. Her low self-worth manifests itself in her willingness to bed any boy who pretends to want her company. Although on the surface she appears unaffected by the name-calling, deep down she is very much troubled by it, evidenced when she dreams of marrying a prince and "sentencing her mother to horrible tortures" (Farrell "Scarecrow" 11). Another example of her internalised pain is when she becomes intoxicated at the party and begins to sob uncontrollably at her victimisation.

"The Scarecrow" is noteworthy because it shows the consequences of informal labelling on adolescents. Whereas early labelling theorists advocated only official/formal labels, believing them to be more effective in altering adolescent identity, contemporary labelling theorists insist that informal labels are far more damaging (Hoffmann 167). Hoffmann argues that "whether an adolescent sees himself as a good or a bad kid is affected more by the way he is treated by his parents and peers than whether he is picked up by the police" (172). Sociologist David Brownfield and criminologist Kev-

in Thompson similarly believe that judgments by parents, peers, and teachers of a juvenile's behaviour can severely influence delinquent behaviour and/or a delinquent self-concept (23), and Bernburg announces: "Informal labeling is at the heart of labeling theory" (190). Farrell's 1930 story, therefore, is remarkably startling in its contemporaneity.

## CONCLUSION

For years, Farrell's short stories have been overlooked in the traditional disciplinary construction of research. However, this study proved that by employing an interdisciplinary approach to the selected works, a better appreciation can be obtained. This is primarily because literature and sociology go hand in hand in Farrell's writing. Unlike the sociologist who analyses the issues of teenagers in American society, Farrell shows them suffering these problems in their day-to-day lives. Novelist Gerald Green confirms this point about Farrell when he states: "Nothing in modern sociology can ever tell us anything new or enriching about [the working class], once we have read James T. Farrell. A giant." Also, Canadian novelist Morley Callaghan argues, "people will want to know what life was really like in Farrell's time, and then they will read him" (qtd. in Landers ix, x). The only thing real to Farrell was his Chicago, and it was only through having Chicago's South Side as a backdrop that anything else ever became important. Throughout his fifty years of writing, he remained faithful to his own notion of literature as truth and of life as art. Based on the short stories discussed in this study, this notion has been manifest.

The four selected works, all set in the Chicago of the early 1900s, feature sensitive adolescents waking to the power of words. An overweight Jewish boy is stereotyped as effeminate, greedy, and cunning; a Polish immigrant's son is branded as dim-witted and filthy; a gang of young juveniles is labelled delinquent by the criminal justice system and as troublemakers by their teachers; a promiscuous teenager is branded a sexual deviant by her own mother. Farrell's labelled juveniles are all seen as irredeemable wrongdoers. All come from impoverished backgrounds, clearly demonstrating the strong correlation between poverty and delinquency. Finally, in all four cases, informal labelling seems to have been far more consequential in altering identities than formal labelling. The stories offer compelling descriptions of the effects of social stigma on adolescents. More importantly, they support the sociological concept of labelling as defined by the experts. Farrell was very critical of the idealisation of character in fiction, believing that characters should be presented realistically. Consequently, he wrote many stories featuring an adolescent's "realistic perspective on himself, his family, and his neighborhood" (Fanning "Introduction" xxvi). It is no wonder that Branch calls Farrell "an expert on adolescent behavior" (10).

What distinguishes Farrell from other writers of his generation is his truthful presentation of the human condition, a point that Norman Mailer also acknowledged years ago by declaring: "[Farrell] was the first author I encountered who wrote about real people living simple lives, full of drudgery and despair" (qtd. in Fyne 89). Farrell told the truth as he

saw it, and even though many did not approve of his realistic style, he nonetheless continued to write on his own terms. Wald quotes the author as saying on this same point: "I began writing in my own way and I shall go on doing it. This is my first and last word on the subject" (qtd. in Wald 261).

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