RECOGNITION AND AGED CARE WORK

Siobhan Austen12, Therese Jefferson2, Gill Lewin2, Rachel Ong2, Rhonda Sharp3, Valerie Adams3

This paper applies the concept of recognition to the case of aged care work. Following themes in Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments and in Hegel’s Master-Slave Dialectic, our analysis incorporates the notion that being visible to others and having one’s contribution to the social project acknowledged by others is a fundamental need. Misrecognition is likely to damage to one’s sense of self and undermine the motivation to continue making particular contributions. Thus, misrecognition will impact negatively on affected individuals and influence patterns of behavior. In turn, it may harm the prospects of achieving particular social projects, such as high quality aged care.

Recognition is the acknowledgement of particular others and their contribution to shared projects. In the Theory of Moral Sentiments, Smith wrote about the impact of recognition on wellbeing; how it is a source of motivation; and the role recognition can play in coordinating individual behaviour to further the achievement of the social project. He also made a clear distinction between the desire for recognition and self-interest. Drawing on Hegel, Marx emphasised the importance of recognition to identity formation.

However, until recently, the topic of recognition has suffered its own invisibility, especially in economics. Geoffrey Brennan and Phillip Pettit’s recent book, “The Economy of Esteem” (Brennan and Pettit 2004), includes the concept. However, critical theorists have done most of the recent work on recognition. Axel Honneth (2003) emphasises the damage done to people’s sense of self by misrecognition. Nancy Fraser (2000) emphasises how misrecognition is a status injury, and may contribute to maldistribution. Macdonald and Merrill (2002) study misrecognition of child care work. They find that misrecognition is a common experience of childcare workers; that it causes harms to the subjectivity of child care workers; and that it is linked to the low wage outcomes of childcare workers.

Our paper reports findings from a study that examined the experience and impact of misrecognition amongst aged care workers. The study used survey and interview data from the Missing Workers project. Survey data was collected from close to 4000 respondents and interview data from 45 participants. The findings highlight a number of important issues affecting the recognition of aged care workers. This paper focuses on findings from the survey data that reveal how misrecognition impacts on the motivation for aged care workers to continue in their roles; and on the findings from the interview data on the links between recognition and the achievement of high quality care for older people.

References


1 Corresponding author: Siobhan.austen@cbs.curtin.edu.au
2 Curtin University
3 University of South Australia