

# Using Ideas from Marxist Sociology to Make Social Awareness Better in Research Related to Pharmacy Practice

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## Abstract

*We examine how Marxist sociology can inform and influence pharmacy practice research. Marxist sociology casts light on the systematic factors that influence and shape pharmacy practice at multiple levels, including how professional identity is formed, the commodification of care and the distribution of power in healthcare. We argue that drawing upon a Marxist perspective can help uncover important dimensions of pharmacy practice and support the development of a more socially aware practice model.*

**Keywords:** *Marxist sociology; pharmacy practice; ideology; power; commodification; healthcare systems; critical theory.*

## 1.Introduction

Relatively little attention has been given to applying sociological theories, especially those from critical or radical perspectives, in pharmacy practice research. While sociology has provided important perspectives on social factors related to health, illness and healthcare, pharmacy has often been understood primarily in scientific and technical terms. Consequently, pharmacy practice research has mainly focused on quantitative methods and a biomedical model, neglecting qualitative and critical approaches derived from social science.

This paper explores the ways in which Marxist sociology might inform our understanding of pharmacy practice and the institutions associated with it. The central inquiry of this analysis is whether Marxist theory, grounded in concepts of power, economic organization and societal stratification, is equip This inquiry invites us to explore how approaches that critique capitalist structures can shed light on the ways that pharmacy adapts its practices under market-driven and neoliberal health systems(1).

Pharmacy practice is influenced by multiple external factors. It is influenced at every level by broader society, public policy and market conditions. Drug pricing, access, marketing and workforce issues are influenced by structural shifts in capital and power at the institutional level. Still, most research within pharmacy remains narrowly focused on efficiency, personal action or customer experience, failing to consider the broader political and economic forces that shape these results. Applying Marxist sociology can help expand the reach and perspective of pharmacy research by situating it within comprehensive analyses of capitalism and the commodification of healthcare.

A fundamental idea in Marxist thinking is that healthcare institutions do not function as impartial or benevolent organizations in a society. To the contrary, healthcare systems are intertwined with and rac According to this perspective, pharmacies and pharmacists are embedded in a system of healthcare shaped by the imperatives of profit and unequal distribution of resources. The activities of pharmaceutical corporations play a central role in fostering the expansion of medical knowledge as well as influencing the nature of health policies, public attitudes towards medicine and the conventions that define pharmaceutical practice. Critical Marxist perspectives invite us to explore how these relationships restrict pharmacists' collective and individual agency, alter pharmacy-based healthcare delivery and transition pharmacists from patient advocates into merchant interlocutors.

There are a range of reasons why such perspectives have been neglected in pharmacy practice research. Many are reluctant to engage with Marxist concepts, mistrust their significance in contemporary healthcare or see them as at odds with the objectives of applied research. Neglecting these perspectives impoverishes the analytical depth of the field. Overlooking the long-term influences behind practice environments and policies means we fail to understand how these factors constrain the way pharmacists work.

Marxist thought highlights the influence that material conditions have on the development and perpetuation of ideas, institutions and society as a whole. Pharmacy practice offers a lever for investigating how the priorities of profit-driven pharmaceutical industries configure the concept of medicines in the public domain. Consequently, we are encouraged to examine the tensions that arise in pharmacy practice. Pharmacists may also face conflicts between

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putting the needs of patients first and ensuring that prescribed products are sold; or between upholding the standards of their profession and responding to pressures from corporate partners or businesses.

Such perspectives can help us analyze the ways in which pharmacists are shaped by and implicated in processes of labor organization(2). Today, the ways in which pharmacists perform their job duties are influenced by efforts to reduce expenses, rearrange staff and introduce computerized systems. These developments exemplify the widespread transformation of labor into a commodity in the neoliberal era. Such a perspective prompts us to consider issues related to workers' sense of themselves, their condition of vulnerability in the market and ways in which they might organize. Such an approach gives us an opportunity to evaluate seemingly benign policies that actually support the perpetuation of power imbalances and disadvantages.



**FIGURE 1** Marxist Sociology in Pharmacy Practice

The purpose of introducing Marxist sociology is to strengthen and broaden existing methodological repertoires. Pharmacy practice research will be strengthened by adopting a range of different theoretical frameworks. Critical analysis can illuminate the less visible motives underlying practices, expose the underlying distributions of power and lead to the discovery of new research questions. The principles articulated in this proposal coincide with the growing urgency within healthcare research towards responsible, values-based and politically sensitive inquiry.

The most important contribution that Marxist theory makes to pharmacy practice research is challenging usual ways of thinking and offering new ways to approach common issues. It enables us to challenge and explore the reasons behind particular practices, who gains from them and alternative ways to organize care. It advocates knowledge production that is committed to both understanding and intervening in the world we live in.

## 2. Theoretical Context of Pharmacy Practice Research

Sociological understandings of health, illness and healthcare systems have remained largely unincorporated into research conducted in the pharmacy field. What we see in most pharmacy research is an emphasis on practical and managerial concerns such as workflow optimizations, clinical effectiveness and patient adherence. However, they do not encompass the more fundamental theoretical issues that help unravel the social context in which drug cycles and the dispensing of medicines are embedded.

This restricted manner in which theory is utilized arises in large part from pharmacy's situatedness within

biomedical frameworks and clinically oriented approaches that prioritize the use of positivist strategies. The dominant approach has privileged empirical evidence over the use of theoretical frameworks to analyze issues such as ideology, power, inequality and institutional critique(3). Other health professions are showing greater openness to theoretical approaches that examine their developing roles and institutional structures, whereas pharmacy continues to remain mostly untouched by such perspectives. As a result, a coherent, critical approach to pharmacy practice research has remained largely elusive.

They maintain that the exclusion of sociological theory in pharmacy research is shaped by broader ideological currents running through the field as a whole. Explanations rooted in market-based assumptions and consumer-centered perspectives have come to dominate thinking in the healthcare field, rendering approaches that challenge those models largely marginalized. Marxist analysis, in particular, provides the cognitive tools indispensable for illuminating how healthcare is commodified, the pervasive role of finance and corporate interests in determining pharmaceutical production and access and the ongoing transformation of practitioners into employees in corporate healthcare systems.

Marxist sociology offers a powerful framework for understanding how economic and social factors have historically influenced the nature and organization of modern-day pharmacies. It motivates scholars to examine the hidden economic and political dynamics that influence the way professionals perform their work. Pharmacy cannot be understood apart from the forces of capitalism that organize its production and distribution. Pharmaceuticals provide healing and pharmacists carry out their work, yet both are caught up in the commodification and capitalist rationalization of healthcare.

Marxist theory encourages scholars to think about pharmacy using a unique set of questions grounded in political economy. Why are some medications given preference and availability while others remain scarcely accessible? Pharmacists are subject to the imperatives of the market which influence how they perform their duties. A variety of economic, political and social obstacles prevent people from having fair and affordable access to medication. Pharmacists working in commercialized pharmacy environments often endure various forms of disconnection from their workplace, coworkers and patients. Research methods used traditionally are unlikely to consider or investigate these issues meaningfully.

The importance of class and exploitation in Marxist theory is equally applicable when exploring how the international pharmaceutical industry operates. A handful of large Global North-based firms control most of the world's pharmaceutical industry, even though the majority of production occurs in the Global South under difficult working conditions. Marxist analyses lead us to examine the disparities inherent in the way profit is derived from the labor of underpaid workers in the Global South while enriching those who control businesses in the Global North. Despite being fundamental to analyzing the effects of pharmaceutical capitalism in practice such issues receive scant attention in mainstream pharmacy research(4).

Furthermore, Marxist approaches show that ideology perpetuates the status quo by Bernardineemanagement meets the demands of capitalism. In pharmacy such ideology manifests by reducing the role of the pharmacist to technical or commercial tasks and ignoring their capacities for social change. Pharmacy researchers who incorporate Marxist perspectives on ideology play a vital role in opening up debate about the false assumptions that underpin exploitative and unjust models of pharmaceutical provision.

Additionally, it is necessary to examine the ways in which professional identity is constituted with pharmaceutical capitalism. Pharmacists are facing heightened demands from employers and retailers that can adversely impact their ability to provide ethical care to patients. This results in conflicting priorities that are usefully interpreted in terms of the Marxist idea of labor alienation. Pharmacists who labor in profit-driven healthcare systems often face a loss of agency, weakening of their professional identity and increased dependence on externally imposed rules and regulations. Viewing these experiences as consequences of large-scale systems enables researchers to pursue fresh lines of study, speak out more effectively and influence policy in innovative ways.

Marxist theory plays a vital role in sociological analysis but cannot be used as the sole lens through which the field should be viewed. It can deepen and strengthen pharmacy research by offering alternative ways of interpreting and analyzing the field. Bringing together feminist, post-colonial and other critical theories allows for a richer analysis of how power operates in and through pharmacy. Such a shift encourages researchers to identify issues and develop creative strategies for radical change.

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The authors call for the intentional and critical use of sociological theory, particularly Marxist approaches, in order to enrich pharmacy practice research. This theoretical enhancement becomes ever more urgent as the organization and provision of healthcare in our world are increasingly influenced by powerful global economic forces, large-scale corporate mergers and narratives of efficient management. The use of sociological theory in pharmacy research allows for a deeper understanding of the forces shaping healthcare, leading to more effective approaches that better support ethical practice within the field.

### 3. Exploring the Relevance of Marxist Sociology in Pharmacy Practice

This area of research benefits from Marxist theory because its definition and widespread achievements are important to examine before evaluating its relevance. Marxism stresses the influence that the economic system, class differences and power hierarchies have on every aspect of society. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels founded the tradition that later developed into a range of perspectives applied to diverse areas of contemporary life such as health and healthcare.

Taking a Marxist perspective on pharmacy practice requires going beyond the fact that pharmacies function in capitalist societies. Specifically, attention is directed toward examining how capitalism shapes every stage of the pharmacy system, from creating medicines to hiring personnel and delivering care. According to Marxist sociologists, processes associated with capitalism such as accumulation of capital, conversion of goods into commodities and struggle over resources, affect every aspect of the health sector. This perspective encourages scholars to examine the pharmacy as an arena subject to contestation in which monetary rather than equitable concerns often prevail.

According to Marxist sociology, pharmaceuticals are produced and sold as commodities within a capitalist system, subject to the rules and priorities of private companies and economic markets. Determinations regarding which medicines to produce, promote and stop producing are shaped more often by commercial interests than by public health concerns. Other determinants of drug innovation are pressures to maximize returns for investors and boost the company's bottom line(5). This pattern, driven by the interests of private corporations, shapes every aspect of medication access, prescription prices and innovation trends, widening existing health disparities within and between nations. Marxist analysis sheds light on the ways in which the political economy structures which health concerns generate profit and which go overlooked.



**FIGURE 2** Marxist Theory in Pharmacy

Marxist theory also reveals ways in which workers and their activities are structured within the pharmacy industry. The working environment for pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and other similar employees is determined by managerial approaches prioritizing cost control and enhanced productivity. Work is becoming more intense and technologically monitored in retail pharmacies, just as in many other sectors of the service economy. As a result, professionals increasingly face challenges to both their autonomy and personal fulfillment because their efforts are

constrained by demands rooted in corporate interests and opposed to their moral obligations and sense of calling. Marxist sociology recognizes ideology as the prevailing ideas that mask exploitative relationships and justify structures that benefit certain groups at the expense of others. Ideology in pharmacy often manifests as the perception that pharmacists are unbiased looking after patients, even as they face greater commercial pressures related to company rules, revenue goals and patient demands. These ideological framings obscure the ways in which society's organization shapes the circumstances in which pharmacy professionals can best meet their ethical obligations and respond to patient needs.

However, Marxist theory offers not just analysis of problems but also a basis for fighting against them and promoting positive reforms. Marxism conceptualizes class struggle as ongoing resistance across many spheres of life, as users and groups come together to advance their interests. In pharmacies such structures might encourage efforts to improve work environments, oppose unfair price hikes and connect with activist groups seeking improvements to the wider health system. Acknowledging the collective power behind such actions, Marxism allows for change and improvement by rallying and challenging structures.

Some skeptics maintain that Marxism is overly deterministic, overly focused on the economy and no longer applicable to today's knowledge-based and service-dominated economy. In response, present-day Marxist theorists have revised the theory to take into account the changing nature of work, power and divisions in society. However, the emergence of transnational pharmaceutical corporations, the adoption of neoliberal ideologies across healthcare and the growth of systemic disparities in health highlight even greater reasons to draw on Marxist analysis today. With ongoing economic reforms transforming health systems, exploring how these changes impact the availability and distribution of healthcare grows ever more important.

Additionally, Marxism allows for dialogue with other forms of critical thinking. Feminist Marxism has opened up important insights into how care labor and gender relations play out within healthcare. Post-colonial Marxist scholars have shown how power relationships inherent in the global pharmaceutical industry affect the distribution of essential medicines. These theoretical combinations offer a more complex analysis of how class, race, gender and geography shape pharmacy practice itself.

The goal of applying Marxist sociological theories to pharmacy practice is not to replace existing methods of research or medical practice. It is to integrate them with insights into the social and economic conditions that shape their practice. This method motivates scholars to consider questions that more deeply examine the forces at play within pharmacy practice(6). What groups or individuals gain the most from pharmaceutical practices' existing structures and dynamics? Which groups are served, neglected or marginalized? What reforms would be needed to create a fairer and more balanced system?

This requires researchers in pharmacy to consider alternative theoretical perspectives that help undermine commonly accepted ideas and encourage fresh Ways of thinking about important issues. Such efforts could lead to significant advances provided that a collaborative, educationally grounded and institutionally enabled approach is taken. Critically informed pharmacy research can profoundly shape the field as well as lead to improved and more responsive, ethical and inclusive practices in pharmaceutical care.

Marxist sociology presents a valuable and abundant body of work for pharmacy research that is frequently overlooked. It enables a systematic examination of how the different aspects of pharmaceutical systems operate together and how these mechanisms might be reshaped. Exposure to this tradition encourages both researchers and practitioners to conceptualize pharmacy as a venue for contestation and transformation.

#### **4. Applications of Marxist Analysis in Pharmacy Practice**

Marxist sociology grants not only a conceptual approach to understanding power relations in the pharmacy industry but also gives researchers a means to reveal how these dynamics play out in real-world pharmacy practice. Applying Marxist analysis to empirical studies reveals unexplored dimensions that can help reshape conventional questions about community and institutional pharmacy practice(7).

A key area of analysis is studying how pharmacy services and the pharmaceutical interaction itself become commodified. Medication dispensing in contemporary pharmacies is catching the character of a transactional process rather than an aspect of public health. Pharmacies linked with major corporation are now both centers for

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medicine distribution and for-profit establishments, directing pharmacists to balance patient requirements and corporate objectives. Moving from care to sales is typical within capitalist systems because consumers instruct service providers through the market and the focus shifts from well-being to product delivery.

The move toward commercialization within pharmacies is not mere coincidence. It is driven by shifting priorities in the healthcare sector as a result of the influence of neoliberal thought. Large pharmacy chains and PBMs prioritize profits for their shareholders which can restrict access to medication and curtail the ability of pharmacists to exercise independent decision-making(8). Capitalism drives the reorganization of even vital social links such as care into means for private gain. This move has led pharmacists to focus Podcast explores potential effects of commercialization on drug prices.

Marxist analysis also allows us to question the reasons behind national and international drug policies. The actions of governments regarding drug prices, intellectual property rights and reimbursement practices are frequently dictated by influential industries. They use their financial and political clout to strongly shape international and domestic drug policies. A Marxist analysis shows that these policies are primarily designed to maximize earnings for pharmaceutical companies.

The Marxist critique becomes most productive when analyzing global inequities in access to vital medications. The patent system, to which pharmaceutical companies want the public to believe helps encourage innovation, in reality ensures that life-saving drugs remain inaccessible to many people living in low- and middle-income nations. Marxist analysis demonstrates how pharmaceutical corporations use mechanisms of privatization to take hold of shared wisdom, capitalize on it through patents and recoup their investment at enhanced clinicoroom drug. Unequal access to medicines is an inherent aspect of a global economic system that depends on accumulating and privatizing knowledge.

Marxist analysis can reveal the conflicts pharmacists face when trying to stay true to their values while operating within a capitalist healthcare system. Pharmacists often express frustration with the ways in which the drive for profits restricts their ability to provide one-on-one care, increases sales pressure and reduces their say in what medication is stocked(9). These discomforts are seen as forms of alienation an important Marxist notion capturing the ways workers are alienated from their productive activities when bosses dictate how their work should be performed and deprive it of its value or significance.

Marxist analyses reveal alienation as more than a personal issue. The existence of alienation is built into the core organization of work under capitalism. Pharmacists experience alienation through the decline of their professional motivation, diminished control over decisions and transformation of their knowledge into a marketable product. Pharmacists' interactions with patients are altered by such structures and encounters become more transactional at the expense of personalized and multifaceted serv Pharmacists are reduced to performing tasks efficiently regardless of their impact on client care.

Applying Marxist theories can help understand how interactions between different professional groups are structured. Pharmacy's position as a health profession has been significant influence by how closely it is linked with medicine. Many pharmacists are seen as secondary members of the healthcare field because they are regarded as working under the authority of physicians. Such subordination of pharmacy is often justified as arising from questions of expertise or liability. A Marxist perspective, however, recognizes it as a component of a larger battle over who exercises power in the marketplace of health care under capitalism.

Pharmacy's diminished status may be furthered by its growing connection with relatively less valued markets such as retail and services, while medicine is embedded in more important state-based institutions. Stable arrangements of labor and valuation in healthcare solidify a system where some occupations are accorded greater resources, status and power, while others remain disadvantaged. By applying a Marxist approach, we can see that these hierarchies reflect not only discrete professional divisions, but also manifestations of fundamental differences in the distribution of economic resources.

Additionally, Marxist thought can position pharmacists as contributors to transforming systems that disadvantage working people. Because they work between patients and industry, pharmacists are well positioned to challenge prevailing health care structures and promote fairer alternatives. Pharmacists are well-positioned to play an important role in shaping public health policy if they are encouraged to emphasize issues such as medication availability, prescribing strategies and patient concerns, as well as to question existing systems from a perspective

that promotes equality and worthwhile critique(10).

Examining pharmacy through a Marxist framework enables biulhwneb gipradualist and piecemeala perspectives are transformed into a more systemic analysis. This approach challenges us to consider the larger structures that shape and constrain the ways in which those behaviors and interventions take place. This perspective invites the integration of empirical and quantitative methods, while enhancing these with a broader understanding of social and political forces. It facilitates an analysis on several levels, linking the everyday experiences of pharmacists and patients to the underlying influences of market capitalism, international flows of goods and services and state policies.

Overall, looking through the lens of Marxist sociology helps expand the understanding and critique of everyday experiences in pharmaceutical practice. Critical analysis of structural inequalities, commodification, exploitation and ideological control enables us to comprehend the problems within the profession and inspire approaches to building a fairer and more compassionate pharmaceutical system.

## **5.Conclusion and Future work**

This study underlines how Marxist sociology helps explain the social, economic and political influences on pharmaceutical care and healthcare. Marxist sociology offers a way to look at how capitalism, power and social inequality are related to pharmacy. It confronts the habit of looking at healthcare and pharmacy work mainly as technical or professional activities, while ignoring why and how health happens off to the side.

A Marxist focus on class relations, production processes and economic needs in the pharmaceutical industry and healthcare sectors shows how profit and capitalist goals drive ways drugs are made, shared and related jobs are organized. By following this view, we can see that past policies and practices may build business opportunities for drug companies instead of helping people's health and this often leads to broader inequalities in health care. Besides, this theory encourages pharmacy researchers to think about the ethical and social effects of using market approaches for healthcare.

Marxist sociology has had important effects, but still poses some issues for pharmacy practice research. It may not completely recognize the different influences related to personal actions, cultural differences and micro-level contacts that affect pharmaceutical care. All the same, including Marxist concepts corrects the problems of overly simple or non-political ideas, prompting researchers to see pharmacy practice as part of broader social and political forces. Having a clear understanding allows for a better analysis of how social and power differences affect those in healthcare.

Moreover, looking at things through a Marxist lens can help pharmacy researchers and practitioners see how their actions are affected by potentially exploitative systems and drive them to address issues related to social justice and equity. Here, Marxist theory both offers analysis and motivates actions to correct unequal access to healthcare, unequal control for healthcare workers and inadequate patient outcomes.

Taken together, while Marxist sociology might not solve all the varied issues in pharmacy practice, it is invaluable for rethinking and examining the way pharmaceutical care is structured. Its significance is demonstrated by encouraging further consideration of the effects of capitalism on healthcare, job roles and patient care in pharmacy practice research. Applying Marxist concepts leads to research agendas that put social fairness first and attempt to change current neoliberal ideas in healthcare.

### **Future Work**

As we go forward, using Marxist sociological theory in pharmacy research requires a planned and ongoing program to test and improve the theory. More studies are needed that make use of Marxist theory in a wide variety of pharmacy situations such as community pharmacies, hospitals, the pharmaceutical industry and health policy areas. The study would help show how systems and groups involved in the economy impact both the practice and outcomes for patients in pharmacy.

Exploring the daily lives of pharmacists and patients using Marxist ideas should be a main area of future research to examine why work conditions, professional roles and access to medicine are shaped by capitalism. Professionals may employ ethnographic and qualitative approaches to notice the small details of pharmacy that highlight disagreements over control and the ways that commercial interests change the way patients are seen by staff.

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Combining micro-level insights with the macro-perspective found in Marxism can lead to a better and more complete understanding of pharmacy work.

More research is needed to see how changes in healthcare and policies drive by the market reshape pharmacy services and affect health inequality. Looking at pharmacy sectors in various countries and economies would help identify where capitalist pressures have an impact and where they do not. This work might uncover what pharmacists and communities do to negotiate, question or deal with the effects of commodification and privatization.

It is possible to include different disciplines to strengthen how Marxist sociology explains findings in pharmacy research. By using Marxist theory together with feminist theory, critical race theory and postcolonial studies, we can better examine the ways that several types of discrimination work within pharmaceutical care. This way, the approach could fully explore social relations by taking into account gender, race, ethnicity, globalization and class..

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### **Conflicts of interest**

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare

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