

# 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary International Conference

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## Unmasking the Unjust Practice and Social Exclusion: A Critical Reflection on Drug Addiction Research

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**Ethical Consideration of  
Human Services: Who Should Care?**

人本服務的道德考量：誰來關顧？

15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
International Conference



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# Why Unjust Practice & Social Exclusion



# Structure of the Self

**Lacanian theory** of the structure of the **self**:

- 1. Real:** real cannot be easily described, discussed, communicated, or represented through language.
- 2. Imaginary:** it is the mirror image of the individual, the understanding of the self through the imagination of how the other seeing one's self.
- 3. Symbolic:** is the language structure, the linguistic order of the society.

# Concept of Signifier and Symbolic Order

- ❖ Individuals are all represented and communicated via signifiers .
- ❖ If the meaning of the signifiers changes, then our ways of communication, representation, judgment, or interaction will change accordingly.
- ❖ The master-signifier connects and define the meaning of the signifiers to form the web of symbolic order.
- ❖ **Sociological viewpoint:** master-signifier is the normative foundation of society.
- ❖ **Postmodernist: Dominant Discourse.**

# Foucault: Knowledge is Power

- ❖ Foucault provides the theory of master-signifier a concrete content in understanding our social behavior in the contemporary era
- ❖ In the traditional eras, power and surveillance was from without; but **nowadays**, the surveillance is from **within**.

# Power in Defining Normalization

- ❖ For the modern sciences of man, the systematic knowledge of individual built is connected to the statistical concept of “population” which is used to define **normal and abnormal, i.e., cholesterol index**
- ❖ Normalizing judgement will lead to homogeneity, playing a part in classification, hierarchization, and distribution of rank.
- ❖ **Simply put, knowledge is a kind of surveillance, and knowledge is power.**

# Drug Addict Identification

- ❖ **The biomedical knowledge would be the master-signifier in understanding the notion of addiction**
- ❖ **Globally, the DSM-V of the American Psychiatric Association's gold-standard text on the symptoms and diagnostic features of addictions.**
- ❖ **Drug addicts are defined from the biomedical knowledge as such, these group of people would be put under medical or social surveillance.**
- ❖ **This surveillance is not only imposed by any power structure outside but from the knowledge itself.**

# Drug Treatment = Loss of Self

- ❖ Undergoing drug treatment = accept the identity of being problematic.
- ❖ Treatment methods usually focus on biomedical which only helps to break the addiction → they seldom explore the clients' real drug abuse reason.
- ❖ Does the removal of addiction from drug users also remove the root problem of evasion by taking drugs as their only means in problems solving?
- ❖ Treatment itself actually helps nothing in realizing their real struggles.

# Drug Treatment Institute = Master Signifier

- ❖ Drug treatment institutes represent a role of standardize moral, and to administer social reprimand.
- ❖ Treatment programmes are normally designed to restructure the drug addicts' thinking and sense of value, training them to follow disciplines of the institutes, with the final goal of turning them to decent citizen who would obey to the social rules and regulations again.

# Drug Treatment Fears

- ❖ **Drug Treatment Fears (Chung, 2015)**
- ❖ **Theme:** to explore the treatment fears about the residential drug treatment
- ❖ **Subjects:** 303 young male substance abusers from non-government treatment agencies in Hong Kong.

# Fears: Loss of Autonomy

In the study conducted with drug user about their treatment fears when they undergo drug treatment, the following two main fears have been identified as most prominent:

## 1. Loss of Autonomy

- Fear of their addiction problem known to family and others
- Fear of losing freedom
- Fear of being supervised
- Fear of losing self-esteem

# **Fears : Loss of Self**

## **2. Maladptation**

- **Fear of adjustment problems**
- **Fear of the disciplined life pattern in the treatment centers**
- **Fear of the strict rules in the centers**
- **Fear of being punished within the treatment period.**

# Fears: Accept Mainstream Value

Upon discharging from the institutes, drug users have other fears about returning back to the mainstream society, their fears include:

- Lagging behind a changing society and other people.
- Facing the changes in life, that means individual's daily, family, and work life.
- Fear of being monitored (social surveillance)

# **Drug Treatment Fears = Obligated to Mainstream Symbolic Order**

- **The findings provide insights about the mental sufferings of drug users in exposing their drug user identity as defined by biomedical power and thereby subjectivating themselves to the addiction signifiers.**
- **Consequently, their stress thus generated under medical and social surveillance.**

# Reflection on Addiction Research

A review of drug addiction research in Hong Kong from 2000 to 2019, using subject term “drug”, “research” and “Hong Kong” from research database of Social Sciences Citation Index in June 8 2019 showed that there were only 21 drug research studies conducted in Hong Kong.

| No. | Year | Research  | Objectives  | Observation |
|-----|------|---|---|-------------|
| 1   | 2019 | Adolescent Drug Abuse in Hong Kong: Prevalence, Psychosocial Correlates, and Prevention   | To tackle the problem of psychoactive drug abuse in adolescents   | 1, 2        |
| 2   | 2019 | Examining the Association Between Resilience and Risk Behaviors Among South Asian Minority Students in Hong Kong: A Quantitative Study        | To examine the relationship between risk behaviors and resilience among South Asian minority youth  | 1, 2        |
| 3   | 2019 | An international study of analgesic dependence among people with pain in the general population   | To identify influences on analgesic dependence among analgesic users in the general populations of different countries  | 1, 2        |
| 4   | 2018 | Service Needs of Pregnant Substance Abuse Women Seeking Residential Drug Treatment in Hong Kong: a Practice-Based Research                    | To explore the sociodemographic characteristics, service needs, reasons, and timing of pregnant substance abuse women seeking residential drug treatment in Hong Kong | 2           |
| 5   | 2018 | Using the Syndrome Model of Addiction: a Preliminary Consideration of Psychological States and Traits   | To better understand the syndrome model of addiction by establishing an epidemiology of addiction treatment seekers across various expressions of addiction           | 1           |
| 6   | 2017 | Culturally Relevant Protective and Risk Factors of Youth Risk Behaviors Among Pakistani and Indian Students in Hong Kong: A Focus Group Study | To explore culturally nuanced factors for the development and prevention of risk behaviors among Pakistani and Indian students in Hong Kong                           | 1, 2        |

# Reflection on Addiction Research

- ❖ **Focuses on the pathological aspect**
- ❖ **The methods, assumptions and concepts are essentially problem oriented**
- ❖ **Analyses are narrow down to micro level and ignore societal effects**

# **Recommendation**

**Future researches should not limit to the individualistic approach which would decontextualize the problem of drug uses and subtly conceal the structural imbalances, leaving the problem of social injustice unaddressed**

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**Thank You**