Psychotic victims: Risk, compassion and blame in mental health discourses

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Recent theories of evaluative language, such as Appraisal theory, aim to use fine-grained qualitative analysis to look at the way social reality is constructed and reflected in text, and how we are aligned through the use of evaluative resources in text. This thesis uses Appraisal theory to look at the way the identity of people with psychotic illness is constructed in a corpus of recent broadsheet feature articles on the topic of schizophrenia, and how we - as readers and members of society- are positioned to perceive people who have psychotic illness. It also looks at the way that the roles and responsibilities of institutions such as the court and prison system, the mental health system and government are evaluated, and outlines the strategies which are used to construe people with psychotic illness as victims, both of their illness and of social institutions. These findings are in direct contrast to much of the previous research on representations of psychotic illness in the media, which has predominantly found that people with psychotic illness are portrayed as violent and a danger to society.

This thesis contributes to a growing body of literature which uses Appraisal theory to identify evaluative patterns in text and add to our understanding of how meaning is made. It also describes patterns of evaluation with regard to certain groups of people (those with psychotic illness, their families, and institutions such as the government, health system and prison system) which appear to mark changing attitudes towards psychotic illness.