Samuel Dixon

Alcoholism: Social Problem

The sociological approaches to studying alcoholism includes a vast spectrum of methods. Two particular approaches will be examined: objective, numerical data which signifies the magnitude of alcohol’s presence and influence on society and subjective interviews with young adults who describe how one’s environment contributes to their alcohol consumption tendencies.

The first article ponders over the question of societal view of the problem. Levine(2012) uses a historical approach to elucidate how time, policy, and elite figures can sway the public perception of alcohol. The roles that policy makers and lobbyist groups execute are examined to further an understanding on how a vast array of motivations and incentives contributes to the pliable nature of their decisions. The article details american histories in which the observance of alcohol consumption was strongly determined through the “social elites” or “upper class” views of the problem(Levine 2012). This promotes a general truth that social problems, such as class and alcoholism, have a dependence on each other or an intersectionality. The author describes how during the Temperance movement, the middle class was losing much of their wealth which ties to the degree of influence they had control over policy(Levine 2012). The disparity between the elites and middle class people made it possible for wealthy groups to fund and control organizations that essentially controlled policy, such as the “Anti-Saloon League(Levine 2012).” In modern times, statistics provide evidence that alcohol has serious consequences on individual health, public health, and the economy. For instance, in 2000 a study showed the impact alcohol had on public safety as more than 27,000 people were reported dead in car accidents related to the use of alcohol(Levine 2012). This astonishing number gives an intuitive understanding for people to grasp the magnitude of trauma alcohol consumption solely in relation to transportation causes in society.

The second article questions how an environment can persuade individuals to think and approach drinking in a particular, dangerous manner. The interviewers tackled the question by sitting down individuals from a sample group in front of pictures depicting different alcoholic environments and scenarios at a bar, and then questioning their drinking behaviors with regard to how they personally interpret the setting(Hill, Foxcraft, and Pilling 2017). One major finding in the study was that the vast array of differences in the numerous categories of alcoholic environments serves as a strong determinant for how participants would feel fitting to act(Hill et al. 2017). For example, when participants found themselves among friends with drinks in their hands in a bar, they felt pressure to have a drink in their hand as well in order to fulfill a social sense of belonging(Hill et al. 2017). Another big determinant in bar environments that impacted the actions of the participants was the physical ease of access to alcohol. Four dependencies on drinking behavior that were scrutinized through the study were: bar characteristics, location, regulations, and time(Hill et al. 2017). Participants gathered certain criteria for each of these categories of environment that ultimately prescribed a justified, unique bias to certain actions(Hill et al. 2017). In certain bars with less waiters and more patrons participants had less access to drinks, and some felt less prompted to engage in drinking(Hill et al. 2017). Location also served as an inhibitor of drinking as some described how moving from one bar to the other prohibited unlimited access to drinks(Hill et al. 2017). Specifically, one person noted that lack of alternative entertainment avenues emphasized the need to be at a bar to be a part of the whole(Hill et. al 2017). Regulations caused some to be more wary of their decisions in the bar. However, for others in the study were apathetic towards the signs suggesting safe consideration in consuming, which left them completely ignored(Hill et al. 2017). Lastly, time was an important part of the environment that served as a restraint for the ability of people to have access to alcohol(Hill et al. 2017).

Objective and subjective approaches can be used to interpret social problems in unique manners. Objective aspects of social problems provide numerical evidence that can lead to inferences that provide insight into the breadth or magnitude of an issue. But, those aspects also focus on the whole and do not account for the vast amount of differences apparent in individuals experiences regarding the issue. Subjective aspects give an understanding as to how individuals experience and feelings contribute to their notions about social problems. Subjective aspects help people obtain a more in depth sense of understanding of why a problem exists. For example, objective aspects can not interpret how individuals feel they must act in a certain setting, because that characteristic is unique to prior, personal experience. On the contrary, subjective aspects can not depict an illustration of what effects a problem has on masses of people. Therefore both objective and subjective aspects of problems must be pondered over before understanding a problem and exploring possible routes of amelioration.

References

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