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**"NUTS, SLUTS AND PERVERTS": AN INVESTIGATION OF THE
MASTER STATUS THEORY IN RELATION TO SOCIAL DEVIANCE**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Psychology
at Massey University

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my close friend and mentor

Una May Macartney

1909 - 1988

and secondly, to Amohia Te Raumahora o te Atakura Love

1991 -

ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this study was an investigation of the master status theory in relation to social deviance. Master status theory is a component of the labelling perspective. The perspective posits that the dominant social group socially constructs what is viewed as deviant and non-deviant in society. Master status theory states that if an individual is seen deviant on one trait he/she will be seen deviant on a host of auxiliary traits. Jenks' (1986) investigated the master status theory in relation to "non-deviant" individuals' perceptions of two "deviant" and two "non-deviant" social groups. The present study extended upon Jenks' in two major ways. "Non-deviant" individuals' perceptions of three "deviant" social groups were investigated. Also, a second component of labelling theory, social distance as a consequence of stigma was incorporated into the methodology. The two theories are believed to exist interdependently. Social distance was incorporated in an attempt to establish construct validity - to ensure that deviance was the construct under investigation. A questionnaire was administered to ninety-two tertiary level students. It was hypothesized that the master status theory would prove a robust phenomenon and that the social distance scale incorporated would support the deviant attributions. Both hypotheses were supported. Weaknesses of the study are outlined, as are implications of the study and recommendations for future research.

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PREFACE

In light of recent discussions regarding experimental bias (e.g. Parker, 1992), I believe that it is valuable to inform the reader of my perspective concerning social stigmatisation and being labelled as deviant.

The theories outlined in this thesis are personally validating. They reflect my encounters with discrimination, and have been encouraging in that they frame something that was for years simply experiential.

Since "coming out" as a gay male at 15, I have experienced discrimination in a variety of forms - having been assaulted, slandered, and "removed" from my church. None of the initiators of the discrimination knew me, and I doubt they understood what they were "fighting" against - albeit the "moral right" of the Church, or the gay bashers who gain conviction and courage as a collective.

My experiences have continually demonstrated to me, that many people (ill informed as they are) are all too ready to judge someone by their societal label. They seem to assume that I (and others who carry a "deviant" label) are so easily "boxed."

I found this research exciting. The further I studied labelling the stronger my conviction grew that people are so much more than the sum of their parts. That none of us can be boxed - people remain an exciting enigma.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
PREFACE	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	vii
CHAPTER ONE	
INTRODUCTION	1
Over of the Introduction	1
Background: Conceptualising Deviance	4
Labelling Theory	7
CHAPTER TWO	
Master and the Present Study	13
Master Status Theory	13
Applications of the Master Status Theory	15
Critique	17
Jenks (1986)	20
The Present Study	24
Deviance and its Validation as a Construct - the use of Social Distance as an Independent Measure of Deviance	26
Justification of Deviant and Non-Deviant Groups	27
CHAPTER THREE	
SUMMARY AND HYPOTHESES	43
CHAPTER FOUR	
METHOD	
Subjects	45

Procedures	47
Materials	48
Questionnaire Content	48
Ethics	54
Pilot	54
CHAPTER FIVE	
RESULTS	
Section One: Master Status Measure	55
Section Two: Social Distance Scale	62
CHAPTER SIX	
DISCUSSION	
Hypothesis One: Master Status Attributions	68
Hypothesis Two: Social Distance	70
Research Question	71
Weaknesses of the Study	72
Implications	75
Future Recommendations	77
REFERENCES	78
APPENDIX ONE	
Jenks' (1986) Scale	90
APPENDIX TWO	
Questionnaire Used in This Study	94

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
CHAPTER TWO	
Table 2.1. Perception of Five Issues for Deviant and Non-deviant Groups	21
Table 2.2. Perception on Satisfaction Measures for Deviant and Non-deviant Groups	21
CHAPTER FIVE	
Table 5.1. Means and Standard Deviations for Perceived Highest Educational Qualification	58
Table 5.2. Mean and Standard Deviations for Perception on Four Issues For Deviant and Non-deviant Groups	59
Table 5.3. Means and Standard Deviations on Five Issues for Deviant and Non-deviant Groups	60
Table 5.4. Means and Standard Deviations for Perception on Satisfaction Measures for Deviant and Non-deviant Groups	61
Table 5.5. Proportion Matrix for 12 Social Groups Judged in Terms of Preference as Close Friends by the Massey and Teacher College Samples	65