Advanced Criminological Theory

INTRODUCTION AND PLOT

The movie revolves around the life of an ex-cop who had gotten out of prison through probation. Though he came out with the thought of changing and living a completely different life from his previous one, his past catches up to him and he is once again seen to be committing crimes. The film portrays the theories of labeling, identity and social construction of crime as well as theories of choosing crime.

LABELING

Throughout the film it can be seen that there was always someone who had an opinion on the protagonist. His own mother had the thought that he may not be capable of change and can be seen to be constantly trying to tell him not to do things.

The labeling theory suggests that formal reactions to crime will become a stepping- stone in the development of a criminal career (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967; Tannenbaum, 1938) and escalate antisocial behaviors. Lemert (1951, 1967) and Becker (1963) argued that labeling theory is progressive and social.

In fact, “social interactions with others is important in shaping whether people eventually become offenders. Humans are not passive but are actively engaged with others in the construction of their social identities and in creating the meaning of their world” (Lanier & Henry, 2010, p. 206).

The film portrays the above theory through showing that since the beginning he had been maintaining that he wants to change and start a new life but one small incidence and introduction to the deviant behavior, he was quite quick to jump on the wagon.

Bernburg’s research (2009) suggested that there are three main processes through which labeling influences future behavior: through the development of a deviant self-concept; through processes of social rejection and withdrawal; and through involvement with deviant groups.

The protoganist can be seen to be going through the above processes wherein in the beginning he is being staged and accused by the DA’s daughter and subsequently he is being questioned again which also leads to him meeting the conspirator behind the crimes that he commits throughout the movie.

SELF-LABELLING & SELF-STIGMA

It is seen in the beginning of the film when he is asked how he feels about being released he says “Feel? I feel that I was a nightmare. I made terrible choices. I drove my family away. I... I hurt people. I didn't mean to, but there it is. And for all that... there's a hole inside me now. It hurts. I carry it”, there is a showcase of regret but at the same time he labels himself as a

nightmare. Also he doesn’t give any promises that he will do better but only talks about himself as a nightmare.

Also throughout the film he acts in a manner that says there is no way out and that’s why he’s committing the crime. He is labeling himself as a person who can only commit a crime to get out of a situation.

Ex-prisoners anticipate rejection and discrimination once they come out of prison which is leading to avoidance behavior such as withdrawal and secrecy (Harding 2003; Winnick and Bodkin 2008). This can also increase the likelihood of their return to criminal activity (Van Olphen et al. 2009).

Labeling can lead individuals to (continue to) commit crimes, because it generates mechanisms (stigmatization, stereotyping) that close doors to norm-consistent behavior (H. S. Becker, 1963)

Therefore even though he had the idea for a second chance not only the stigma and stereotyping but himself having this opinion on him has led to him returning back to criminal behavior.

IMPACT ON FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

His parents were of two different personalities in the family. While his mother is more critical and suspecting of his behavior and attitude, his father is more apologetic and has the heart to help him get better. Though in the end it can be seen that the father has the thought that until the protagonist dies they will not be able to move forward in life, so he stabs him.

Braithwaite (1989) and Sherman (1993), both of whom emphasized the conditional nature of the relationship between sanctions and offending. Also found that certain situations are a home ground for offending.

Therefore though his father was trying to create an environment wherein he wanted to bring his son in a good space, his mother was more keen on trying to stop him from doing anything.

He too is not allowed to see his ex-wife and kids, which he really wants to but both his parents are against it as well as his ex-wife, wherein the end it can be seen that he takes money that he wants to give to his children but the money too is not through legitimate means. Eventually he is killed by his own father after he refuses to back down from visiting his daughters which shows that his own family and the community feels that he is better dead than alive since he is a criminal man incapable of changing and unqualified for a second chance.

DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR

The common-sense assumption that the deviant act occurs because some characteristic of the person who commits it makes it necessary or inevitable that he should (H.S.Becker 1963).

Throughout the film even though you can see him trying to convince himself and others that he does not want to commit the crimes, there are various instances where he is still participating in the scenes. In one such scene he decides to set up the defense attorney with a pole dancer and

tries to get it videotaped in order to use it as a blackmail.

Maruna's (2001) research where respondents often chose a sub-identity, such as being a family man, to illustrate their 'goodness' despite the fact that they have committed crime. Also that desisting offenders should develop a pro-social identity and a credible story that explains their pasts, in order to successfully desist from crime.

On the applicability of the above research to this particular movie, it can be seen that there is various instances in which he portrays that he's a good person who just wants to live his life in peace but the second he thinks that he is being threatened he returns back to committing a criminal act. If he had not been introduced once again to his earlier identity he may have been successful in desisting the crime.

SOCIETAL STIGMA, REINTEGRATIVE SHAMING AND CONTIGENT LABELLING

Also in the film he is seen to be automatically deemed to be a person of bad character and the source of trouble due to him being an ex-convict. He also starts to lie about his life and his prison life to his love interest at the beginning until she calls him out on his lie.

Ex-prisoners tend to anticipate the stigma and shaming after their release which can lead to them returning back to committing crimes (Harding 2003; Winnick and Bodkin 2008, (Van Olphen et al. 2009, Winnick and Bodkin 2008).

In Braithwaite's theory of stigmatization, reintegrative shaming is preferable to stigmatizing shaming, as stigmatizing shaming facilitates exclusion from pro-social relationships (Braithwaite, 2001) wherein the former is supposed to make a law abiding citizen.

An alternative perspective, the more-to-lose hypothesis, has proposed that individuals with higher social status and those viewed as least likely to recidivate are more likely to be affected by negative labels (Chiricos, Barrick, Bales, & Bontrager, 2007).

The disadvantage-saturation perspective (Hannon, 2003). This perspective suggests that a criminal label will have little impact on the recidivism of already disadvantaged populations, but will reduce the recidivism of advantaged populations because individuals with higher social status in the community and stronger social bonds are more likely to experience strong negative effects from an out- cast label such as "criminal". For these individuals, committing crime is viewed as a greater norm violation.

Applying all of the above in the movie, it can be seen that he came out thinking that he is getting a second chance only for him to commit more serious crimes than he did for the first time and he also gets a partner towards the end, who he ends up murdering too. He is an ex-cop which is usually a high position in the society and for him to be called as a criminal and convict can be stated to be a norm violation.

CONCLUSION

Deviant behavior and labeling usually are concurrent. Stigmatization and stereotyping are

unavoidable repercussions of the society and is especially detrimental to a release prisoner. The film was able to portray the above theories in a brief manner through constant life changes gone through by the protagonist. The protagonist himself was not just deviant but also an outsider (H.S.Becker 1963). There is a need for building awareness and better monitoring of the released prisoners in order to avoid repercussions as well as recidivism.

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