Containing Madness

Jennifer M. Kilty • Erin Dej
Editors

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Gender and 'Psy' in Institutional Contexts

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Madness Uncontained

Containing Madness is a collection about the power of various types of carceral institutions, filtered through the lens of a critical account of the 'psy' complex. Understanding the containment of 'mad' and 'bad' bodies in carceral spaces, and the meanings and material effects of incarceration, has a long history. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault predicted that the body would be less the subject of physical institutional controls over time, and that the mind would become the object of external control and self-control (Foucault 1979). His ideas about subjectivity and its formation and the impact of the discourses grouped together within the 'psy' disciplines became the focus of a genealogy of subjectivity advanced by social theorist Nikolas Rose in *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (Rose 1990).

Following these interventions, in this book, the editors and authors examine the premise that 'psy discourses and practices and different forms of institutionalization form a complex web of gendered and racialized oppression and social control' (see Chap. 1). Separate authors take up the ideas advanced by Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic* (Foucault 1963), with the 'medical gaze' an example of psychocentrism in the present. A number of the chapters analyze institutional case studies using Foucauldian perspectives, combined with feminist and post-structuralist methodologies, deepening the accounts of social control by advancing detailed readings of forms of power in context. The 'complex web' of oppression, as described by the editors, presents opportunities for intersectional analyses of power and medical regimes. Disciplinary discourses, practices and technologies continued long after the rise and fall of eighteenth-century

prisons and nineteenth-century asylums, as evidenced by both physical and psychological practices, including techniques of punishment, used inside contemporary institutions. Yet the accounts of discipline included in this book also remind readers that madness is rarely contained. It spills out and over, across and into the available spaces of a blurred and indistinct set of power relations. Anything approximating 'containment' therefore becomes desperately impossible, for instance, in the case of homelessness and mental illness.

In fact, this new account of institutional contexts zeros in on the core tenets of the institution: its structures of power. Scholarship about institutional power invites a careful unpicking of these structures, formed through categories such as sexuality, gender, race/ethnicity and class. This volume takes the case studies of people confined as mentally ill as well as prisoners, including political detainees and immigrants in detention; it examines the experiences of women and men, queer and transgender peoples, the violent and those who have been subject to present and past violence, including that produced by the after-effects of colonialism.

Further, this book extends our awareness of regimes of discursive power inside institutions. These regimes demonstrate the hegemony of the 'psy' disciplines as they engage in various practices defined as violent, such as mechanical and chemical restraints, and are imbued with the power to define subjectivity, such as normative sexualities, through devices like patient charts. The continuation of colonialist violence has found expression in the late twentieth century, and in the present, in immigration detention facilities. These are places where the demonstrable effects of the carceral environment, such as detention centres, turn on the fear of Otherness, and perpetuate the foreign element: that is, the proposition that illegal immigrants are dangerous and criminal, with the threat of immigrants tied to much earlier claims about 'race' and eugenic ideas. The fact that postcolonial nations also have a poor record of treatment of displaced Indigenous peoples, often more vulnerable to policing and detention, underscores the global problem of perceived racialized threats from mobile peoples.

The volume also examines the legibility of queer sexualities inside patient case notes or medical charts, questioning the tendency towards the occlusion of same-sex intimate partner violence. Larger samples of patient charts also reveal patterns of diagnostic explanations of individual experiences. In seeking the performance of patient 'insight', for example, medical personnel look for conformity and compliance with the expected behaviours of inpatients, an institutional practice dating back to the earliest

days of the asylum. Social identities are triggers for medical control and also provide some potential for rehabilitation—although the meanings of patients' self-reflexivity are only explicable through institutional discourse and categories. In these and other ways, psychocentrism promotes the pathologies of individuals rather than exposing the structural inequalities that shape social and cultural experiences. A number of the chapters take up feminist approaches to interrogate this psychocentrism and to investigate inside the 'sickening institutions' that were historically and are continually embedded within structures of power, with their own internal power relations.

Carceral institutions historically did more than 'contain' individuals and groups. They performed the intense work of segregation, classification, monitoring and capturing subjects. From physical restraints, which never really disappeared from view, to strategic forms of effecting difference within institutions through spatial arrangements, the expectation was that to be confined was to be herded and controlled. Staff who worked in institutions for the insane came to be part of these 'total institutions', in Erving Goffman's words (Goffman 1961), and the totalizing oppression also bore down on them, making it difficult for any questioning or eruptions of dissonance, though these did occur. Tommy Dickinson, for example, writes elsewhere about the nurses who disrupted the chemical and social 'cures' of queer patients by subverting treatments (Dickson 2014, 181–188), and in the process offered chinks of light on the dominant discourses of normative sexuality.

In this volume, we read an account of state-sanctioned violence inside isolation wards in prisons, the most severe form of segregation. Acts of violence against isolated women signify the objectification of confined women; this form of visual record of violence against women in prisons is akin to torture against racially othered, imprisoned terror suspects. Such acts of spectatorship become evidence of injustice, but they are also stark mechanisms of control. Strip-searching, too, is an invasive mode of coercion, and a tool of the medical gaze. Despite the increased internalization of modes of 'self-control', bodies are made vulnerable to gendered and punitive techniques of the institution within which they are contained.

Current critical assumptions about the meanings of the modalities of institutions are tested in this collection. Generations of historians of the asylum and prison have been concerned with the institution's capacity to order space, to use and deploy clinical language, and more recently, to understand social identities (Coleborne 2015). Taking questions about

gender and sexuality, feminist genealogical approaches, queer linguistic interpretations and intersectional analyses of race, gender and sexuality, these contributions posit new formulations of the web of oppression represented by various institutions. Some of the most interesting work in this volume considers the spaces between institutional and home-worlds, such as extra-institutional care and out-of-home care. This collection includes a piece about homelessness and masculinity, which reminds us of the inescapable ways in which the 'government of self', as proposed by Rose, is interpellated and practiced: men seeking to fashion masculinities under duress who bring power relations into spaces where 'normalized' power, such as economic, affective and cultural power, is unlikely to exist. In the outdoor lives of those without homes, making meanings out of the formations of power on the street becomes its own objective. Likewise, community treatment in community-based settings sometimes reinscribes institutional forms of gendered power: the repeated description of men with mental illness as 'violent' rather than the recipients of social, political and other forms of violence further marginalizes the unwell. In the 'sickening society', psychocentrism underlines the politics of psychiatry, psychiatric expertise and psy-praxis.

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