

[Joseph Heath](#) (University of Toronto)

**“A Defence of Stigmatization”**

**Abstract:** The term “stigmatization,” when used in contemporary social science, almost always has a negative connotation. Particularly when applied to behavior that is primarily self-regarding, such as drug addiction, the existence of a social stigma is widely regarded as adding “insult to injury,” although the normative basis of this assessment is seldom made explicit. My objective in this paper is to develop a more careful analysis, and qualified defence of, stigmatization in these cases. I will argue that, with instances of potential self-control failure, stigmatization can serve as an important piece of social scaffolding, allowing individuals to externalize a portion of their willpower. As a result, destigmatization strategies may have the perverse effect of exacerbating the self-destructive behaviour among the individuals they are purporting to help. The careful cultivation of stigma, by contrast, can serve as a useful “nudge,” helping individuals to carry through on their own intentions.