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Institutional Survivorship: Abandonment and the “Machinery of the Establishment”

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Abstract

Institutions are a central and painful feature in the historical record of the treatment of people with intellectual disabilities in Canada. To date, scholarly work has provided a robust understanding of the multiple intersecting factors and “political rationalities” (Chapman, 2014) that have contributed to institutions’ development, including their relationship with capitalism’s “exploitative social relations of production and consumption” (Erevelles, 2014, para. 6). Accounts from institutional survivors that describe the direct and lived experience of institutionalization have begun to emerge in Canadian disability studies and historical canons. Based on research that examined the impact of institutionalization on families, this paper draws from survivor narratives to explore the alienation and abandonment that survivors experienced as a result of having been institutionalized. It interrogates the connection between survivors’ experiences and the function of their alienation in the workings of a capitalist system. Additionally, this paper addresses some of the historical, social and political conditions of the time and place of concern (post World War II Ontario), and discusses how those conditions created a discourse of persuasion in the institutionalization of children with intellectual disabilities.

Keywords

Institutionalization, survivors, abandonment, capitalism, conditions of possibility

Institutional Survivorship: Abandonment and the “Machinery of the Establishment”

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Scholarly interest in the development of the modern institution has provided a robust picture of various “political rationalities” (Chapman, 2014) that have informed and justified the existence of total institutions since their charitable origins in the 16th century (Stiker, 1999). This work has indicated how complex interrelated factors, including historical fluctuations in discourse surrounding the worth and potential of “deviant” lives (Carlson, 2010; Trent, 1994), shifts in the felt need for social control (Rothman, 1971, 1983), and the compounding effects of race, gender, class, and ability (Chapman, Carey, & Ben-Moshe, 2014) all contributed to the development of segregated institutions, including those for people with intellectual disabilities. A major contribution to these analyses is the work of socio-historical scholars who have posited that the emerging modern capitalist state in 18th and 19th century U.K. and North America was instrumental to the development of institutions (Ignatieff, 1983; Ingleby, 1983; Scull, 1979). Notwithstanding the contemporaneous influence of moral reformists, who felt that centralized, government-sanctioned institutions could offer a regulated and humane way to lift indigent people out of dire circumstances, these scholars indicate that the emerging market economy necessitated the “crucial distinction” (Scull, 1979, p. 40) between productive and non-productive members of the population. Maximum efficiency and output could be hastened by the movement of non-contributing members of society out of the mainstream into segregated spaces. By providing liminal spaces in which to house the “unemployable,” including those considered “feble-minded,” mad or otherwise “degenerate,” segregated institutions made room for the development of an intense and competitive market economy.

While a segregated arrangement holds economic promise for those who have control over the means of production (Scull, 1979), historical materialist critics have pointed out the threats of alienation and exclusion that such a system engenders (Coburn, 2014; Harvey, 2006). The “owners” of wealth achieve their stability through the exploitation of labourers (Sim & Van Loon, 2004) and the removal of the less “productive,” distancing people physically from, and inhibiting their participation in, centres of power and decision-making. Marxist thought posits that owners’ accumulation of wealth and the “success” of capitalism as a whole is reliant upon the social desertion and mistreatment of workers, such that “at the very moment when greatly increased productive potential seems to offer so much in terms of meeting human needs, it takes away so much in terms of increasing human misery” (Tormey, 2002, p. 53). Similarly, disability studies scholars have pointed out that there is a connection between the rise of capitalism and the development of disabling social structures (Oliver, 1990; Thomas, 1999) due to capitalist demands for productive minds and bodies. Indeed, the social model of disability is founded on materialist critiques of capitalism and the exclusion, oppression, and segregation that it generates (Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 1999), including the segregation of people with disabilities “out of mainstream life and into a variety of institutions” (Russell & Malhotra, 2002, p. 213).

While the above-named scholars have contributed to theoretical understandings of the development of institutions in key historical moments, as well as the relationship between capitalism and the growth of institutions, the perspectives of institutional survivors¹ in regard to their experiences of institutionalization have thus far received modest attention in the literature.

¹ A note on language: the term *survivor* is used to denote those people who were institutionalized due to the label of intellectual disability. The term *survivor* was initiated and has been adopted by the cohort of people who lived through institutionalization in the 20th century. Throughout the text, I make use of the term *intellectual disability* to denote the socially constructed “conditions” of intellect which have historically had significant influence on people so designated. I acknowledge here the oppressive implications of the term and use it only to contextualize the phenomena discussed in the article. At times, historically specific terms are used, such as *feble-minded*, in order to convey the terminology that was in use at the time.

Following the example of more recent scholarship that provides historical interrogation of the relationship between families, institutionalization, and the state (Carey & Gu, 2014; Chupik & Wright, 2006; Malacrida, 2015; Panitch, 2008), and based on research that explores the impact of institutionalization on family relationships and understandings of disability (Burghardt, 2014), this paper draws from survivor narratives to explore the alienation and abandonment that survivors experienced as a result of having been institutionalized. Further, it interrogates the connection between survivors' experiences and the function of their alienation in the workings of a capitalist system. Through this analysis, I explore two ideas: first, that capitalism as a system is dependent on people's marginalization and oppression, a process which is aided by institutionalization; and second, that the historical, social and political conditions of the time and place of concern (post World War II Ontario)² created a discourse of persuasion in the institutionalization of children with intellectual disabilities.

This paper consists of three parts. First, I provide a brief overview of the history of institutions in Ontario, with a particular focus on the political and economic motivations for their development. This includes consideration of some of the intersecting "conditions of possibility" (Tremain, 2002, p. 33) that existed during the particular historical moment of concern. These are conditions that influenced families' decision-making and that allowed the decision to institutionalize to be interpreted as the inevitable consequence of having a child with a disability, as opposed to being understood as playing a necessary role within the state's larger capital interests. The second part of the paper draws from narratives of institutional survivors who

² The original study upon which this article is based examined the experiences of institutional survivors and members of their families in the decades following World War II. In the study, nine survivors of institutions participated in interviews, as did eleven siblings and eight parents. All of the survivors who participated in this study were admitted to an Ontario institution between approximately 1948 and 1965, and their length of stay ranged from nine to thirty years. The study consisted of in-depth, qualitative interviews, from which themes were drawn.

reflect on their experiences of having been left at the institution and what they encountered there. In the last section, in light of the experiences shared by survivors, I re-address the notion of a discourse of persuasion toward institutionalization that has been created by historical conditions, and reflect on the ways in which some of the requisites and consequences of capitalism continue to be materialized in the lives of people with disabilities. The paper concludes with the observation that, despite the province-wide closure of institutions in Ontario in 2009, the foundations of their capitalist underpinnings remain, thus necessitating ongoing vigilance against the threat of re-institutionalization in the context of 21st century neoliberal capitalism (Carpenter, 2007).

History

Institutions are a central and painful feature in the historical record of the treatment of people with intellectual disabilities in Canada (Simmons, 1982; Williston, 1971).³ In this brief historical tracing, I describe three main influences that contributed to the development of institutions in Ontario. The first is the political intentions behind their establishment, a phenomenon which can generally be characterized as a politically-driven response to a variety of social ills and an attempt to differentiate people with intellectual disabilities from other marginalized populations. Prior to Confederation in 1867, although some training schools existed for people with intellectual disabilities (Simmons, 1982), the provision of institutional care indiscriminately encompassed several groups of marginalized individuals, including the elderly, as well as those considered mad, indigent, and feebleminded. In the early 1870s, government

³ While this article deals primarily with the experience of institutionalization in Ontario, similar work has been undertaken to address its history in other provinces and in Canada as a whole. See, for example: Ben-Moshe, Chapman, & Carey, 2014; Clarke, 2006; Malacrida, 2015; McLaren, 1990.

officials and reformists began to advocate for separate asylums for the feeble-minded, a decision emerging not from clearly defined policy objectives for the population of concern, but from “a set of quite negative considerations: to alleviate pressure for space on local jails and the main asylums, [and] to cut costs” (p. 27). Thus, while reformists heralded the arrival of “differentiated confinement” (Chapman et al., 2014, p. 5) for its promise of specialized care, Simmons (1982) notes that such differentiation had much more to do with “administrative economies” (p. 32) and efficiencies than it did with concern for the needs of this particular population. Unlike attempts in institutions in the Northeastern United States to incorporate some —albeit short-lived—educative and rehabilitative principles (Trent, 1994), from the beginning publicly-funded institutions in Ontario assumed a custodial model and prioritized the provision of cost-effective surveillance and supervision.

The second historical thread requiring address stems from the first and concerns the relationship between Ontario institutions (and institutions in general) and economic interests, particularly in light of the emerging force of capitalism in Western democracies. Despite institutions’ isolation and placement outside the boundaries of regular social interaction (Radford, 1991; Radford & Park, 1993), they are “not completely in a world of their own but bear some connection, bureaucratic and subordinated, to structures in the outside world” (Goffman, 1961, p. 104). Thus, in addition to the role that institutions have historically played in the removal of the Other due to fears of chaos (Rothman, 1983) and contamination (McLaren, 1990), there has also always been a “link between...confinement and the political economy” (Foucault, 2006, p. 78). Indeed, according to Foucault, institutions provide “elementary economic regulation” (p. 78) and their initial purpose was less curative than they were sites that supported capitalism’s new “work imperative” (p. 62, as cited in Carey, 2009, p. 48). Thus, in

addition to reformists' confidence in their curative capacity, the emergence of incarcerative methods of treating people with intellectual disabilities in the mid-late 19th century was also a principal feature of capitalism's broadening reach (Chapman et al, 2014; Russell & Malhotra, 2002).

The position of institutions in the emerging capitalist economy in North America was ensured in several ways. First, one's ability to remain independent in the community was closely aligned with one's ability to be productive (Carey, 2009; Trent, 1994), a goal "made ever more challenging by a progressively competitive industrial labour market demanding fast-paced and standardized work" (Chapman et al, 2014, p. 7). While prior to the Civil War in the U.S. and Confederation in Canada people with intellectual disabilities were generally accepted in and supported by their home communities, this inclusion became more tenuous as systems of paid employment became increasingly formalized and competitive (Trent, 1994). Second, the overall guiding moral imperative at this time was to work. This was a capitalist principle encouraged either through remuneration or by making the conditions under which non-workers received social assistance "wretched enough to make paid labour seem attractive" (Chapman et al., 2014, p. 6). Caught between the limits of these two competing conditions, people with disabilities who were institutionalized frequently ended up in situations that were both "custodial and abusive... because these conditions served the interests of the emerging capitalist system, which demanded wage work of all able-bodied people and the stigmatization of those unwilling or unable to do so" (Carey, 2009, p. 43).

Another point regarding the link between economic interests and the development of institutions in Ontario concerns the internal labour of institutional residents. From the establishment of the first institution for the "feebleminded" at Orillia in 1867, superintendents

and politicians alike strove to make institutions as economically efficient as possible, with the goal of creating self-sustaining internal economies. John Langmuir, the provincial inspector of prisons, asylums, and public charities at the time of Orillia's establishment, allowed per-patient spending to sink to the point that it became among the lowest in the world, a point of pride which quickly became a reputation to be upheld. Orillia's first two superintendents, Alexander Beaton and Joseph Downey (from 1876-1910 and 1910-26 respectively), maintained this tradition: Beaton imagined Orillia as a closed system in which productive inmates would not be discharged from the asylum in order to maximize its functioning, and Downey envisioned a corporate system in which various institutions could support each other by sharing the products of their (unpaid) labour (Simmons, 1982). These internal economies created sites of self-sufficiency that prevented "feeble-minded" people from participating meaningfully in the community, while paradoxically obliging them to participate in labour that facilitated their own incarceration. They also gave the impression of therapeutic work environments, which relieved the government and the public "from the responsibility of seriously engaging" (Rhodes, 2001, p. 67) with a "problematic" population.

The third historical thread requiring address concerns conflating intersectional factors with regard to both government pressure and families' decisions to institutionalize. While capitalist motivations played an instrumental role in the rise of institutions, other "interlocking logics of incarceration" (Chapman et al., 2014, p. 3) must be acknowledged. Intersecting factors such as gender, race, class, and societal discourse of the family cannot be disentangled from disability, institutionalization, and the constantly growing needs of a modern capitalist state (Carey, 2009; Carlson, 2010; Trent, 1994). While the limits of this paper prevent a thorough discussion of the complex relations between them, a few points require consideration.

By the end of the 19th century, at which time the custodial model was well established in North American institutions, the interrelated prioritization of eugenic theories and nation-building furthered the demands of professionals and superintendents for increased segregation of certain members of the population.⁴ Eugenicians worked diligently to prevent “imminent” Anglo-Saxon “race suicide” by encouraging reproduction in the educated, white upper class, and discouraging it among those considered “hopelessly, inherently, dependent defective” (Lamp, 2006, para. 4). Without scientific evidence (McLaren, 1990), and using data that was exaggerated and unfounded (Gould, 1996), Canadian eugenicians had significant influence on the treatment of people considered feeble-minded, and on women of lower socio-economic status in particular, using institutions as effective “eugenic instruments” (Radford, 1991, p. 456) to segregate the sexes and to keep “feeble-minded” women of childbearing age out of the general population.⁵ Members of the eugenics and social hygiene movements in Canada also used the implementation of mandatory public schooling as a way to identify and segregate children considered to be of lower-than-average aptitude, thus using the education system to further the goal of eliminating feeble-mindedness (McLaren, 1990, p. 40). Despite authorities’ professed intentions to use segregated institutions to address the needs of dislocated or dysfunctional children and families, they “quickly became associated with abuse, becoming...little more than eugenic warehouses” (Strong-Boag, 2007, p. 423).

In Canada, the eugenics movement and institutionalization were informed and supported by Canada’s nation-building and colonialist heritage. By the time institutions for the

⁴ Eugenic theories were initially developed by Galton in the U.K. (1822-1911), were embraced by Goddard (1866-1957) and Davenport (1866-1944), among others, in the United States, and by members of the social hygiene movement in Canada, such as Helen MacMurchy, “inspector of the feeble-minded” in Toronto between 1906 and 1916 (Allen, 1997; Gould, 1996; McLaren, 1990; Trent, 1994).

⁵ Institutions were by no means the only eugenic method used with feeble-minded women. Sterilization laws were in place in Alberta between 1928 and 1972, and in British Columbia between 1933 and 1973. For more on involuntary sterilization in Canada, see Malacrida (2015) and McLaren (1990).

feeble-minded were being established in the latter decades of the 19th century, the colonization and segregation of Canada's Indigenous peoples was well established within Euro-Canadian governance (Austen, 2010). The removal of Indigenous children from their families and their placement in residential schools, notorious sites of abuse and mistreatment, coincided directly with the rise of institutions for the feeble-minded (Chapman, 2014). While informed by slightly different rhetoric, these institutions served the same end of removing undesired groups from the general population in the quest toward establishing a strong and unified body politic (Thobani, 2007). Further, Canadian government immigration policies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, although touted as attempts to settle the Western provinces (McLaren, 1990), placed restrictions on newcomers who fell outside the boundaries of the ideal "white, male, productive, responsible, and compliant" Canadian citizen (Menziez, 1998, p. 140). Non-Europeans faced significant obstacles when attempting to settle (p. 140), a continuation of Canada's racist and colonial legacy in the treatment of its Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, racial and class-based categorizations were conflated with feeble-mindedness (Chadha, 2008) and other "disordered and deficient mentalities" (Menziez, 1998, p. 138), justifying government actions such as deportation (Menziez, 1998), institutionalization (McLaren, 1990) and ongoing exclusion within Canadian society (Thobani, 2007). European Canada's nation-building history, along with the desire to emerge as a strong and competitive nation state, was founded on legacies of eugenic and race- and class-informed settler policies which both informed and justified institutionalization (Chapman et al., 2014).

The families who participated in this study, although facing the prospect of institutionalization in the post WWII era, several decades after the time-periods discussed above, were thus making their decisions in a social context rooted in Canada's eugenic and colonial

history. In addition, they were situated within the narrow definitions of the ideal postwar family characterized by a return to traditional values in which women's roles were limited (Brookfield, 2012; May, 2008), a prioritization of "normal" and successful child development (Gleason, 1999, 1997), and ostracization of the Other in order to protect Canadian society from potential Cold War threats (Gentile, 2000; Kinsman, 2004).

These factors constitute the "historical conditions of possibility" (Tremain, 2002, p. 33) within which families discerned the future of a child born "different."⁶ Canada's long exclusionary history, as well as the social conditions described above, contributed to a discourse of persuasion with regard to what families felt they should do with their disabled child. The strength of this discourse, expressed by public authorities and politicians alike,⁷ made it possible for families and for society in general to view the decision to institutionalize as an appropriate social contribution as opposed to serving a necessary function in Canada's development as a Eurocentric, capitalist society. Moreover, these exclusionary conditions, based on racism, classism, and sexism, were the foundations of the practices and strategies used in Canadian institutions; they established the rules of relation into which many thousands of people with intellectual disabilities were forced to move.

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the pressures faced by families with a child with a disability during the post WWII era, please see Burghardt, M. (2016).

⁷ Tommy Douglas, a Canadian politician who introduced publicly funded health care to his home province of Saskatchewan (later adopted at the federal level) and founded Canada's socialist political party, the New Democratic Party, is an example of an influential public figure who supported the use of eugenics. His Master's thesis, completed in 1933, was entitled *The Problems of the Subnormal Family*. Douglas did not refer to his Master's work in his later political life.

Survivors: “It was abandonment and rejection”⁸

In describing the transition from the “outside world” to a total institution, Goffman (1961) refers to the “betrayal funnel” (p. 140) through which new residents must pass. He describes the “abandonment, disloyalty, and embitterment” (p. 140) that mark this experience, and the personal and symbolic meanings this engenders. In the narratives that follow, survivors describe their entry to life in an institution and their own encounters with a sense of betrayal from both their families and the larger community. Their stories illustrate some of the ways in which their rejection from mainstream society was made definite, revealing “the complex ways that suffering...is manifest” (Coburn, 2014, p. 9) in oppressive and uneven relations.

The stories of survivors here echo Goffman’s (1961) observation that the institutional response to intellectual disability is more about “strategic leverage in the management of men [*sic*]” (p. 13) than about responding to the needs of vulnerable populations. The reflections from institutional survivors recounted below carry with them themes of abandonment, exclusion, and mistreatment, and raise questions regarding places of belonging for people with intellectual disabilities both within their birth families and within the larger human family.

Although survivors described their institutionalization from personal and individual perspectives, the experience of abandonment was a shared feature of their accounts. All of the survivors described experiencing a profound sense of rejection and loss when they were left at the institution, most often by their families.⁹ Indeed, in addition to going through significant mistreatment at the hands of institutional staff and the system, knowing they had been left to this

⁸ Anna, describing being left at the institution.

⁹ Survivors and parents alike described the moment at which they were separated from each other upon arrival at the institution. Their accounts suggest that parents were instructed to leave their child close to the entrance: they were not allowed into the institution, and were advised to not call or visit their child during the first six weeks of the child’s institutionalization. This was meant to allow the child to more readily ‘adapt’ to his or her new surroundings. According to survivors, this abrupt leave-taking was one of the more traumatic aspects of their transition to institutional life.

fate was one of the more painful realizations of their institutional experience. Not being given adequate explanation for their institutionalization further added to survivors' sense of abandonment and confusion. Anna described her memory of arriving at the institution as follows:

I didn't think I'd ever see them again. I sat on the floor and I cried. I said—Mom, aren't you going to stay with me? And she said—No, I've got kids in the car and Dad to look after.

André describes a similar experience, initiated when a nurse first visited their home to recommend institutionalization:

I didn't want to be in an institution...I was upset and crying and worrying...I didn't want to go...I started to cry...and I didn't know what to do, and I didn't like it...Said goodbye, and after that, I didn't know what to do with it.

Quentin recalled: "I didn't think I'd be there very long...a year, at most several months. ...[I stayed] 18 years." For all of the survivors, their arrival at the institution and their family's leave-taking was a traumatic and confusing experience, one that they have not forgotten even decades later.

Some of the survivors recognized a second layer of abandonment, that of the state, wherein the rejection they experienced was not attributable only to their families, but to government, educational, and medical authorities who had influenced families' decisions to institutionalize. In one particularly poignant example, Irene described learning, only after having lived at the institution for some time, that she had brothers and sisters also living there, siblings that she had not known existed. Coming from a childhood with intense involvement from child protection agencies, she described meeting them for the first time: "I didn't believe she was my sister at first, because...I thought I had only one sister. ...They never said anything about

[another one].” Walt described his pain upon learning that the government was ultimately responsible for what he had experienced in the institution, and that authorities had allowed the inhumane treatment to continue:

The government knew about this? And they didn’t do nothing about it? I was supposed to be protected by the government, I was supposed to be protected by the staffs, and they didn’t do that. They didn’t protect us...I just say—shame on you, the government. Look at these people. They went through so much, you know, pain. It’s just sad. It’s sad, very sad, what happened.

Thus, in addition to their own abandonment, survivors pointed out that families had similarly been abandoned by the government in its failure to fulfill its promise of providing adequate care for their children.

Survivors also articulated their abandonment as manifested through the oppression and mistreatment they experienced while living at the institution. This mistreatment took many forms, some of which are recounted below and provide examples of the extreme de-socialization particular to large, total institutions (Goffman, 1961; Hubert, 2000). They described an atmosphere of regimentation, including the lack of opportunity to make any of their own choices, with every detail determined by the super-structure of the institution. Walt observed: “It wasn’t a different day. It was the same day. I guess every day was the same day.” When to turn the lights off, what one could or could not eat, what time to go to bed, how one spent the day, the inability to own one’s own clothing: all are examples of the limits placed on institutional residents. The lack of freedom and the sense of powerlessness this engendered was essential to the institution’s prioritization of the smooth organization of many thousands of people (Goffman, 1961).

Survivors also spoke of the dehumanization and depersonalization (Malacrida, 2015) that marked the conditions under which they lived. Toilets were communal (“It was all just one room with toilets”); beds were crammed together in crowded dormitories (“You didn’t know whose bed was whose”); and “slab” baths were used, a process by which residents were hosed down in front of each other. Two of the survivors in particular described the dehumanization they experienced upon arrival at the institution:

When I went in there, I went to the admission ward, and when you go into the admission ward, they (*pauses*)...they strip your clothes and you’re naked and you’re standing here, and they measure you...your clothes are all gone and they give you new clothes, their clothes, like prison clothes.

This mirrors Goffman’s (1961) assertion that upon entry to the institution, “marked by the experience of abandonment...[one is] stripped of almost everything” (p. 140).

Further, survivors described being forced to participate in labour that supported the functioning and maintenance of the institution, thus paradoxically supporting their own incarceration (Reaume, 2000, 2006; Trent, 1994). Notably, more than half of the survivors described working in the institution’s laundry, a job that included cleaning excrement out of residents’ sheets and clothing. This is indicative not only of the cost-saving measures that institutional administrations felt they could get away with, justified by the inmates’ otherwise “unemployability” (Reaume, 2004, p. 467) and of the belief that residents should bear some responsibility for the upkeep of the institution, but also of the poor regard that the administration held for residents. Their encounters with the ‘bowels’ of the institution echo Kristeva’s (1982) interpretation of the abject’s encounters with “the horror within,” which serves to “reassure a subject that [it] is lacking its own and clean self” (p. 53).

Lastly, survivors described the atmosphere of violence and abuse that permeated all aspects of life in the institution. Gord stated: “It was rough. And the men’s staffs used to talk dirty. Yeah, talk dirty, and I didn’t like that. It was disgusting.” There was an ever-present threat of physical violence if one did not adhere to the rules. Anna stated: “If you even looked at one of the counselors the wrong way, you got beat up.” Irene added: “You weren’t allowed to talk back. I got into trouble every day for something...stupid little things, you know?” Moreover, survivors explained that staff often incited residents to act violently toward each other, either to diminish the power that residents might gain by bonding together, or as a source of entertainment. André noted: “There’s too much fighting going on...they fight in the morning, the afternoon, and night. That’s too much!” Further, survivors shared particularly difficult stories of aggression and abuse: verbal ridicule from staff; being sent to lie under benches for having spoken out; “digging for worms” (lying on the floor with hands tied behind the back, forced to rub one’s face on the floor); scrubbing the floor with one’s own toothbrush; being sent naked to isolation rooms; being forced to walk in front of one’s peers with pants down; and sexual abuse in one’s bed or shower.

Institutional survivors’ encounters with violence, dehumanization, oppression, and abuse are extreme examples of the interactions that became normalized within the institutional environment. Irene’s observation—“they [staff] probably didn’t think we were human, or that we had any feelings or anything, or that we wouldn’t know what was going on. Thought they could get away with it”—mirror Hubert’s (2000) observation that “men and women who have been segregated for most of their lives...are not perceived to have any social identity” (p. 200), thus giving authorities permission to treat them as “less than human.” These narratives shared by survivors demand attention, not just as normalized yet violent encounters, but as features of a system that relies on classification and segregation and the violence that results to meet its ends.

These descriptions of abuse, therefore, are not only tragic and difficult to reconcile, but must be considered both consequences and prerequisites of the predominant way of being and producing in the world.

Discussion

Throughout this paper, I have argued that the segregation and institutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities have played important functions within capitalism. I have also briefly examined some of the historical conditions that contributed to the development of institutions, both in terms of their correlation with the emergence of capitalism, and with the conditions specific to the time and place within which the participants in this study were situated. In this last section of the paper, I return to these two themes in light of what survivors have shared and attempt to consider where they might lead.

First, I return to the “historical conditions of possibility” that allowed institutions, and the decision to place people there, to be considered an acceptable and correct course of action. What do survivors’ accounts add to our reflection on the rhetoric of institutionalization and on the discourse of persuasion that permeated the sociocultural circumstances within which families were situated? Second, I address the ongoing necessity within capitalism for the classification and segregation of people according to productivity and worth, and consider their current implications in the lives of people with disabilities.

In the first instance, Foucault is helpful in his elucidation of power’s coercive effects, how its exercise “consists in guiding the possibilities of conduct and putting in order the possible outcomes” (Tremain, 2002, p. 36). Foucault urges a “historico-critical attitude” (Carlson, 2010, p. 14), through which we can reveal “how it was that one particular discourse appeared rather

than another” (Foucault, 1972, p. 27), or, according to Hacking (2004) how “the ways in which the possibilities for choice, and for being, arose in history” (p. 12). Thus, in the situation here, a Foucauldian analysis asks how it was that some choices came to be understood as viable and reasonable, and others as barely visible. What were the conditions that allowed the institutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities to be considered “an inevitable consequence of the physical and intellectual differences imposed by disability”? (Funk, as cited in Carey, 2009, p. 2).

The historical evolution of institutions discussed earlier provides some explanation for the acceptance of the official discourse of segregation. It is worth re-iterating that in the time period encapsulated by this study, authorities fervently promoted institutionalization as the best course of action for families with a child with a disability—for the relief of the family, for the sake of the other children, for the “inclusion” of the disabled child with “those of their own kind,” and to remove the child from visible locations of concern and responsibility. Institutionalization was touted as the most responsible and civic-minded response to the “tragedy” of a disabled child. Additionally, in terms of economic and political considerations, the Ontario government of the time had too much at stake to consider offering something other than institutionalization to families. It would have been too risky to disrupt what was perceived to be a highly successful solution to an ‘irresolvable’ problem. The efficiencies of the institution, their productive value, and their employment of thousands of workers in smaller, economically depressed areas of the province all justified institutions as the way to meet both the economic concerns of the province and the needs of families.

The government’s successful rhetoric and the many decades of institutionalization that resulted appear to support Foucault’s claims of the coercive power of discourse. However, some

of the survivors' reflections complicate and trouble Foucault's analysis. Borrowing from Hughes's (2005) assessment that Foucault does not sufficiently take into account the agency of oppressed peoples, some of the comments made by survivors suggest an agency that challenges the inevitability of their institutionalization. Far from accepting institutionalization's oppressive reach quietly, the survivors with whom I spoke all referred to their internal struggle with the reasons why they had been sent there. Many of the survivors posed the question "why me?"—why had they, out of all their brothers and sisters, been the one who was sent away? By asking the question, survivors revealed the arbitrariness of the classifications that had been used to segregate them and demonstrated resistance to the presumed power of medical and social distinctions. By demanding to know why they had been excluded from their birth family and, by extension, from the larger human family, they counter the presumption that institutional surveillance always succeeds in obliterating people's sense of self and subjectivity.

Secondly, in regards to capitalism's ongoing demands, I caution that as long as "capitalist social relations that seek to do more, faster, and with less expense" (Coburn, 2014, p. 15) remain the predominant method of participation and contribution, then people with disabilities will continue to experience the abandonment and alienation expressed by the institutional survivors who have shared their stories here. In Ontario's current post-institutional age, survivors and supporters are being encouraged to perceive institutional abuse as the unfortunate consequence of a faulty system from a previous era that was ill informed about the rights and needs of persons with intellectual disabilities. Since institutional closures, official government apologies¹⁰ have acknowledged the role that individual staff members and policy

¹⁰ On December 9, 2013, Kathleen Wynne, the premier of Ontario, gave an official apology on behalf of the government to survivors who had been institutionalized at the Huronia Regional Centre (originally called the Orillia Asylum for Idiots, founded in 1876), for mistreatment and abuse.

decision-makers played in the mistreatment of institutional residents. These apologies have been presented as individualized responses to historical wrongdoings; while appreciated, they do not acknowledge the systemic and historical need for segregation in capitalist market and production arrangements and the disastrous impact these have had on many thousands of people. According to Mitchell and Snyder (2015), “a prior cultural moment’s widespread practices of institutionalization, prohibitions, and stigmatizing containment strategies...are magically resolved by allowing them to lapse into the distance of a bygone, and presumably, more barbaric era” (p. 15). Thus, while governments (rightfully) acknowledge the wrongs that were committed, their lack of commitment to engage with the systemic underpinnings of segregation and alienation allows such practices to continue, albeit in ways less visible than the institutions of yesteryear.

The survivors’ narratives presented here provide a glimpse of the repercussions of capitalist society as they were lived by those excluded during a specific time and in a specific place. These survivors were institutionalized during its peak decades in the 20th century, those following the Second World War, a time when measures of people’s contributions were closely tied to their actions as responsible citizens and were a reflection of their level of patriotism in a hostile time (Brookfield, 2012). Accordingly, there was little need to discuss the decision to send a child to an institution either within the family or in the broader community; it was a reasonable decision in the context of responsible citizenship. Moreover, in the same way that the earliest institutions were a way to remove non-productive persons from society, the institutions of the

mid-late 20th century served much the same purpose: they removed obstacles to the re-building of a society reeling from the devastating effects of World War II (Simmons, 1982).

Despite the closure of large, segregated institutions in Ontario, thus signaling the end of one form of incarceration, the exclusionary practices embedded within capitalism continue to be materialized in other forms of incarceration, in new sites and configurations (Chapman, 2014). Whereas previously people with intellectual disabilities were housed in tangible edifices (although usually “hidden” due to their placement on the outskirts of small, rural communities), today the material effects of “institutionalization” are more typically felt in segregated work arrangements (Galer, 2014), nominal “community living” situations (Ben-Moshe, 2011), through obstructed access to and exercise of rights (Carey, 2009), and through neoliberal arrangements that make it increasingly difficult, financially and otherwise, for people with disabilities to access the services to which they are entitled (Carpenter, 2007). Moreover, in the same way that institutions disappeared many thousands of people from mainstream society for 150 years, capitalism’s “exploitative social relations of production and consumption...which produce, propagate, and proliferate disability...[also] render disabled people completely invisible” (Erevelles, 2014, para 6). Thus, although institutions as they stood in the 19th and 20th centuries no longer exist, their capitalist underpinnings continue to thrive through the sequestering and exploitation of marginalized populations including people with disabilities (Harvey, 2006; Russell & Malhotra, 2002).

Conclusion

By denying “human life through the subordination of everything that is specifically human to the logic of exchange value and profit” (Tormey, 2002, p. 59), institutions reinforced

capitalism's meta-narrative and subjected institutional residents to lives of subjugation and surveillance. In light of the need for certain minds and bodies to serve the needs of modern capitalism, survivors' experiences can be seen as a function of the suffering required by the demands of a capitalist system. Despite these critiques from disability and other scholars, capitalism remains the predominant mode of production in the world; indeed, it "has proven much more resilient and resourceful than Marx thought it would be" (Wood, 1988), and it continues to create oppressive work and living conditions for many of the world's most marginalized peoples, including people with disabilities.

Although years have elapsed since many of these survivors lived in an institution, and changes in policy concerning people with intellectual disabilities have been introduced, the stories brought forward by survivors serve as reminders of the extent to which overarching economic and political goals can take precedence over people's wellbeing, particularly among those who must continue to work hard to claim their humanity (Hughes, 2007). Many of the institutional survivors who shared their experiences of institutionalization as part of this project expressed regret and sadness for the period of their lives that they spent incarcerated. What could have been the most vigorous and joyful years of their lives had been wasted. One of the most distressing features of this part of their history is that the time spent institutionalized served no purpose other than to support the "administrative machinery of the establishment" (Goffman, 1961, p. 16), and to sustain the province's larger aims of efficiency and production, enlisting survivors as unwitting participants in a system that suppressed them.

The stories of survivors are a reminder to remain alert to the "conditions of possibility that exist for this history in the present" (Tremain, 2002, p. 33). In other words, they serve as a warning to be vigilant towards economic and political tendencies that are assumed and

legitimated despite their potential to oppress and dehumanize. Ongoing critique and activism is needed to confront the social underpinnings that allowed institutions to emerge in the first place and that have not disappeared from the landscape.

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