

CITIZEN CAIN: STIGMA & LABELLING

Lecture Notes/ Presentation by J.M. Camilleri (October, 2005)

What is stigma?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines stigma as:

- “Mark branded on slave, criminal, etc.
 - Imputation attached to person’s reputation; stain on one’s good name.
 - Definite characteristic of some disease (spot, pore, small natural mark on skin ...”
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The discredited & the discreditable?

- In *Stigma and Social Identity*, Erving Goffman* specifically mentions two types of stigmatized people, the discredited and discreditable. The discredited are people who visibly vary from ideal humans. The discreditable secretly vary from ideal humans and, if their secrets were known, would be rejected by other people. [*Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Prentice-Hall, 1963.]
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Discredited

- And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden." (*Genesis 4:14-16*)
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Stigma: always discreditable?

Among the 62 Catholic Saints or Blesseds with stigmata

- St. Catherine of Siena
 - St. Catherine d’Ricci
 - St. Francis of Assisi
 - Padre Pio
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Stigma: negative & positive

“The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not to tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers—stern and wild ones—and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss.” [*Nathaniel Hawthorne*]

Disability & stigma

- Traditionally seen as different from ‘normal’ people.
 - An embarrassment & shame to family & community.
 - Disability a sign of evil & sinfulness.
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- Objects of fear to be avoided and/ or hidden away.

Stigma: its origins?

- Goffman: stigma resides within the individual who deviates in some way from the norm
- Labelling & stigma as social constructs
 - Whether stigma is positive or negative depends on the value given to it by society, that is, by the people in one's community.
 - This also effects the way in which the stigma, or stigmatised person, is viewed.

ABNORMAL people? - Children of a Lesser God?

- Impairment no longer a Divine Curse, but a personal, MEDICAL tragedy a deviation from the 'norm'.
- Therefore 'less fortunate', pitiful, tragic creatures.
- Judged as functionally deficient we were considered invalids, IN-VALID in every aspect of our lives.

Stigma & the Medical Model

- unable to decide on our own;
- physically, mentally, intellectually unreliable;
- eternal beggars, unable to support ourselves;
- 'special' needs, needing cure or care from experts, usually in 'special', ie., segregated environments.

You see what you want to see

- Look carefully at this picture. *[picture of the upper one tenth of an iceberg]*
- What do you see?

You see what you want to see

- Look at it again, with a different perspective.
- Now, what do you see?

Points of view I

Is this an ICEBERG ? *[picture of the upper one tenth of an iceberg]*

Points of view II

Is this an ICEBERG ? *[picture of the lower nine tenths of an iceberg]*

Points of view III

Or is this an ICEBERG ? *[picture of upper and lower parts of iceberg]*

Understanding = acceptance

STIGMA - UPIAS & the Medical Model of Disability

'We as a Union are not interested in descriptions of how awful it is to be disabled. What we are interested in is the ways of changing our conditions of life, and thus overcoming the disabilities which are imposed on top of our physical impairments by the way society is organised to exclude us' (*UPIAS, 1976, pp. 4-5*)

The Medical Model of Disability

presents a "... radical challenge to the medical or individual model of disability."

- Medical Model: individual 'disabled' by his/her impairment.
 - Social Model: how socially constructed barriers (eg., design of buildings, transport, communication & discriminatory attitudes) 'disable' people with a perceived impairment. (from Barnes and Mercer, 1996)
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First the PERSON, then the disability

- are not people to be feared;
 - can function in, and should, attend mainstream schools;
 - can carry out, and should, be given a wide variety of jobs;
 - are capable of maintaining long-term relationships;
 - make good parents;
 - are reliable and loving friends.
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Changing stigma: from negative to positive

- understand the fear of others & conquer our own fear;
 - educate;
 - legislate ('legislation does not change hearts, but it restrains the heartless' *Martin Luther King Jr.*)
 - don't be ashamed to be different;
 - support others where possible, and not just expect support for ourselves.
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WE are the solution

* Erving Goffman's theories have been criticised by many disabled academics. Research the issue for yourself before presenting. Avoid presenting one view-point as the only right one.
(J.M.Camilleri)