

Labelling Theory and the PCS Model in Social Services

Posted on September 11, 2019

Introduction

When it comes to labelling discriminating, and making judgments, it seems as if there is a strange pleasure in this practice that is purely natural, though it can be detrimental as well as confident. The poets wrote William Wordsworth's *The Thorn*, which deals with the issue of discrimination and labelling, where a woman is isolated and abandoned by the community for her transgression. The present analysis deals with two approaches: one, the labelling theory, and two, the PCS model theory. According to labelling theory (which is a criminological theory) criminals are not criminal minded but are labelled as deviant by the society that leads towards deviance. Similarly, the PCS model theory explains how and why discrimination occurs and leads towards internal oppression. According to the proponent of this model, discrimination operates on three levels: personal, cultural and structural, as we will see in the course of this analysis (Yuill and Gibson, 2011).

Discussion and Analysis

To unpack these theoretical approaches, we need to understand them using real-life examples. For instance, the stigmatising and severe reaction of people towards drug addicts cannot help the addict but consequently increases the chance of addiction as they start to see themselves as deviant and transgressors. Hence, the labelling theory or theory of social stigmatisation is a remarkable achievement in social sciences as it does not treat human norms and values as universal entities. Similarly, according to the PCS model theory, the hierarchical structure of society leads many individuals to discriminate against others. Drug use is depicted in media as the crucial factor in vicious and detestable crimes and is commonly associated with working and sometimes with the elite class. Furthermore, we see a division of drug use coming from the elite level to justify their types of drugs and detest the others; these people call themselves 'people' while categorising others as junkies because they use coke, crack, crash, hash and meth while they drink wine, beer, whisky and cigars.

As mentioned above, the labelling theory was expounded by Frank Tannenbaum in the 1960s to stress the reaction of society as a participant in the making of criminal personality; no method had ever attempted to grasp anything like his before, according to Tannenbaum:

"The process of making the criminal, therefore, is a process of tagging, defining, identifying, segregating, describing, emphasising, making conscious and self-conscious; it becomes a way of

stimulating, suggesting, emphasising, and evoking the very traits that are complained of” (MOYER, 2001, p.165)

Frank calls it the ‘first dramatisation of evil’ that separates a child from his group and makes him a criminal. A drug-addicted is tagged and defined. Identified and isolated from the society, why? Because of his breaking the rules, the social norms and the standard sets of behaviour. According to this theory, human values are ever-changing; in other words, we cannot claim their universality. For example, the Native Americans practice their traditional ways of selecting a Shaman (the medicine man). To become a Shaman, one undergoes a ritual where the individual is induced with highly psychoactive drugs to pass the test and consequently become a Shaman, the medicine man. According to our social norms psychoactive drug is prohibited and considered fatal if taken in heavy doses, while for the Native Indian, it is a necessary element to get into the dream state. Hence, the values that we cherish as the ultimate code of life are relative and changing. In 1940s smoking cigarettes was considered a sign of self-confidence through advertisement, it was promoted and encouraged by the culture.

Therefore, the theory of stigmatisation reflects the cultural shifts in the norms and values. What is acceptable today may not be acceptable in the future, and vice versa, what is unacceptable today may be acceptable in the future. Opium was used for medicinal purposes in England for centuries; even the renowned poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge was an opium user. The great psychologist Sigmund Freud wrote about the medical benefits of heroin, and in our times, it is a highly prohibited drug. Frank emphasises that this practice of stigmatisation is not the cure for the addicts but an evil force that inflicts pain rather than comfort. Similarly, Neil Thompson’s PCS model theory elaborates on the institutionalised stigmatisation that leads towards discrimination, as already referred to before in the above passage. It is straightforward and commonsensical and also very Marxist in its attire. Conferring to this theory discrimination and oppression is based on power, those who are in power they use their agency over the less powerful to regulate laws, moral values and, hence, their prejudices. The following statement captures its agenda in a very comprehensive manner:

“The constant experience of this marginalisation has led many problem drug users to internalise their problems and blame themselves for their plight. This loss of self-esteem then becomes a serious debilitating factor as they feel isolated and excluded from society”(Buchanan, 2004).

As we can see this gap is ever-increasing and is the reason for the ‘plight’ of drug addicts. The social and economic differences lead them to believe that he is the culprit and he responsible for their condition, and consequently, they isolate themselves from the society. They are disgusted and demented by the non-drug users, as if they are responsible for everything. Therefore, this stigma of discrimination and tagging is more injurious than the drugs itself because it is not the drugs that damage a person’s life but the fear of being abandoned and forsaken by non-drug users. The severity of moral allegations imposed on the drug user is the biggest hurdle in recovering from long-term drug use, as they find themselves insufficient and unable to connect with people in society due to this stigmatisation and discrimination, as ducker states:

'In an environment frightened with great moral and legal reactions to the use of drugs, the stigma attached to drugs may come to be a more important factor than the biology of addiction. The demonisation of drugs and the criminalisation of the drug user (i.e. the war on drugs) could be more damaging to the individual and society than drug use or addiction' (Drucker, 1999, p.31).

Thus, according to Niel Thompson's PCS model theory the individual's beliefs are the product of social and cultural as well as economic forces; they take these values and moral codes for granted and impose and judge others by these standards; it is a malaise that is metastasising our minds more than drugs. Our language is the product of our culture, this combination of culture and language influence an individual's perceptions of this world and through these lenses of prejudice he/she sees the drug users as evil beings as we can see all over the world.

Now that we have explored these two approaches, it's time to test their strengths. In this regard, we will compare and contrast these theories and see if they can work together, as well as their flaws and intrinsic worth. As we have already seen both approaches share ground where rather than criticizing the drug users the criticism is directed towards the community, the culture and the social structure; it is based on the man vs society background; a lot has been written on this in world literature where the great artists defended and dignified the individual against the society. From a broader perspective, these approaches share the same anatomical structure. Both theories criticise the social norms and highlight their lack of universality. Nevertheless, there are a few differences between the two approaches. First, the labelling theory exclusively emphasises the logic of labelling, while the PCS model theory has a broader canvas of other possibilities, such as the structural view of the society and the economic factors involved in the exercise of agency towards the less powerful by the powerful. Furthermore, the labelling theory fails to explain the actual causes of deviance; the subject is relieved of any label whatsoever. Hence, the human urge for self-destruction and the complexities of its behaviour are reduced to merely one factor termed labelling. Even the PCS theory like the labelling theory attempt to dehumanise the subject, both approaches share this radical position when they criticise the society and just the community and its institutional forces. So far we have seen the significant commonalities and differences in the two approaches, nothing is perfect in a world of imperfection, but there is always a middle ground if the two theories are merged even then it would have some flaws as stressed earlier in the proceeding passage about the innocent individual against society. Many psychological and biological facts are ignored, although the assumptions made by both theories are convincing and self-evident, as we see this phenomenon of stigmatisation in our society. The most fascinating thing about both approaches is their philosophical position of determinism.

In this section, we will thoroughly examine the anti-oppressive and anti-discrimination practice. According to Thompson (1997), the phenomenon of oppression can be understood by following a model that involves three levels: Personal (P), Cultural (C), and Structural (S). The first level is concerned with the individual, for instance, a person who hates drug users; his action is purely individualistic. The person is in the middle of the diagram, and his perceptions and beliefs are supported by the other two levels. The second level is cultural, which relates to the shared values and moral notions of right and wrong. Third and last is the structural level that controls the other two

levels, at this point the model is so fascinating because of its authenticity. Religion, media, and politics monitor the two different levels. A young man hates homosexuals because of the general beliefs of the community constructed by the religious as well as other social institutions such as the media. The position is Foucauldian and, hence, postmodern because it not only challenges the authority of religion and other social institutions but also comments on language and how language is used to construct our worldview. The anti-oppressive practice and the anti-discrimination practice help us to understand and tolerate diversity, and as I said, it has a postmodern agenda of the relativity of values behind it. Nevertheless, methods of this kind in workplaces can be very positive for a healthy environment that tolerates and encourages differences.

Labelling theory and the PCS model theory share many grounds and a few differences, as we have explored in the preceding paragraphs. Furthermore, we evaluated the anti-oppressive and anti-discrimination approaches. Now, it's time to link these ideas with the BASW ethical code model and medical model. Base codes of ethics are set of laws registered to protect the human rights, social justice and professional integrity of social workers. Along with the anti-oppressive and anti-discrimination practice, the Basw codes of social ethics are a significant step towards a sound working environment without prejudice, discrimination and segregation. We need to create an atmosphere of equality as well as diversity. Though it seems very challenging to merge these theories and practices along with the Basw framework and health care professional council of social work, there is a possibility of a better future for drug users. The drug users can be helped through the medical model, according to this model addiction is brain disease that can be treated but cannot be cured; with the help of some rigorous therapeutic methods, one can control addiction although it requires strong commitment and fighting. Hence, medical model is against the [labeling theory](#) and the PCS model theory due to its complete focus on the individual, the medical theory sees the individual as responsible not the society unlike labeling theory and the PCS model that blamed the society for stigmatising and tagging the deviant. Basw ethical code framework can easily work with the labelling theory and the PCS model, while the medical model is at odds with the two theoretical approaches.

Conclusion

Human beings are exceptionally complicated; we have analysed and evaluated different approaches to understand and figure out the reasons behind their mysterious behaviour. But we cannot understand it thoroughly unless or until we connect every possible field of study including psychology, biology, philosophy and medical sciences, only then we can get an insightful view of its fleeting behaviour. The theory of labelling is an authentic overview of the idea of stigmatisation and segregation in our society, where the evil practice of tagging can ruin a life. Similarly, the PCS model attempted to give a broad view of this practice of oppression and discrimination by the hand of the powerful and elite.

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