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Containment, conformity: Families, institutions, and the limits of imagination.

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Abstract

In the decades immediately following World War II, commonly referred to as the Cold War, people with intellectual disabilities continued to be institutionalized despite growing public calls for civic and social rights for all peoples. This article examines the social, cultural, and political conditions of the Cold War era that contributed to the ongoing placement of children in Canadian government institutions, and explores the relationship between cultural and political discourse, familial decision-making, and the continued marginalization and segregation of people with intellectual disabilities. Using a Foucauldian approach, it also reflects on the 'historical ontology' of this phenomenon in order to better understand the limits of possibility as understood by families of this era.

Keywords:

Cold War; Institutionalization; Familial decision-making; Discourse; Historical ontology; Imagination

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Introduction

Recent Canadian disability scholarship has disclosed social and political phenomena which have contributed to the marginalization and oppression of people with disabilities throughout Canada's history (see, for example, Reaume, 2012; Yoshida et al, 2014). This includes significant scholarly work on the institutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities¹ and the historical development of these practices (Chupik & Wright, 2006; Clarke, 2006; Malacrida, 2015, 2006; Radford, 1991; Radford & Park, 1993; Rossiter & Clarkson, 2013). While Trent (1994), Carlson (2010) and Carey (2009) have provided detailed histories of the institutionalization of the 'feble-minded' in the United States, room remains in the Canadian disability studies canon for an examination of the cultural discourse and praxes which surrounded the ongoing institutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities in the decades immediately following World War II, commonly referred to as the Cold War, despite growing calls for civic and social rights for all peoples which characterized nascent social-political movements throughout this time period (Simmons, 1982). Stemming from doctoral research which examined the impact of institutionalization on family relationships and understandings of

¹ I acknowledge the contentiousness of terms which designate and categorize people due to perceived differences and hesitate to use such nomenclature. However, for clarity purposes, in this paper, terms such as "people with disabilities" and "people with intellectual disabilities" are used. In some instances, the term "intellectually disabled" appears. Derogatory terms such as "feble-minded" and "retarded" which appear in the text to are used only in reference to the specific historical era within which they were used and do not reflect my opinion of the people so designated.

disability², this paper examines the social, cultural and political conditions of the Cold War era that contributed to the continued placement of children with intellectual disabilities in Canadian government institutions³. In so doing, it explores the relationship between broad cultural and political discourse and more intimate social practices, such as familial decision-making, which had a direct and frequently devastating effect on people with intellectual disabilities. This article also attempts, borrowing Carlson's (2010) approach, to excavate the "historical ontology" (Foucault, 1997, p. 316) of institutionalization practices in mid twentieth-century Canada by exploring "the ways in which the possibilities for choice, and for being, arise in history" (Hacking, 2002, p. 23). That is, while the research from which these explorations emerge reveal the practical and discursive conditions that would have influenced parents to commit their child to an institution, thus contributing to a more complete and nuanced understanding of motives and practices, it also opens up the possibility to mine a vein of enquiry which "explores the ways that certain kinds of questions and forms of discourse were made possible, and others discounted or excluded" (Carlson, 2010, p. 17). In this way, this enquiry further encourages us to examine "the historical conditions of possibility for this problem in the present" (Tremain, 2002, p. 33), thus shedding historical light on current practices of oppression and marginalization directed against people with intellectual disabilities.

² Burghardt, M. (2014). *Narratives of separation: Institutions, families, and the construction of difference*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Critical Disability Studies, York University. This study investigated the impact of institutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities on family relationships and understandings of disability. Background historical research completed for this project exposed the social and cultural factors which are discussed in this article. While interviews with institutional survivors, their parents and siblings are the heart of the project and inform many of the conclusions drawn in the larger study, these interviews are not explicitly drawn on here, except in a few cases where they illustrate an observation.

³ Figures from Simmons (1982) and Williston (1971) indicate steady increases in the numbers of admissions to Ontario's Schedule 1 facilities (institutions which housed people deemed to have the most involved degree of disability) between the end of WWII and the 1970s. Simmons (1982) further notes that decreasing figures in the 1970s were also due to re-categorization wherein some institutional residents were classified under the *Homes for Special Care* programme, and "were by no means de-institutionalized" (p. 313).

This article consists of two parts. The first provides historical background of the Cold War era in Canada, and discusses four Cold War phenomena—the ‘containment’ of external threats, conformity to normative standards, the re-emergence of traditional family and gender roles, and the emergence of professional expertise—and their discursive and material connections to institutionalization. In it, I explore the relationship between broad socio-political impulses, particularly those fuelled by discourses of fear and anxiety concerning “the other”, and the experiences of people with intellectual disabilities, who have historically carried little influence in public and private arenas (Goodley, 2001; Steffánsdóttir & Traustadóttir, 2015). The second part of the paper analyses this period in Canada’s institutional history by interrogating its ‘historical ontology’, or the conditions which allowed institutionalization to be sustained in the public imagination, in order to better comprehend the limits of possibility as understood by families of this era⁴. As with any research that excavates morally questionable and ultimately reprehensible practices (Gould, 1996; McLaren, 1990), this essay hopes to contribute to the body of work providing critical historical reflection in order to prevent the propagation and repetition of unjust and abusive practices in the current socio-political milieu.

Social and political context

Historical analyses of the decades immediately following the Second World War suggest renewed hope for a global order within which negotiated and long-lasting peace might be realized after decades of uncertainty (Egerton, 2004; Guest, 1999). Many who had lived through

⁴ This piece is written with an acknowledgement of the decades of work undertaken by families who, despite the pressures discussed in this article, chose to keep their children at home and worked to establish community resources to better support family members with an intellectual disability, as well as those families who felt compelled to institutionalize, yet continued to work towards greater inclusion. Panitch (2008), in her work with mothers of children with intellectual disabilities, provides intimate portraits of such situations.

the war were determined that the notion of citizenship, essential to the establishment of a just and peaceful global body politic, must be expanded to include social and political rights for all people, including people with disabilities and others who had historically been marginalized (Guest, 1999; Simmons, 1982). Growing awareness of these universal obligations was countered, however, by a powerful global discourse concerning mounting tensions between forces of capitalism and communism and their strongholds, the United States and the Soviet Union respectively (Cavell, 2004; Whitaker & Marcuse, 1994). Indeed, the approximately forty-year span which demarcates the limits of the Cold War⁵ was defined to a large degree by the heated political, rhetorical, and threatening contest of wills between these two 'superpowers' and their attempts to achieve dominance on the international stage in an era marked by the possibility of annihilation through atomic warfare.

Entrenched underneath this intense militaristic manoeuvring, however, were Cold War discourses which had implications in the intimate social and cultural practices of domestic and family life. In North America, a principal ideological thrust was the 'containment' of communism (Kennan, 2012), considered a threat to the consumer-based, idealized lifestyle towards which postwar⁶ North Americans were encouraged to aspire (Brookfield, 2012; May, 2008; Runté & Mills, 2006). Further ideological principles included the pervasive threat of the 'other', the unseen yet ubiquitous enemy of the state (Cavell, 2004), and the responsibility of

⁵ There are varying opinions regarding the official 'start' and length of the Cold War. Whitaker & Marcuse (1994) note that the anti-communism of the Cold War was a continuation of sentiment already well-established in the twentieth century (p. 11), and that tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union were firmly established by the conclusion of the Second World War, including a "stiffening of distrust in Canadian [public] opinion" (p. 12). Brookfield (2012), however, suggests that 1949 is the official start of the Cold War. In that year, the Chinese civil war ended with a communist party victory, and on 29 August, 1949, the Soviet Union successfully tested an atomic bomb, the United States thus "losing its monopoly on atomic weapons" (p. 30). Moreover, in general, academics agree that current situation aside, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, a powerful symbol of the 'Iron Curtain' in 1989, marked the end of the most heated decades of the Cold War.

⁶ The term 'postwar' is used throughout the text to denote the years following World War II.

citizens to contain this 'other' linguistically and materially (Iacovetta, 2004; Kinsman, 2004; May, 2008; Whitaker, 2004; Whitaker & Marcuse, 1994). Moreover, Cold War ideology influenced discursive constructions of gender, work, sexuality and the family, each of which served particular social and political purposes, including one's niche in the development of "a strong and flourishing nation" (Brookfield, 2012, p. 53/4).

While the Cold War is generally understood as the military and political tension between the United States and the Soviet Union (Cavell, 2004; May, 2008; Whitaker, 2004), the implications of the Cold War in terms of domestic and foreign policy were also felt in Canada (Whitaker & Marcuse, 1994). Despite political movement to work towards a Canadian Bill of Rights, following the example of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, consecutive postwar Canadian governments placed a "priority on fighting communism rather than advancing human rights" (Egerton, 2004, p. 451). Adherence within Canadian politics to the priorities of the Cold War (Whitaker, 2004) left little room for domestic factions to resist the rhetoric of external threat and the need for military preparedness. Notwithstanding pockets of anti-war resistance which began to demonstrate their position during this time period and continued to do so throughout the politically charged 1960s and 70s, the general sentiment throughout the population reflected the government's priority to contain the perceived risk of the spread of communism (Brookfield, 2012; Roberts, 1989).

Scholars suggest, furthermore, that "Canada's Cold War was not simply an extension of the one waged in the United States" (Cavell, 2004, p. 5), but that animosities "had a particular cultural dimension because [they] raised issues of national self-representation" (ibid), and were "*struggles for control of the symbols of legitimacy in Canadian society*" (Whitaker & Marcuse, 1994, p. 24, original emphasis). Moreover, this time period was characterized by a "broad

process of 'othering'" (Cavell, 2004, p. 4) marked by discriminatory practices already long-established in Canadian socio-political circles, becoming notably more pronounced during the Cold War. The Cold War, therefore, cannot be reduced to an ongoing tension between two superpowers (Whitaker, 2004), but should be regarded as a time during which social and political discourse had significant influence on public and domestic life in areas beyond their borders. In the sections that follow, I address four key ideological notions and practices and discuss their relationship to the phenomenon of sustained institutionalization practices in the years following WWII.

Threat of the other and the discourse of "containment"

Containment, a term first coined by American policy-maker and diplomat Kennan (2012) in the late 1940s, refers to policies of restraint and surveillance against groups and individuals considered risks to the hegemony of capitalist state administration and to the realization of an idyllic postwar future (Brookfield, 2012; May, 2008). 'Containment' was the official response to the ubiquitous threat of 'problematic others' in the public sphere, and included discourses of military preparedness and self-protection against an enemy which hovered unseen, yet imminently ready to facilitate Soviet "territorial expansion" (May, 2008, p. 9). Further, containment refers to the establishment of cultural sites within which citizens could find safety, security, and protection (ibid) in an imminently dangerous world. Preoccupations with bringing foreign influences under control and preventing the spread of communism were played out domestically through the establishment of the protective enclaves of the suburban home and nuclear family, "the best bulwarks against the dangers of the Cold War" (ibid, p. 9). Thus, while 'containment' was predominantly framed in militaristic terms, it influenced meanings ascribed to

potentially subversive 'others' and shaped normative definitions of gender, family, and the home.

Potential threats to domestic and political stability were not limited to foreign sources, however, and the menace feared by political leaders included those perceived to emanate from within (Cavell, 2004; Kinsman, 2004; Whitaker & Marcuse, 1994). Internal threats, such as "racial strife, emancipated women, class conflict, and familial disruption" (May, 2008, p. 9), were as much cause for alarm for decision-makers as the risk of the spread of communism. Nascent ideological movements, including the peace movement, were interpreted as threats to the moral order of the modern family (Iacovetta, 2006), and were opposed by political rhetoric which encouraged the upholding of traditional familial and gender norms.

Canadian scholars suggest that government responses to these ideological and cultural threats were the principle manifestation of the Cold War in Canada. For example, while subversive individuals and groups were generally considered suspect in the government's quest for foreign and domestic security, the harassment levelled at the gay community was particularly oppressive. Kinsman (2004) notes that the interrogation and arrest of thousands of gay men by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in the 1960s (p. 109) is indicative of an overriding culture of surveillance and discipline. The suppression of the queer community, considered acceptable by many due to its moral undertones, paralleled the widespread practice of suppression and dismissal against those who might disturb the status quo.

This 'justified' suppression of 'queerness' encouraged acts of discrimination against other marginalized groups. As Gentile (2000) notes, "the notion of 'deviance'... was a way to identify not only gays and lesbians, but also women [and other marginalized groups] who resisted or challenged the gender norms and social order prescribed by political and medical

experts" (p. 132). While the queer community was the face of justified discrimination in light of the needs of the state, a generalized culture of 'othering' became acceptable in the social and political milieu. Furthermore, Cavell (2004) notes that while this historical period was marked by fears of the enemy within and without, processes of 'othering' were already "deeply rooted in the historical substrata of the nation" (p. 4), and the Cold War provided a convenient framework for the naming and surveillance of those seen as different, practices already engrained within the Canadian political tradition (Kinsman, 2004). Accordingly, while the Canadian government struggled with questions concerning its position within the Cold War (Whitaker, 2004) and its self-perceived need to establish markers of "national self-representation" (Cavell, 2004, p. 7), the disciplinary work being done 'on the ground', invisible to most, suppressed calls to establish a more inclusive society and to implement broader mechanisms of social justice.

Thus, while containment in the United States was the "overarching principle... the key to security" (May, 2008, p. 16) against the threat of communism, in Canada, the "culture of containment [w]as... a culture of regulation" (Kinsman, as cited in Cavell, 2004, p. 13). Government rhetoric that democracy and a long-desired lifestyle were threatened justified the use of control and regulation to monitor 'factious societal elements'. An ethos of fear gave reason for the militarization of Canadian culture and prevented meaningful consideration of policy directed towards social initiatives. Further, the need for order justified the ongoing demarcation and segregation of people considered 'different'.

Norms: Adaptation versus Resistance

The culture of normativity marking this era meant that those falling outside acceptable standards of opinion, appearance, and behaviour were considered suspect in the quest for national security.

"Reification" (Kinsman, 2004, p. 113) of the enemy and the need for its containment meant that those who questioned political decisions were considered unpatriotic and potential communist sympathizers. Ironically, 'peace' became a "contentious term... as it was considered by many Canadians to be a concept more in line with communism than democracy... to speak openly about peace was subversive" (Brookfield, 2012, p. 76). Adherence to the status quo denoted patriotism, while challenge, such as agitating for a reduction in violence-preparedness (Brookfield, 2012), or for the allocation of funds towards social inclusion as opposed to military might (Simmons, 1982), marked one as seditious, a trouble-maker (Whitaker & Marcuse, 1994). Accordingly, the acceptable civic response during this era was acquiescence, not resistance (Roberts, 1989; Runté & Mills, 2006), and the general tenor of postwar life was distinctly "apolitical" (May, 2008, p. 17). Social critique was not encouraged, particularly from marginalized groups such as women, who had much to gain from social change, yet instead played significant roles in the maintenance of the Cold War ethic.

The culture of conformity was expansive and consolidated the hegemony of the white, able, middle-class Canadian family (Gleason, 1999a, 1999b). Contextualising the Cold War family within the larger political agenda of conventionality exposes the impasse that some families would have experienced in the event of the birth of a child with a disability. The "universalized standards of childhood... contained costs for those who did not meet with its standards" (Helleiner, 2001, p. 150), and those located outside of the explicitly gendered (male), racialized (white) and ableist norms were "in a much more ambiguous relationship with nation-building" (ibid), non-essential players in the establishment of a strong postwar body politic (Iacovetta, 2004). The right course of action for patriotic Canadian families, therefore, was to produce "the right kind of children" (Helleiner, 2001, p. 143-152); in the event of disability,

"inferiority was written on their bodies... [and] the body was an inescapable marker from acceptable... society" (Gleason, 1999b, p. 122).

In an agenda of conformity, resisting the accepted and professionally-backed route of institutionalization and agitating for increased community services for children with disabilities would have been a difficult endeavour indeed. In an era during which norms were deified, deviance was suspect, and people's compliance was a demonstration of national allegiance, challenging expert advice to "put the child away" could have been interpreted as a display of unpatriotic defiance.

Cold War families and "gender regulation" (Kinsman, 2004, p. 116)

Cold War ideology fostered the "symbiotic connection between the culture of the Cold War and the domestic revival" (May, 2008, p. 13), and cultivated the re-emergence of a "conservative family ideology" (Iacovetta, 2004, p. 78). Domestic containment, the nuclear family and gender hierarchies became "part of the highly charged turf on which moral victories against communism were fought" (Iacovetta, 2006, p. 174). Despite gains by first-wave feminists, including prewar trends of later marriage, fewer children, and women working outside the home to support families hit by the Depression, the immediate postwar years were marked by a distinct reversal: marrying at a young age, having several children, and embracing divisions of labour based on traditional gender lines (Brookfield, 2012; May 2008). North American families turned to conventional and distinctive roles: men worked outside of the home at hierarchically-organized jobs, and women stayed home as full-time homemakers, caring for children and organizing the running of the household (Iacovetta, 2004; McPhail, 2009; Runté & Mills, 2006).

Marriage and family were central. The family home became a nexus of security and preparedness within the landscape of potential nuclear war, and was an antidote to the perceived threat of familial breakdown due to rapid urbanization and modernization (Gleason, 1997). With the chaotic uncertainty of no known location wherein this 'war' would be waged (Whitaker, 2004), the "home front became the front line" (Brookfield, 2012, pp. 51-69), and successive Canadian governments encouraged a generalized preparedness in which family homes were secure enclaves, ready to withstand enemies from within and without (Runté & Mills, 2006). A stable family home and a house "filled with children" (May, 2008, p. 26) had as much to do with establishing a strong security state as it did with fuelling the romantic postwar notion of returning war veterans and their sweethearts creating a home together.

The return to traditional domestic arrangements was also part of a broader effort to ensure returning veterans' re-integration into regular civilian life with prescribed and restorative roles (Runté & Mills, 2006). Efforts were made to ensure men's resumption of positions as responsible and contributing citizens (May, 2008, p. 86) and to restore their sense of masculinity and purpose. Domestic life "focused on the needs of the returning veterans" (ibid, p. 65) and women were encouraged to return to the home front to make room for their men, and to assume the role of the resilient home-builder and emotional sounding board.

This return to traditional domestic arrangements and the deifying of the nuclear family exposes three assumptions that contributed to the ongoing institutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities. The first is that the ideological dependence on traditional institutions such as marriage and family meant great efforts were made to ensure their survival (Iacovetta, 2006). Women in particular worked hard to maintain their marriages, for they "had invested a great deal of their personal identities in their domestic roles and were not willing to abandon

them" (May, 2008, p. 38). Gendered domestic arrangements played a significant role in how decisions were made (McPhail, 2009; Runté & Mills, 2006), and many women were likely to acquiesce within the relationship in order to sustain it (Brookfield, 2012; Iacovetta, 2006). In terms of our purposes here, if the care of a child with a disability was adding tension to an already-fragile relationship, removing the child from the family home could have taken precedence over attempts to keep her at home, as the survival of the marriage and domestic order was paramount (May, 2008; Sherman & Coccoza, 1984). This point was iterated by one of the participants in the study from which these observations stem: once her brother was institutionalized, "basically they [parents] had to disengage [from the boy]... and that was the basis of their continued marriage".

Second, women's agency was defined by assumptions regarding women's competence (or lack thereof) and the extent of their capabilities. Notwithstanding the fact that women's realm was the home, men remained principal decisions-makers within the family (Gleason, 1997, 1999a, 1999b; May, 2008; Thorn, 2009). Moreover, women's absorption of domestic and childcare responsibilities, as well as discourse which opposed women's work outside the home because of the feared consequences of dysfunctional families and delinquent children (Gleason, 1997; Iacovetta, 2004; Thorn, 2009) contributed to women's absence in the public arena, and denied women the full extent of their authority in public and private spheres (McPhail, 2009; Runté & Mills, 2006). Assumptions of incapacity reinforced the notion of women's limitations, particularly in areas considered physically and emotionally taxing. These assumptions, in combination with a lack of community supports for children with disabilities and their families in the postwar period, underpinned perceptions that many women were not up to the challenge of raising a child with a disability, unassisted, in the home. The simplified response in many cases

was to name it as a task too large, both physically and emotionally, for the limited abilities of the women charged with their care. Typical of the generally apolitical milieu of this era, a frequent response to the difficulties women encountered was not to challenge the status quo and push for change that might have alleviated the pressures they faced, nor to provide better opportunities for children with disabilities in the community, but to assume instead that families were better off placing the child outside the home into institutional care. As one of the parents interviewed for this project stated, "The basic reason that he went was that my wife couldn't handle him. And what was she going to do? She's got these three other children, and me, I'm not around that much, and he knew she couldn't handle him".

Third, Cold War ideology extended to the kind of children who should be produced and their perceived potential to contribute to patriotic efforts. "Strong and able offspring... [were] an essential ingredient to winning the Cold War" (May, 2008, p. 96), and "maintaining strong, healthy bodies was... part of families' civil defence plan" (Brookfield, 2012, p. 58). Public health endeavours launched during this era, while ostensibly promoting reasonable lifestyles of healthy eating and exercise, also promoted the political and economic mandates of the Cold War via discursive connections between health, capability, and "capitalist production and militarism" (McPhail, 2009, p. 1026). Despite increasing awareness of the devastating effects of Nazi Germany's eugenic policies on groups of 'non-essential' peoples, including people with disabilities (McLaren, 1990), eerily similar calls for race purification continued to be voiced within certain jurisdictions of North America during the postwar years in feeble arguments linking a weak populace to being overrun by communists (Brookfield, 2012; May, 2008).

Moreover, families were under pressure to ensure that non-disabled siblings were not impinged upon by the presumed burdens of a disabled brother or sister (Lobato, 1983; Sherman

& Coccoza, 1984). Narrow and expert-informed parameters for the model family "pathologized those outside the ideal" (Gleason, 1999a, p. 81), and provoked consternation when families did not live up to idealized expectations. Literature from the postwar period that discusses disability within the family concerns itself almost exclusively with the (principally negative) effect of a disabled child on his or her family and siblings, never the reverse, locating the 'problem' in its entirety in the child with the disability (see, for example, Farber, 1959; Holt, 1958; Jordan, 1961)⁷. Moreover, postwar researchers were silent with regards to critical and structural reasons for familial challenges, and did not consider potential societal changes that might have improved situations for those affected by disability in some way.

Throughout this time period, families, and women in particular, were compelled to adapt to discourse which sustained the status quo in terms of domestic and social arrangements. Families conformed to social and political expectations in spite of potential costs in other areas. Thus, in some situations, couples were more likely to remove a child with a disability than to grapple with alternate arrangements that might have allowed the child to stay at home, albeit with the stressors this might have presented to the marriage and family. This inclination towards adaptation explains the emergence of another Cold War phenomenon, the 'expert', which had significant bearing on familial decisions regarding the care of family members with disabilities.

The nuclear family and the role of the 'expert'

Amid fears of familial breakdown (Gleason, 1999a, 1999b; Thorn, 2009) and the collapse of traditional values (Brookfield, 2012), 'experts' in auxiliary professions such as social

⁷ While research from professional disciplines such as nursing and psychology continues to prioritize the impact of the disabled child on the remainder of the family (see, for example, Blacher et al, 2005; Jones & Passey, 2004; and Reichman, Corman, & Noonan, 2008), notable exceptions have emerged in the last thirty years from the disability studies literature, wherein accounts written by people with disabilities have begun to re-calibrate perceptions of the 'effect' of disability on the home and family life. See, for example, Jones (2007) and Odell (2011).

work, rehabilitation, and special education began to secure their positions as essential figures in the task of coping with emergent family issues. Experts and the therapeutic models they embraced encouraged the postwar populace to address challenges via specific, medical- and goal-oriented models of intervention rather than to address their social and political origins. For the first time, the 'expert' phenomenon firmly secured itself in the public realm, and professional expertise began to have significant influence on the culture and workings of the family.

Two phenomena explain professionals' emergence. First was the concern that the traditional family would not survive amid the possibility of nuclear annihilation and rapid social change. Perceived gaps in families' abilities to withstand these pressures created a space for the expert, who was willing to impart professional skills on families vulnerable to the threats of the age (Brookfield, 2012; Gleason, 1997; Thorn, 2009). 'Well' marriages meant 'well' children (and vice-versa), and the strength of the family imparted strength to the nation (Gleason, 1999a, 1997; Thorn, 2009; Brookfield, 2012; May, 2008). Thus, while the role of the helping professions was ostensibly to assist families, they also reinforced hegemonic ideals of the white, middle-class, successful and able Canadian family (Gleason, 1999a, 1997; Helleiner, 2001). Further, experts' existence can be considered part of the "social practice that actually [brought] itself into being" (Kinsman, 2004, p. 109), as professionals played a role in creating the normative discourse which validated their own existence (Gleason, 1997; Thorn, 2009). The task of raising a 'normal' family in postwar Canada, and the expert advice deemed essential to its success, were in a symbiotic and mutually-sustaining relationship.

Within this context, and with the ever-expanding circle of children deemed to need educative and psychological assistance, long-term institutionalization remained a viable option. As families relinquished their internal expertise to that of experts (Gleason, 1997, 1999a, 1999b)

and professionals' expertise continued to expand, institutions designed for long-term placement remained fixtures on the landscape of possibilities for postwar families. Indeed, despite increasing efforts by many parents to ensure inclusion and services for their children, and the work of hundreds of families which chose to keep their children at home, admissions to institutions continued to rise (Radford & Park, 1993; Simmons, 1982).

Second, a geographic phenomenon emerged which, although not normally considered in discussions concerning the institutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities, contributed to growing reliance on the expert. The development of sprawling, suburban housing developments, dependent on huge tracts of land, extensive networks of roads, and car ownership were significant aspects of Cold War life (Whitaker & Marcuse, 1994)⁸. The decentralized and expansive nature of suburban developments meant that for the first time in the modern era, extended families and their traditional lines of communication and support were suddenly distanced from each other (Thorn, 2009). No longer was the expertise of parents and grandparents readily available to young men and women who were beginning families of their own (Iacovetta, 2006; May, 2008). Women in particular were affected, as they were isolated from peers and family from whom they might have gained significant practical and emotional support. Loss of the knowledge that would have been available to previous generations via more intense domestic arrangements, in combination with the figurative and practical distance between families, meant that many families did not have access to informal yet vital networks of support that might have sustained them while raising their children, particularly in light of the minimal community resources available at the time.

⁸ Beyond the lure of abundance and space that such arrangements offered, May (2008) suggests that political leaders also saw suburban neighbourhoods as another way to minimize the potentially devastating impact of a nuclear attack, as they decentralized urban cores, preventing the "concentration of residences or industries [which might act as] potential targets" (p. 161).

Women's absence from forums of public discourse and political critique, gaps in shared knowledge and practical support, as well as isolating socio-cultural and geographic developments, left significant space in women's and families' lives for the opinions of 'experts' to emerge (Iacovetta, 2006; Simmons, 1982; Thorn, 2009). Indeed, "the reliance on expertise was one of the most striking developments of the postwar years" (May, 2008, p. 30), and the link between adherence to professional opinion and one's moral and patriotic standing was encouraged via discourses of responsible citizenship and the respect and authority that experts commanded in the public arena (Iacovetta, 2006, Thobani, 2007; Thorn, 2009). Moreover, as Trent (1994) and Simmons (1982) have suggested, the proximity with which professionals in the community worked with institutional supervisors and administrators as well as government officials responsible for their funding and oversight would have played a role in continued support for referrals to institutional care.

The trends discussed above suggest that families faced with decision-making regarding the care of their children with disabilities had many influences with which to contend. Ongoing admission to institutions during the Cold War era was due not only to the lack of community support and acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities, nor to the hegemonic idealization of the strong, beautiful, and content family. Institutional admissions were underscored in a very practical way by government policy which consolidated particular elements of Cold War life, including the development of suburban living and the resultant isolation of families and women, and the co-emergent authority of professional opinion and expertise.

To conclude this section, two additional phenomena require mention. During the Cold War years, families with disabled family members would have had to grapple with the shameful ignominy of caring for a "retarded" child. For families that otherwise fell within the hegemonic

ideal of the white, heterosexual middle class, the existence of a child with a disability would have thwarted parents' imagined and idealized future for their family. The cultural and political dynamics outlined here suggest that social class and related discourses of public approval and humiliation would have had some bearing on the decisions that families made regarding their children with intellectual disabilities. As Simmons (1982) indicates, a large proportion of the families who admitted their children to long-term institutions were middle-to-upper class, and the postwar upward mobility to which many families aspired, as well as the appearances required of it, would have been frustrated by the existence of a less-than-perfect child, a constant reminder of their failure to live up to the postwar ideal. While the motive of shame is disconcerting at best, families in situations such as these would have at least been able to maintain some semblance of choice.

For many families, however, the decision to place a child in an institution was not theirs to make. As Canadian scholars Strong-Boag (2011, 2007), Gleason (1999a, 199b, 1997), Helps (2007), Iacovetta (2006), and Helleiner (2001) have indicated, the discourse of Canadian nation-building throughout the twentieth century was skewed in favour of the hegemonic norms discussed above, and the threshold of selection for institutionalization under the auspices of public health and government agencies was significantly lower for Aboriginal peoples or those from low socio-economic status. Conflations between poverty, ethnicity, intellect, and one's assumed ability to contribute meaningfully to Canada's postwar patriotic project were significant factors in decisions to place children in institutions, decisions which lay outside many families' control.

Broad discourse, narrow lives

The above discussion has examined facets of Cold War ideology which shaped popular discourse and influenced families' decisions regarding institutionalization, and I turn now to a brief discussion of the thematic threads which bind these phenomena together. First, social discourses and political decisions, despite their breadth, have a profound impact on people with intellectual disabilities, down to the most intimate details of their lives. While the decisions that families made regarding their own family member might have been considered personal and private, they were, foremost, a reflection of the social conditions and influences that existed at the time. This infiltration is part of a larger, reiterated pattern of segregation and oppression which has repeated itself throughout history. Far-reaching decisions made within circles of power on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities have historically had profound influence on them (Trent, 1994), and this time period is no exception. Further, as current scholarship indicates, despite changes in public definitions and understandings of terms such as intellectual disability, inclusion, human rights, community living, and advocacy, gaps remain between what people with intellectual disabilities wish to claim as their rightful place, and the opportunities and support to execute those desires (Carpenter, 2007; Galer, 2014). What should concern us as disability scholars, therefore, are not only the time-specific phenomena themselves and their obvious life-damaging consequences, but the oppression and marginalization that stemmed from them and carry on despite ideological and semantic shifts. That is, although policies and priorities change, patterns of oppression continue, and people with intellectual disabilities remain, in many jurisdictions, as removed from centres of power as they did during the institutional era.

Moreover, the time period discussed in this paper was marked by a culture of fear. Fear of the subsuming of modern Western culture and of possible nuclear obliteration allowed governments to direct mandates of regulation with little resistance. 'Messy' elements disrupted the perceived need for order and preparedness, and thus the continuation of segregated facilities for people with intellectual disabilities, a group with a long history of being considered disorderly and unnecessary in larger political projects, remained justified.

Last, we return to the queries posed in the introduction, to examine "the ways that certain kinds of questions and forms of discourse were made possible, and others discounted or excluded" (Carlson, 2010, p. 17). That is, what were the historical conditions that allowed the 'bad choice' of institutionalization to be made? Or, to borrow a Foucauldian line of analysis, what prevented parents from imagining themselves to be other than what they perceived themselves to be? Or to imagine their children to be other than what they perceived them to be? Succinctly, what were "the ways in which the possibilities for choice and for being arose in [this particular time and place of our] history" (Hacking, 2002, p. 23)?

Historical Ontology and the Limits of Imagination

It has become clear that much of this analysis revolves around the decisions that parents made about their children. While the preceding discussion illuminates the conditions within which parents discerned, it is not undertaken to relieve parents of the responsibility of sending their child away, or to euphemize a hellish institutional existence simply because parents were under the stresses of the age. Nor is this a forum in which I wish to judge parents' actions. Indeed, as participants in the larger study indicated, the decision to institutionalize was made by 'good' and 'bad' parents alike, and it is not my intention to attempt to define what is meant by those relative

terms. Rather, my intention is to critically examine conditions and practices with the goal of "imagining otherwise".

What this analysis indicates, particularly in regards to parents' decisions, is the accuracy of Foucault's (1984) assessment of the coercive nature of power, its existence as a "productive network that runs through the whole social body" (p. 61) as opposed to merely a repressive tool. In the vast majority of cases, parents were not legally bound to institutionalize their intellectually disabled children⁹, but many did anyway¹⁰. Even those not considered 'bad' parents often felt compelled to make 'bad' choices. And although all the parents in this study noted that they were reassured they were making the best choice, the right choice, their testimonies of long years of guilt and depression after the fact indicate that, at the very least instinctually, they knew otherwise.

Moreover, to continue in a Foucauldian vein, it was not only the *existence* of particular social conditions that gave rise to the impulse to institutionalize, but their *intentionality*. That is, conditions of fear, conformity, containment of the enemy, and so on were not naive gestures that assisted governments in running an orderly society, but were tools that supported and made obvious the choices that assisted them in maintaining it as such. For most provincial governments, bringing about changes to the ways in which people with intellectual disabilities were cared for was not at the top of their priority lists, and why would it have been? Institutions were a "convenient" (Radford & Park, 1993) way to sustain one aspect of society as the government wished it to be—efficient and well-organized, with at least one potentially disruptive

⁹ However, as earlier comments indicate, many children were institutionalized under the auspices of Children's Aid agencies and State intervention, often for reasons of poverty, social status, and ethnicity.

¹⁰ Indeed, as Carey (2009) suggests, some parents during this era might have viewed the decision to institutionalize a custodial 'right', with the view that institutionalization best served the majority of people's interests, despite this actually being a restriction of the individual rights of the person with intellectual disabilities (pp. 29/30).

group out of sight—and it served them well to not introduce the radical changes that closing institutions would have necessitated.

Further, it is important to loop Hacking's (2002) assertion of the ways in which we constitute ourselves back into the larger picture of the circumstances outlined in the earlier sections of this paper. Although too large to address here, questions emerge: throughout history, in what ways have people been encouraged to create themselves in ways which supported larger, nationalist projects? In what ways do we continue to constitute ourselves in order to sustain oppression? In what ways do *I* constitute myself in the name of oppression? How do governments encourage this kind of self-constitution in order to meet their own means, and finally, where are sites for challenge and resistance located? While there are no easy answers, Hacking's and Foucault's approaches provide us with the tools to "imagine ourselves to be other than we are" (Carlson, 2010, p. 17). If we examine phenomena such as those outlined in this paper with the "historic-critical attitude" that Foucault (1997, p. 316) espouses, then we remain open to the possibilities of imaging other, better futures. By acknowledging the ways in which we "constitute ourselves" (Hacking, 2002, p. 2), we are compelled to respond to the points of resistance that emerge and to alter the patterns of injustice embedded in the history of people with intellectual disabilities.

While hopeful and instructive, critical analyses such as these do not alter the oppression and abuse that thousands of Canadians suffered through during the peak of our institutional history. While it is too late to change the fact that thousands spent decades of their lives in institutions, institutional survivors have themselves taken steps to ensure that "historical conditions of possibility" (Tremain, 2002, p. 33) for ongoing segregation and oppression are

interrupted¹¹. It is in survivors' own re-constitution of themselves as persons who can live where they desire, without government restraint, that we can all begin to imagine other possibilities.

Concluding Remarks

This article has reflected on the discursive norms of the Cold War era in Canada, their manifestation in institutional practices, and their relationship to people with intellectual disabilities. It has shed light on the association between broad social and political impulses and their enactment in people's lives, particularly via decisions made on behalf of people considered incapable of doing so. It demonstrates how, during a particular time period in our history, people with intellectual disabilities became pawns amid discourse which served a broader purpose. Last, it has reflected on the need to perform excavations of historical practices which contribute to the oppression of marginalized groups in society, and the need to imagine otherwise.

¹¹ In 2010, two institutional survivors, Marie Slark and Patricia Seth, instituted a Class Action lawsuit against the Ontario government for abuses suffered while living at Huronia Regional Centre (HRC) near Orillia, Ontario. In September 2013, the Ontario government offered financial compensation for those who had lived at HRC from 1945 until its closure on March 31, 2009. In December 2013, Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario, offered a public apology to all those who had lived, and suffered, in Ontario's institutions. The survivor community as well as a strong advocacy group continues to work to ensure the government adheres to promises made at the time of the public apology, including securing financial compensation owed to survivors, and for accountability in regards to the cemetery on HRC grounds.

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