

Reflections on the shawshank redemption



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Shawshank Redemption is a remarkable movie that depicts the thoughts, actions, and motivations of prisoners and their wardens. The symbolic interactionist perspective leads us unto the knowledge of how different symbols, such as the uniforms worn by all in the prison represent power. Differential association sheds light on the bond that is formed by those we feel are like us and becomes solidified by increasing contact with those, who share common traits, like the prisoners. Labeling theory is the final important aspect of analyzing this film as the main character Andy is innocent, but once labeled guilty he falls into primary deviancy from the label of murderer, but fights for decades so that he does not fall into second deviancy and accept the labels his "captors" wish him to accept, as he is an innocent man. The prison guards were cruel and treated all the prisoners terribly, which brings to mind all the insights that were discovered during the famous Stanford Prison Experiment.

Zimbardo's primary reason for conducting the experiment was to focus on the power of roles, rules, symbols, group identity and situational validation of behavior that generally would repulse ordinary individuals. "I had been conducting research for some years on deindividuation, vandalism and dehumanization that illustrated the ease with which ordinary people could be led to engage in anti-social acts by putting them in situations where they felt anonymous, or they could perceive of others in ways that made them less than human, as enemies or objects," Zimbardo told the Toronto symposium in the summer of 1996 (O'Toole, 1997). What is important to note here that it seemed that the mere symbols of the guards wearing different uniforms than the prisoners, put them in a position to feel more important and act

more brutally toward those in their care. For the prisoners it seemed like the poster of the beautiful actress, Rita Hayworth, that Andy requested from Red and the workday were Andy persuaded a guard to let the men have beer both symbolized freedom for them and were highly significant in the movie. The poster, ironically was used to cover the hole in the wall that Andy was using to dig his way out of the prison, so the poster's significance toward the symbol of freedom is obvious. The symbols of power and freedom were well projected here.

Differential association is evident when the oldest member of the group, Brooks Hatlen is released and commits suicide a few days after he is granted parole. He had served fifty years and wanted to commit a crime to remain incarcerated, but decided his only option was to take his life. Brooks and the other prisoners understand one another and although their histories and crimes differ greatly, their experiences lead them to bond with one another to the point it is virtually impossible for them to associate with others if and when they are released. Finally, the labels imposed by the courts go hand in hand with the use of language and symbols to demonize and dehumanize the prisoners.

Most of the prisoners go into primary deviancy when a police officer arrests them or a judge finds him guilty of a criminal offense. But, Andy does not go into secondary deviancy and accept the label of criminal, although he gives up hope many times when he realizes that the warden will never allow him to leave. Red, as well, although he realizes he has committed a crime, does not accept that he is "less than" and/or "deviant", as the guards and warden would wish for him to believe. It is this hope of being normal that

assist Andy and Red to a new life in Mexico, though they arrive there by two different means. Andy escapes as it is his only choice, and Red is paroled. Policy-makers should be aware of what Michael Foucault deemed discursive formation.

A discursive formation is a set of round holes into which the unpredictable, multishaped pegs of human experience are crammed. The round holes define what is “ normal” and “ deviant”, “ sane” or “ insane”, “ natural” or “ unnatural”. These terms have to be put in quotation marks because they have no intrinsic meaning. The cramming of human acts and experiences into the categories of the discursive formation always involves exercise of power and enactment of punishments. It is always met by some degree of resistance (Garner, 2001).

When persons go to prison, such as Andy and Red in the film, they are treated as deviant and their punishments, though they may vary time-wise, are roughly the same. They are all looked upon as subhuman and subject to ill-treatment. This discursive formation of putting different people together in a labeled category and pushing them through the role of differential association and alienation of others is of the utmost importance for understanding. People go into prison unique and come out alienated and afraid of the freedom they have been told they do not deserve.

Red and Andy did make it to freedom and with their friendship both should be expected to leave relatively “ normal lives” .;;