

Broken: Institutions, Families, and the Construction of Intellectual Disability by Madeline C. Burghardt

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ment” that would regularize fiscal transfers in a new constitutional arrangement, echoing the aspirations of reform-minded intellectuals during the Depression such as Norman McLeod Rogers, a central figure of Chapter 3, for a more powerful redistributive role for the federal state.

Chapter 4 examines the consequences of the dramatic expansion of federal income tax in political life during the period of the Second World War. The growth of the federal government’s role in taxing and spending, suggests Tough, became the “basis for new left-right political differences that people were using with increasing sophistication and confidence” (139). Put plainly, a party’s position on taxing and spending played a decisive role in orienting its place on the left-right political spectrum. Yet, as Tough’s reading of *Saturday Night* and other sources suggests, the modernization of the Conservative party hardly delivered political clarity, and intentionally so, during a period when public opinion was deeply influenced by social-

democratic aspirations. Opportunism, obfuscation, and partisan difference was, it seems, recast in new language for traditional purpose.

The Terrific Engine is a stimulating book. By integrating diverse political histories into a single narrative explaining how the rise of income tax recast politics, the book delivers a new and original interpretation. Yet, the recurring claim that these politics constituted a dramatic break from past practices is an overstatement. And the monocausal link drawn between rhetoric and politics does not always deliver satisfying explanations of historical change. Readers might have also expected more on how race and gender operated in tax rhetoric, not least owing to the redistributive thrust of income taxation. Tough, nonetheless, has produced a thoughtful book that contributes to an important field of study.

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Broken

Institutions, Families, and the Construction of Intellectual Disability

By Madeline C. Burghardt

Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018. 262 pages. \$110.00 cloth ISBN 9780773554825. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN 9780773554832. (www.mqup.ca)

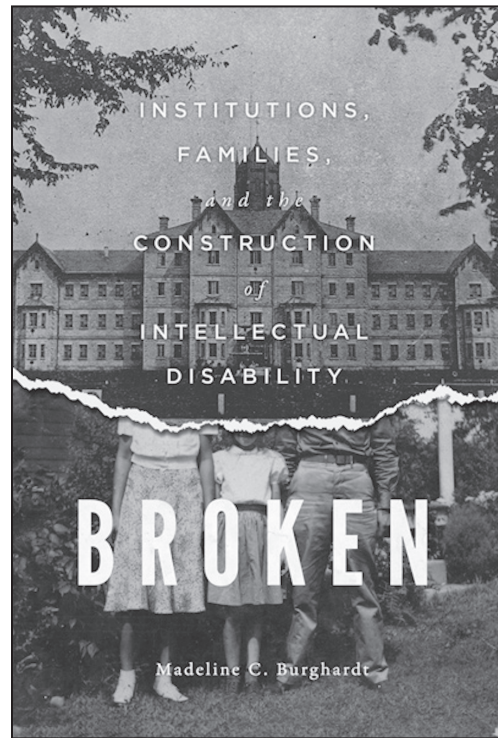
Disability history, particularly in Canada, struggles to get outside of the institution walls. Large-scale residential institutions such as the Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia created records that are rich sources but focus on the experiences of inmates as viewed by medical professionals or staff members. The perceived “voicelessness” of people with dis-

abilities has removed their histories from the broader Canadian context and hides the socio-economic and political factors that led to many parents choosing to institutionalize their children during the 135-year history of Huronia. In *Broken: Institutions, Families, and the Construction of Intellectual Disability*, Madeline C. Burghardt bridges the spaces between

those labelled intellectually disabled (earlier called “feeble-minded”) and their family members, as well as workers in the institution. By interviewing various stakeholders and placing their differing experiences side by side, she demonstrates how ideas of intellectual disability are shaped by shifting understandings of “otherness” and the ideal Canadian subject. Residents of these institutions were self-advocates, learners, and workers both within and outside of them, challenging the common perception of people with intellectual disabilities as incapable of agency.

Burghardt interviews thirty-six people with connections to Ontario’s institutions for the intellectually disabled to explore “the impact of institutionalization on family relationships and understanding of disability” (5). She repeatedly comes back to the theme of how institutions created a sense of brokenness, both within the people who were institutionalized and their families, and within a society that chose to institutionalize people rather than fund support networks that would keep families together. Rather than blaming family members, Burghardt shifts the view to broad historical and political contexts, demonstrating why parents felt that Huronia and similar institutions were the best places for their children. The governmental support of these institutions was driven not only by a need to solve the social problems that the intellectually disabled were perceived to cause, but also by the institutions themselves as job creators in their communities. The growing professionalization of care for people with intellectual disabilities also contributed to the pressure placed on parents to institutionalize their children, as mothers were deemed incapable of doing this caregiving themselves.

Madeline Burghardt is an assistant professor in disability studies at King’s Col-



lege at the University of Western Ontario. She also worked in various capacities with L’Arche Canada, a group that works with intellectually disabled adults and the people who live with them. Burghardt divides her book into three parts. “Institutions in Context” summarizes the history of institutions for those labelled as feeble-minded from their North American foundations based on charitable impulses during the mid-1800s through to their closing, with significant attention paid to the Cold War era during which the majority of her subjects were institutionalized. While this treads over ground familiar to historians who study similar institutions, Burghardt focuses on the Canadian state’s role in their creation. She applies a very deft hand in drawing comparisons between these institutions and the Indian Residential School system, making clear that while these insti-

tutions were not sites of cultural genocide, they were formed in part by the same goal of “creating the ideal Canadian subject” by segregating people deemed undesirable (32). She concludes that these two types of confining institutions for children were part of a broader Canadian “framework of colonialism and its larger goals of assimilation, absorption, and disappearance” (32). By focusing on this Canadian-specific context and using Ontario as a case study of the expansion of the system, Burghart brings unique insights to the period. The ideological connections between these two systems have been kept separate both in government policy and the public imagination, but she argues persuasively that the timing of these institutions, their oppressive nature, and their histories of abuse are connected, and they need to be examined together (54).

Part two, “Stories”, is the strongest section of the book. Here, Burghardt draws on her interview subjects to explore how families and individuals were broken by the experience of institutionalization and compares these to the experiences of workers and key informants. The experiences that people with different points of connection to both institutions and those institutionalized demonstrate how complicated this history is, and how easy it has been to erase the experience of the intellectually disabled. Her subjects include survivors of various institutions in Ontario (including two whose siblings were also interviewed); siblings of people who were institutionalized (including three whose parents were also interviewed); parents of children labelled as intellectually disabled (including two who did not institutionalize their child); former workers at institutions across Ontario; and key informants who worked as advocates for the disabled.

These interviews uncover the compli-

cated layers of institutionalization, bringing the experiences of the intellectually disabled into the light. These stories are often contradictory, with survivors describing the institution as “dehumanizing” and “abusive” (89), while workers described it as “the best job I ever had” (155) and characterized the institutions as places of abundance (162). In light of the successful class-action lawsuit brought by survivors Marie Slark and Patricia Seth (both interviewed as part of the book), it would be easy for Burghardt to lay blame on both parents and workers for the abuse experienced by survivors. Instead, she builds her argument in such a way as to examine the narrative differences between stakeholders about what occurred within institutions, seeking to “examine the nexus of oppression and the conditions that give rise to it” (170). To be clear, Burghardt believes the survivors that abuse occurred within institutions, despite the staff members she interviews stating they never saw the abuse happening. While those who worked in the institutions may have seen them as places of abundance, with swimming pools and other services available, for residents the “fact that they had no choice regarding how and on whose terms they used them” was more important (162).

In part three, “Conclusions”, Burghardt describes the recalibration of ideas of intellectual disability within the families of her subjects as well as within society. Throughout her work she explains how the idea of who is feeble-minded has changed over time and was influenced by gender, race, and class, particularly in regard to those pressured to institutionalize their child. The siblings of those who were institutionalized were often the ones who needed to re-establish relationships after deinstitutionalization, sometimes with people they had not seen in decades. Surviving parents

went from being told they were doing the best thing for their child when they made the choice to institutionalize to being told they could always have had their children with them and in the community. Burghardt again makes clear that blaming parents individualizes the broad factors she's outlined throughout (203); however, she makes clear that too much of the story of institutionalization has focused on parents and workers—the voices of the intellectually disabled needs to be prioritized so we do not repeat the oppression of the intellectually disabled through a different guise, such as community care facilities that limit the physical and emotional freedoms of their residents.

The main weakness of the book is one that the author refers to throughout: the lack of representation of racialized people in the histories she is uncovering. This issue in disability studies was raised by Chris Bell in 2010 and continues to be an issue in disability-related histories in Canada. Burghardt tries to address this by discussing how Indigenous children labelled as intellectually disabled were likely instead living in residential schools; however, no one

who might have fallen into this category was interviewed (as the author continually addresses issues of Indigeneity throughout the book, this is likely due to lack of available subjects rather than deliberate or accidental oversight). The lack of African-Canadians in disability history is a problem that the field is attempting to address, but limited sources outside of institutions that primarily served European-Canadians makes this difficult (54).

This book makes a strong contribution to Canada's growing disability history field. By choosing to prioritize the experiences of those institutionalized, Burghardt is able to highlight histories that are rarely able to be told. While it is obvious that this book also contributes to the histories of childhood, family, and medicine, I would also recommend it to those who study the creation of "normal" during the Cold War era. This is a strong first book, and I look forward to seeing what Burghardt does with her next project.

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Buying Happiness

The Emergence of Consumer Consciousness in English Canada

By Bettina Liverant

Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2018. 304 pages. \$89.95 hardcover; ISBN 9780774835138. \$34.95 paperback; ISBN 9780774835145. \$34.95 EPUB; ISBN 9780774835169. \$34.95 PDF; ISBN 9780774835152. (ubcpres.ca).

Reflecting on Canada's economic situation in the years following the Second World War, Donald Gordon, then Deputy Governor of the Bank of Canada, offered the following upbeat assessment: We "drank one third more

milk, ate two thirds more pork, rang up two thirds more movie admissions and bought 75 percent more new houses in 1948 than in... 1938... We used twice as much gasoline, chewed twice as much gum, bought twice as many refrigerators