

Enabling or disabling practice?: Psycho-emotional disablism and acts of (mis)recognition within professional relationships with disabled people

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Introduction

- Recognition and disabled people
 - Honneth: Critical theory of recognition
 - Work of Danermark and Gellerstedt (2004)
 - Psycho-emotional disablism
- Professional relationships of one disabled man with social workers and care staff
 - (Mis)recognition and (dis)respect
 - Significance of small words/actions
- Implications for professional practice



Honneth's critical theory of recognition

- Recognition and disabled people:
 - Love – self-confidence due to emotional and bodily self-assurance (relationships with care givers or personal assistants, autonomy vs. dependency)
 - Rights – self-respect when treated as citizen (fight of disabled people for full inclusion)
 - Solidarity – self-esteem when individual is valued for unique talents/capabilities (challenge stigma of disability)
- Necessary to allow someone to achieve their freely chosen aims in life
- Misrecognition = disrespect = moral injustice



'Recognition' and psycho-emotional disablism

- Psycho-emotional disablism:
 - “Disablism is a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the *socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being.*” (Thomas, 2007: 73)
- Being *misrecognised* is a key aspect of psycho-emotional disablism



Being a father ... in name only

'You lose status - you're not a father anymore, you're a father in name. You haven't got the responsibilities of being a father, yet they say, 'We'll engage you, we'll involve you' and you know other people are making decisions. You go along with it because you want to be with your boy and you go and take the flack when you go to visiting day, and when you speak up, you get criticised for speaking up. [cut] But even when I say, 'Use me as a resource', I am pushed aside and they tell me what they want to hear - the professionals. They've got to do their job, they're doing the best for the boy but they haven't got any shape on how to deal with me. It's awful [sounds upset]. It's awful.' (Rhodri)



Misrecognition as a father

- Prejudice about ability of disabled people to be parents
 - 'You was bound to have landed up divorced because you've got disabilities'
- Example of psycho-emotional disablism
- Honneth:
 - Rights: Self-respect (denied right to be father)
 - Solidarity: Self-esteem (seen as incapable father)



'Do it my way'

'Do it my way, not the way - if you do it the conventional way which you're trained to as a support worker, terminal care worker whatever it is, that will not help me because I'm using less muscles now. So to get up on the side of the bed in the morning, to undress myself in the night, I'm still being active. If I handed it over to people I would be less - I'd be fatter. They say, 'You should exercise more'. Exercise more! I said, 'I'm not Linford Christie!' You give such daft answers and I cause trouble for myself. But it's so infuriating, the fighting you've got to do, just to go an inch forward. [cut] I want to do things my way, but I want to do it that I'm in control.' (Rhodri)



Misrecognition within personal care relationships

- Misrecognition of Rhodri's knowledge of his body
- Misrecognition of Rhodri as autonomous adult
- Thoughtless actions/words can exacerbate past/current psycho-emotional disablism
- Honneth:
 - Love: Self-confidence (threat to physical integrity (health), loss of control)
 - Solidarity: Self-esteem (rendered invisible, internalised oppression)



Recognition and respect: Small actions and words

'[Pat] was my lifeline, knew my personality, brought me up when I was down, and everything like that - worked well. Had a joke and everything. She had protected me for years because the care I received after, was done as it should be done - distant, not supposed to do this, not supposed to do that, get the nurse to do this. [cut] Because we always used to have a back chat, she likes me loads, but she would never say she liked me and I wouldn't say I liked her. 'You're Welsh and I'm English', that type of attitude, right? And we would go on like that all the time, but beneath all the bravado of us acting, there's a lot of respect for each other.' (Rhodri)



Significance of 'recognition' for professional practice

- Psycho-emotional disablism as form of misrecognition
- Discourse of respect and dignity within professional practice is not always present on the ground
- Significance of small gestures/words towards recognition
- Offers alternative framework for 'ethical social support' (Houston & Dolan, 2008)
- Ethical practitioner – importance of 'recognition' as part of enabling rather than disabling professional relationships



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