# If One Man’s Death is Another Man’s Bread

Every society strives to ensure all members conform to a particular set of social norms in their daily interactions. Anyone who violates the established social norms becomes deviant, and the society has mechanisms to sanction those who do not conform to such standards. However, it is difficult to have an ideal society where deviance does not exist. Indeed, deviance is inevitable, and those who deviate from the social norms find themselves in the correction and psychiatric institutions. In fact, Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* illustrates how institutes function to tame the habits that have deviated from the social norms. The confinement of the patients in the wards and using the Combine serves as critical tools for shaping the personalities of the individuals to conform to the expectations of the society. The paper uses Kesey’s novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* as the primary document and other secondary sources to illustrate how the societal pressure of achieving ideal society unknowingly results in deviance. Although the society plays a critical role in establishing order by setting social norms, the established high standards are unachievable and result in deviant behaviors.

The social interactions among individuals in the society lead to the formation of social norms. These standards shape the people’s behavior in line with the accepted ways of acting as well as thinking. In many cases, individuals experience overwhelming pressure to conformity if they stand out as being different from the populace. They sometimes yield to such demands and conform to the societal expectations to go along with the rest of the society. However, some individuals do not conform to this pressure as they view that the established social norms as strenuous and controlling. They deviate from the expectations of the majority and end up being deviants (Clinard and Robert 33). In the light of this, the societal pressure for people to conform to a particular set of standards constitutes to deviance. People fail to behave in the usual ways of thinking and acting because they view that the pressure to attain the set standards is strong and hurting. In fact, McMurphy is a classic example of how the pressure to conform begets more deviance behavior in Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. McMurphy acts against the authority of the psychiatric institution under the leadership of Big Nurse, Ratched. Since the ward is a tool to manipulate the patients' personality to conform to expectations of the society, the strictness of Nurse Ratched hardens some of the patients.

Indeed, McMurphy is prepared to defy these forms of emasculation and intimidation as he aspires to change the asylum. His quest to go against the will of authority results in deviant behaviors and other patients rebel against the strict rules and cruelty of Nurse Ratched. The nurse perceives McMurphy as insane based on the society’s standards of defining sane, which explains why he is in the ward. Sensing that McMurphy might be a domineering and challenging person to handle, Ratched persuades all the men that he is not extraordinary individual and the best thing to do is to oversee him (Kesey 143-144). However, the patients view McMurphy as a strong man who can challenge the authority, and his influence makes them rebel against the authority. Nonetheless, the Big Nurse and other staff members who arguably represent the larger society are committed to ensuring that they tame the deviant behavior in congruence with the stipulations of the social norms. Their pursuit of having a community guided by norms is unshakable and will do anything to stamp out the antisocial habits.

Taming the antisocial behavior is one of the mechanisms the society uses to restore order and promote acceptance. The decay of morality in the society creates anarchy and disorder, and people live in undefined ways with no respect for one another. Due to this, any aberrant habits become a subject of correction before they escalate and destroy the social fabric that defines how individuals interact (Clinard and Robert 34). Hence, the society controls the deviant habits to prevent the destruction of the social structure. It seeks to protect the rest of the community from the few deviants who pose harm to the welfare of the populace. Although some societies have developed a fairer treatment for the deviants, others deal with those habits with brutal means including incarceration. The negative sanctions including the confinement in the ward as evident in Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* portray the efforts of the society to make the social life possible. By attempting to stamp out the antisocial behavior using the ward and combine, the institution seeks to clarify the moral boundaries that consequently allow the deviants to embrace morality. The reformed individuals who live according to the social norms promote unity as opposed to chaos.

Apart from preserving the social fabric, taming of the deviant behavior promotes acceptance. Typically, the society rejects the people who go against the established standards and expectations. As noted in Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* shame accompanies those who commit actions that deviate from the social norms. McMurphy learns that the majority of men are in the psych ward voluntarily as opposed to the commission by the state. For instance, Dale Harding who had sex with the fellow men commits himself to the mental asylum because he cannot face his wife and withstand the shame that stems from his actions. In effect, his wife cannot accept him because homosexuality deviates from the societal norms that guide romantic relationships and marriages. Shame befalls those who are different from the rest of the society as Harding indicates (Kesey 257). Similarly, Billy Bibbit action of sleeping with Candy and subsequently blaming McMurphy and other men for the actions portrays his fear for his mother’s reaction. Although he is in his early thirties, his mother’s discovery that he slept with another woman would result in her disapproving and lessening of her esteem that she has on him. The examples illustrate that the majority of men in the mental asylum do not live freely because they are afraid of how the society would receive them. Therefore, stamping out the deviant behavior would facilitate the acceptance of the deviants by the general society, as it will perceive them as reformed individuals. Providing medical attention stems from the view that deviance shows symptoms of underlying problems that need management.

The examples presented above show that the people who embody these deviant behaviors become social misfits. The condemnation of these individuals by the society is overwhelming and became subjects of ridicule. They are associated with habits such inconsiderate, aggressiveness, non-empathic, and unconcerned. Indeed, Nurse Ratched shows how the society mistreats the people who qualify as social misfits. She is harsh on the patients and exerts her domineering and authoritative leadership by always labeling them as insane. In effect, Ratched oppresses the patients in the ward to the extent of losing their identity. She has reinforced the label of craziness that depicts the societal perceptions of mental illness and deviant behavior. Such labeling aims at demeaning the affected and making the habits personally relevant that consequently damages self-feelings and lowers self-esteem. According to Bernburg et al., labeling reinforces the deviant behavior and deviants accept the labels as the right description of their identity (70). Since the society perceives the deviants as social misfits, they have a high chance adjust their identity to conform to the label. Indeed, the patients in Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* have accepted the label of crazy because the psychiatric institution has reinforced the identity. They channel their behavior in a way that maintains such labeled identity.

Rather than focusing on how to help the perceived social misfits to change their behaviors in holistic and acceptable manner, the ridicule derails the efforts of reforming such individuals. The habit of stereotyping of the individuals who behave or act against the societal norms results in adverse outcomes such as rebellion and seclusion. In Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* Nurse Ratched keeps on reminding the men of their past events as one way of stereotyping them. For example, she continually revisits the previous challenges and traumas the patients underwent as one way of stereotyping and reinforcing what they believe they suffer from and exceeding their stay in the hospital. She informs them their confinement in the mental result is due to their failure conform to the rules of outside world (Kesey 171). By using these tactics, Nurse Ratched seeks to provide grounds for continued confinement of the patients. Such seclusion denies them their freedom because the society perceives them as social misfits who should not interact with other members of the community. The branding of the majority of men unfit in the society compels them to accept the continued confinement in the ward. They have lost internal dignity and worthiness, and it is not until McMurphy comes and changes their negative perception. Unlike the staff at the facility, McMurphy enables the other men to realize their self-worth and reconnect in a way devoid of society’s negative impression of them.

The ward and combine are crucial tools for shaping the personalities of the insane people to live according to the expectations of the society. They are turning them into individuals who foster respect and dignity and can live harmoniously with the rest of the society. According to Sharma and Dalip, the norms are vital parameters that dictate how people interact (59). In essence, the majority of moral codes originate from the adherence of the established norms that determine what is right and wrong in congruence with the beliefs held by the majority of the society. Although universal laws exist that the populace must abide by, those who go against the perception of morality, become deviants. Indeed, the men in Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* confined in the ward have deviated from the expectations and norms of the society. In the light of this, the ward and combine serve as corrective agents of reforming the deviant men who exhibit psychopathic behaviors. The people with a mental health condition are victims of the society that puts a lot of pressure on people to conform to what Bromden refer to the combine. Hence, the combine aims at homogenizing the society in which each individual resembles an adjusted component.

In the spirit of adjusting the deviant behavior and restoring dignity, the ward is the place where the people who defy the pressure for social conformity end up. As narrator indicates, the ward was the “factory for the combine” and used to correct the mistakes committed in the neighborhoods and social institutions including the churches and schools (Kesey 40). It is noteworthy the process of transforming the men into conformities and obedient automations entails the loss of sexuality, individuality, and masculinity. Nurse Ratched employs the system of mechanical surveillance coupled with the manipulation of the men’s mind. As the Chief indicates, the nurse is an integral part of the combine and represents the massive force with nationwide coverage (Kesey 165). In the process of converting the men into what the society expects of them, the staff, particularly Nurse Ratched uses fear and intimidation to emasculate the men. Indeed, the narrator describes a fog of fear that was evident in the ward, and he is unable to communicate with a voice of reason after spending lots of time in the facility. Instead of converting him socially acceptable person, the mental hospital has made Chief to be socially dysfunctional, which depicts how the ward and the combine deviated from the mandate of reforming the men holistically.

It is evident the efforts of staff and the combine aim at taming the men to conform to certain norms and expectations of the society. Being in the mental hospital is one way of disempowering those who go against the dictates of the seemingly oppress society. However, the men rebel against such oppressive society. McMurphy spearheads such rebellion as he changes the mindset of the men to realize that the members of staff under the leadership of Nurse Ratched are ruthlessly oppressing the patients. Indeed, the violent attack on the Big Nurse orchestrated by McMurphy arguably represents a social protest. Having a society that disregards the voice of dissent would be disastrous, as it would displace those who do not live and act according to the stipulated standards. As Chief informs McMurphy, combine resulted in the adverse effects of displacing his father and the entire tribe. These are the outcomes of the repressive world of the dominant thoughts and ideologies. Such advocated world cannot be a model of social justice because people have diverse opinions and intimidation cannot be the best strategies for taming the dissenting thoughts. It is critical to recognize that the norms are not absolute and unchangeable, and can be limiting at times. According to Weinstein, cultural and social structure shifts characterize dynamic world, which is ready to integrate all the voices without imposed the conformist ideologies on the people (42). The mechanistic systems of control represented by nurses, ward, doctors, and combine are worst forms of rehabilitation of deviants and beget anarchy and rebellion.

In conclusion, the society disciplines those who exhibit the antisocial behavior. However, the social pressure to conform to certain norms results in deviance. People love the voice of reason and freedom of thought, and directing them in a particular predetermined way goes against their will as humans. The men in Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* epitomize the rebellion that comes with the imposing what the society feels it is the right social order. While the mental facility staff seeks to exert mechanistic control on the patients, the men are ready to stage social protests as one way of indicating dynamism and freedom of thought. The resistance is a testimony that the dynamic world appreciates both conformists and the dissenting world, and confinement manifests anarchical and oppressive society.

## **Works Cited**

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