

Kathryn Boundy - "You Can't Complain, You're Crazy- What Do You Know?": Working Towards Change at a Facility After an Admission

As a graduate instructor, I teach a course called "Women and Madness." Last spring, I was involuntarily hospitalized for a period of several days at a local mental health facility. This fall, as I was previewing a film on the history of the asylum in America, I began to realize how closely many of the complaints and injustices reported by state hospital patients from the 1950's, 60's and 70's mirrored my own experience at a county hospital in 2009. I also realized how easily and cheaply many of the difficulties- lack of access to sufficient water, lack of orientation to the procedures and schedules of the facility, lack of anything to do during the day other than pace, etc.- could be remedied. There were larger, more severe structural issues as well including the use of threatened extra medication as a means of social control and things of that nature. However, while the larger issues may take more time and collective power to successfully combat, the "smaller" cultural issues I observed seem like something that could be changed quite readily if the facility was willing to make a fairly minor effort. I am going to attempt to contact the facility's board of directors- first by letter and then hopefully in person- and try to work with them in an effort to begin to get these issues addressed. I proposed a presentation on the difficulties and (hopefully!) successes of this effort. I explored the complexities involved in attempting to bring this case to the authorities in charge of the facility having been a recent resident there and while possessing an active psychiatric label.