

**Becoming perpetrator:
How I came to accept restraining and confining disabled Aboriginal children**

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Introduction

Some people may not wish to read this paper. It's an attempt to make sense of my own past perpetration of physical restraints and locked confinement of disabled Aboriginal children. My nightmare scenario of writing this is that it will do harm to people who've been subjected to such violence and read it. If you have been subjected to physical restraints and locked confinement, please know that this *is* the subject of the following paper, and so you may or may not wish to read ahead. I could never know for you whether or not you should proceed. On the other hand, if, like me, you have perpetrated this kind of violence, then I would encourage you to read it. If you feel defensive or otherwise strongly, respond to what I write. I invite you to consider that this may be a response that you can attend to ethically and politically—and that it could be an important response that may not be primarily or only about what I've written. Of course I could never know this for you either.

Hannah Arendt wrote: "What I propose ... is nothing more than to think what we are doing" (1998, p. 5), which I think fed her subsequent suggestion that a more rigorous understanding of Adolf Eichmann's account of *his* thinking about what *he* was doing would have been politically useful for us all. In this paper, I take her analysis of Eichmann's accounts and use it as starting points to explore resonances with how *I* thought about what *I* was doing in the past as a residential counsellor. I then briefly connect this to my work today as a social work instructor and some pedagogical considerations that guide me in that context.

Over ten years ago now, I worked as a residential counsellor in a treatment centre. Elsewhere I've critically explored this work on a more systemic and theoretical level (Chapman, submitted), but I've been hesitant to explore my own use of violence directly, in physically restraining children as young as eight and locking them up. I continue to struggle with how I was able to do that.

I am *not* suggesting that other residential counsellors or I can be equated with Eichmann. This would surely do an injustice to many people in various ways. One of the perhaps less obvious ways that it would do so is by taking away from the particularity of the ways that real people navigate real contexts, particularly when any one of us does real harm to any other (see Ahmed, 1998, 2004, 2006; Arendt, 1964; Butler, 2004; Chapman, 2007, 2009, 2010; Derrida, 1995; Fellows and Razack, 1998; Foucault, 1994, 2006; Goodrum, Umberson, and Anderson, 2001; Hatzfeld, 2005; Heron, 2007; Jenkins, 1990, 2009; Mahmood, 2005; Neu and Therrien, 2003; Wood, 2004). I approach Eichmann's accounts, then, as particularly embodied and contextualized narratives of personal ethical navigation, as I understand Arendt to have done. I believe that we all navigate our lives in ways that are available to us in part due to the structural contexts in which we find ourselves and the stories we tell about ourselves and the world. I believe this is a way to fruitfully approach how anyone lives in this world and does things, whether it's you or I or Eichmann. Of course, not everyone ethically navigates their life with equal effects on others. I believe, though, that there's something valuable in carefully attending to the 'hows' of such navigation—amongst those who do it very carefully, those who do it with devastating consequences, and—like most of us, probably—those who do it carefully sometimes and in certain contexts and who also sometimes do it with harmful consequences. This kind of analysis is distinct from an approach that imagines violence and atrocities to be always committed by people entirely unlike the rest of us, which I would suggest implicitly justifies psychiatric and penal abuse and incarceration, as well as war. As an alternative, I'm inviting curiosity about how someone *becomes* an administrator of genocide, how someone else *becomes* a restrainer and confiner of disabled Aboriginal children, and how we two very different people—and the rest of us when we do harm—come to accept hurting and oppressing

others as normal or acceptable and then go on with our lives. What makes this possible? What might make it less likely to happen?

Why I believe it's important to take Eichmann's account seriously

It's easy for us to imagine that Eichmann was simply a monster. And, of course, he was exactly that in terms of what he did. But *how* he became what he became is another question altogether (see Butler, 2004; Patel, 2009). According to Arendt, this is more complicated than we might assume. She writes (1964, p. 25), for example:

Eichmann pleaded: 'Not guilty in the sense of the indictment.' [and so Arendt asked in what sense he thought] he was guilty.... First of all, [he claimed,] the indictment for murder was wrong: 'With the killing of Jews I had nothing to do [he stated]. I never killed a Jew, or a non-Jew, for that matter – I never killed any human being. I never gave an order to kill either a Jew or a non-Jew; I just did not do it'.... Hence he repeated over and over ... that he could be accused only of 'aiding and abetting' the annihilation of the Jews, which he declared in Jerusalem to have been 'one of the greatest crimes in the history of Humanity'.

Elsewhere (Chapman, 2010), I explore this dividing line he draws, using Guatemalan human rights activists' distinctions between 'material authors' and 'intellectual authors' of genocide (Jesús Tecu Osorio, cited in al Nakba, 2008), in relation to other studies of people who have done harm and the lines they draw to secure their own relative innocence (Fellows and Razack, 1998; Goodrum, Umberson, and Anderson, 2001; Hatzfeld, 2005; Heron, 2007; Wood, 2004). Here, however, it's the second point of his plea, alongside his statement that the annihilation of the Jews was 'one of the greatest crimes in the history of Humanity,' that interests me. His second point was this: "The indictment implied not only that he had acted on purpose, which he did not deny, but [that he had acted] out of base motives" (Arendt, 1964, p. 25). He was, he claimed, 'not guilty in the sense of the indictment' because the indictment assumed--as I think we all tend to do when we hear of others' violence--that his motivation was clearly, simply, and unambiguously *to do harm*, because he was a certain kind of person unlike the rest of us. In relation to the idea that a given person 'is' a certain kind of person, Michael White (2004a) has provided a very compelling account of the distinction between what he calls 'the folk psychologies,' which have always existed in all places and all times, and the relatively recent, putatively scientific, and Eurocentric 'professional psychologies.' It is only in the latter, he suggests, that people are understood to be permanently fixed as certain types of people, for example, as those who are either good or bad, either sane or insane, either responsible or irresponsible, etc. As Heron points out, this is particular to the also relatively recent and Eurocentric liberal individualist understandings of personhood (2007, p. 28), without which the professional psychologies would have no ground whatsoever to have flourished. And Foucault gives more detailed analyses of what made these forms of objectification possible, describing certain developments as occurring "at the level of what will soon be called psychology" (Foucault, 1970, p. 224). Further, he writes that these were not politically neutral developments of theory or ideas:

we cannot say that the individual pre-exists ... the projection of the psyche, or the normalizing agency. On the contrary, it is ... through disciplinary mechanisms that the individual appeared within a political system. The individual was constituted insofar as uninterrupted supervision, continual writing [i.e., of case notes], and potential punishment enframed this subjected body and extracted a psyche from it. It has been possible to distinguish the individual only insofar as

the normalizing agency has distributed, excluded, and constantly taken up again this body-psyche.... The sciences of man, considered at any rate as sciences of the individual, are only the effects of this series of procedures (Foucault, 2008, p. 56; see also Chrisjohn, Young and Mauran, 2006, and Davis, 2007, for the ways that this continues to obscure power relations).

There is no reason other than habit for us to take for granted the truth claims of these particular ways of understanding what humans are. And I would like to suggest that a critique of the objectifications of the professional psychologies coincides with the possibility that Arendt's account of Eichmann may be useful for all of us in understanding *how* a person comes to become violent and oppressive and especially how a person narrates or rationalizes this process. Foucault writes:

many factors determine power. Yet rationalization is also constantly working away at it. There are specific forms to such rationalization. The government of [people] by [people] – whether it is power exerted by men over women, or by adults over children, or by one class over another, or by a bureaucracy over a population – involves a certain type of rationality [at the level, we might add, that has come to be called psychology].... Consequently, those who resist or rebel against a form of power cannot merely be content to denounce violence or criticize an institution.... What has to be questioned is the form of rationality at stake. The criticism of power wielded over the mentally sick or mad cannot be restricted to psychiatric institutions; nor can those questioning the power to punish be content with denouncing prisons as total institutions. The question is: How are such relations of power rationalized? (1994, pp. 324-325).

It is this rationalization of relations of power that seems to interest Arendt most in her careful study of Eichmann's own narratives. Arendt writes of what we most easily assume to be his anti-Semitism, for example: "He 'personally' never had anything whatever against Jews; on the contrary, he had plenty of 'private reasons' for not being a Jew hater. [And then she adds] Alas, nobody believed him" (1964, p. 26). This 'alas' is very significant to Arendt's project. I believe that she's concerned that Eichmann is being misrepresented *for the sake of what we can learn from his example* if what he says *is* true (and even if it's only partially true). I'm following her lead in assuming that what he says is at least partly true and in believing that we can all learn from the ways that he accounts for the process of having ethically normalized and rationalized his own perpetration of violence. Narrating it as 'aiding and abetting,' rather than murder or genocide, surely played some role. But how did he initially become comfortable with what he called 'aiding and abetting' what *he* called 'one of the greatest crimes in the history of Humanity'? He says he did not initially experience this as anything like acceptable:

when he was told of the Führer's order for the 'physical extermination of the Jews,' in which he was to play such an important role[, he says that] he himself had 'never thought of . . . such a solution through violence,' and he described his reaction [as follows]: 'I now lost everything, all joy in my work, all initiative, all interest; I was, so to speak, blown out' (Arendt, 1964, p. 31).

Of course we all know that this initial response did not last.

How this resonates with how I came to normalize my own use of violence

First of all, let me say again that I am not equating myself with Eichmann. When I use the term 'resonance' to describe a relationship between our respective processes of normalizing and rationalizing violence, this should not be read as a making of equivalencies. I am rather using this term along the lines of what Tamboukou (2003) calls 'dissonant harmony'--which is to say a sense of *some* commonality, which is also very much 'dissonant' or distinct. I also relate to Jenkins' (2009) description of 'parallel, political journeys' by which he refers to the resonance between his position as a therapist and that of the men who perpetrate abuse that he works with: he's suggesting that *his* journey to be accountable for the real effects of his actions on the men he works with and their families is 'parallel' or resonant with the journeys of the men he works with to become accountable to their families' experiences of them. He is not suggesting that he is himself a perpetrator of domestic violence, any more than I'm suggesting that I'm 'the same as' Adolf Eichmann. I'm rather attending to very particular ways that I can learn from Eichmann's accounts of his own process, allowing myself to 'sit with' what I feel as resonance with his accounts, and using this as starting points for my own reflexive exploration. This was precisely the methodology of initially writing this paper.

I can still remember the specifics of the first two restraints I ever did – and no others, in the same kind of detail. I think these two continue to stand out for me because, as Arendt says of Eichmann, my "conscience [initially] functioned in the expected way" even if, relative to the rest of my life, it functioned "within rather odd limits" (Arendt, 1964, p. 95). Like Eichmann's, this initial, expected, conscientious response did not last.

I'd sought out a social services job out of a sense of political commitment. I believed that working with 'disadvantaged' youth was a way to make a difference in the world – along the lines of something like global justice. When I first started the job, I had no training or experience, but I had a lot of ideas and enthusiasm, which were politically, rather than individualistically, oriented. I imagined watching John Wayne movies with the children and collectively critiquing their racism, for example. And I imagined that doing so might be 'therapeutic' because of how I came into the job understanding what it meant to be 'disadvantaged'. But then I took on the training regime of what I needed to learn to do my job (see also Chapman, submitted). And so instead of watching cowboy movies critically and asking the children what they thought, I watched things like 'Ten Things to do Instead of Hitting' (Sunburst, 1995) uncritically and then told the children what to do. One of the things that *my* training regime entailed, for me, because of who I'd always been, was ongoing concern about my ability to 'set limits', 'establish boundaries' and generally discipline and control. I had to learn to be 'the adult' in the relationship, even though I'd never had an adult *like that* in my life. And one of the major things this entailed was to physically restrain kids.

In fact, untrained and inexperienced, I soon found out that I had basically been hired on as muscle, which seemed like a joke really. I was also to be a 'male role model' to the kids, which was also a bit of a joke to me, but the concern about male physical strength was explicitly stated. Before I was ever expected to take the lead in education groups or counselling, I took the lead in physical restraints. Because I was a man. Alongside sighs of exasperation about there being no Aboriginal staff and no serious efforts to address this, the centre had a strict policy that half of the full time staff be male. White women who had worked there casually for years were not hired, no Aboriginal people were considered, and they took my effeminate University dropout masculinity as the best they could do. I found myself with a job involving pay and responsibility that was unparalleled amongst my peer group at the time.

As I understood it then, I was actually making a difference in the real lives of survivors of family and colonial violence and getting trained and compensated to do so, and so I was very much

'elated' about aspects my situation (see Arendt, 1964, pp. 53-54, on Eichmann's strategies for achieving elation, which I address below). But I also had to physically restrain children, which was initially incredibly emotionally complicated for me and which nothing in my previous life had prepared me for. I can remember that when I talked with friends and family, the restraints were a major focus of early conversations. I would state my discomfort about what I was doing, but somehow the self-centred story of the perceived ridiculousness of *my* body having been chosen to do such a thing often won out. This '*my* body' completely ignored my whiteness, ability and maleness and instead focused exclusively on my effeminacy—the fact that it seemed funny to me that a white male able body was considered appropriate to overpower disabled Aboriginal children clearly shows my sense of disconnect from legacies of colonization and eugenic institutionalization (See Chapman, submitted). 'Can you believe it,' I would say, 'they hired *me* to do this? Some of those kids are bigger than I am and I've never even been in a fight.' This was funny to me, because it was so incongruous with anything else I'd ever done or known, but it was also incredibly disturbing to do these things. And, perhaps even more disturbing, somehow I knew that this disturbance was to be psychologically 'worked through' and 'overcome' rather than politically and ethically attended to.

Becoming perpetrator as a parallel, political process to becoming self-blaming other

Of the Nazis, Arendt writes that, in terms of affect and ethical self-governance,

the problem was how to overcome ... the animal pity by which all normal [people] are affected in the presence of physical suffering. The trick used by Himmler – who apparently was rather strongly afflicted with these instinctive reactions himself – was very simple and probably very effective; it consisted in turning these instincts around, as it were, in directing them toward the self. So that instead of saying: What horrible things I did to people!, the murderers would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders! (1964, p. 106).

At the treatment centre, it was routinely acknowledged that it was disturbing to physically restrain someone. This was spoken about as an 'unfortunate' aspect of the job. If only we could play games and have counselling sessions all day, without the violence, without the time outs even, of course we would all prefer that. But one of the things that came with 'helping' children who were 'this damaged', we said, was restraining and confining. The idea that there could be a world without restraints and locked confinement seemed clearly untrue, as evidenced by the children we worked with, and so some of us had to do the 'unfortunate' work involved in 'maintaining safety' for them and others. It's not that we didn't acknowledge that these restraints were traumatic for the children being restrained or for other children witnessing them, but we were the protagonists in the stories we told and believed. Our violence was only ever a response to their violence. The possibility of imagining their individual violence as a response to our structural, epistemic, *and* individual violence--both institutional/ableist and national/colonial/racist--was not available to us. And so because they were the initiators of violence, as we understood it, there was nothing we could do to prevent it (see Butler, 2004). We had nothing to do with their violence, until it erupted and our only role was to keep everyone safe. Even the room where children were locked up, which usually followed a physical restraint, was called a 'safe room,' which was clearly an act of manipulating perception – but it's hard to locate the *agent* of that manipulation. As staff, I think we all believed it. We *perceived* it. There was no safety without the safe room, we said, 'unfortunately'.

'Unfortunately.' It seems to me that what was once an ethical and political 'crisis of conscience' about what we were doing (Arendt, 1964, p. 104)--for me and perhaps for others--somehow gave way to this resigned 'unfortunately,' as if it was misfortune that placed the children upon the path to the treatment centre rather than the effects of real people's concrete decisions and actions (see Ahmed, 2004). As if it was misfortune that created the fact that almost all of them were Aboriginal and almost all of us were white. And, 'unfortunately,' someone had to 'care for them' with all the sense of righteousness and self-sacrifice that this implied. In fact, while I was there, all of the staff went away on a retreat on 'secondary post-trauma,' that is the trauma experienced as a result of exposure to others' trauma. Doing what was clearly 'group therapy,' but calling it 'professional development,' the purpose was for us to explore the effects on us of the stories we heard in counselling conversations, rather than the effects on us of restraining children, but nevertheless, I can imagine a different 'treatment' of our feelings. Relative to the kids we worked with, our traumas were much less significant, but they were nonetheless real. And perhaps they could have instead been taken for what Arendt calls 'instinctive reactions' to *both* the painful experiences the children told us about *and* the painful experiences we perpetrated. But by psychologizing and thus depoliticizing our emotional and at least potentially ethical and political struggles, we were actively steered away from interrogating our own violence and the trauma *we were causing*. In her paper for this PsychOUT conference earlier today, Louise Tam (2010) cited Mitchell-Brody of the Icarus Project, both of them using the following to question the pathologization of people who are psychiatrized: "there is much in our world to be angry, anxious or sad about." I would like to suggest here that the 'normal' or 'instinctual' or at least *expected* experiences of anger, anxiety and sadness that staff experienced were psychologized and abnormalized in a 'dissonant' but harmonious way to the pathologization of the children we worked with and others who are confined in similar closed sites. Taking up Jenkins' language differently than he uses it, I would like to suggest that this was a 'parallel, political journey' – but it was not one of 'becoming ethical' in the sense that 'ethical' sometimes means 'moral.' It was rather a process of becoming invested in a project of ethical self-governance that would allow us to more comfortably occupy and perpetuate our respective positions in systemic oppression.

I now consider my worry, guilt, and anger about such things as important. The children I worked with were pathologized of course, making our violence seem necessary, but so too were workers' struggles with perpetrating violence psychologized and individualized, steering us away from approaching these struggles as political or ethical concerns. When we restrained children, we 'debriefed' newer staff afterwards, knowing it was difficult to witness or participate in a restraint, and approaching it as something to address through something like a 'talking cure' with a predetermined destination: to accept perpetrating violence as necessary.

The word 'debrief,' in fact, as I understand it, is primarily otherwise used in military contexts to work through having participated in military violence and all that it entails--and when 'first world' inhabitants come back from 'development projects' overseas. In the latter, we can imagine that if the discomforts of coming back to Canada after returning from Guatemala were approached as 'ethical and political' concerns to attend to, then this would result in a more normative fundamental questioning of geopolitical inequalities, starvation, war, and what Heron (2007) calls 'colonial continuities.'

In the treatment centre, our expected and therefore 'normal' discomforts resulting from restraining were differentiated from those of the children we worked with, implicitly threatening staff with the identification of 'emotionally disturbed' (or whatever) if we were unable to 'work through' these initial discomforts. In fact, this was how we as staff made sense of the 'conscientious objector' staff person I describe a few pages below: she was 'not right' or 'not

healthy enough' to do the job or something along those lines. Our discomforts as staff, however unpleasant, could be worked through 'normally,' meaning without confinement or restraint, proving that we were worthy of our freedom while the kids we worked with, who seemed to 'need' these interventions, were exceptionally, individually 'disturbed.'

Resonant with this analysis, last year I presented on a panel with Shaista Patel (2009) and Melissa Abbey Strowger (2009). Shaista's paper explored how 'terror suspects' were described in popular press sources using discourses of 'madness,' both erasing the possibility of understanding 'terrorists' as politically motivated *and* evoking a longstanding tradition of incarcerating people who've committed no crime because of their 'psychological state'. Melissa's paper also looked at popular press sources, although her study was of the ways that Americans' anxiety about 'the war on terror' was treated in these sources, anxiety that could, at least potentially, be related to questioning the justice of American military action. This anxiety was unlike the 'madness' of the 'terror suspects' that self-evidently required incarceration. It was rather, according to some of her sources, to be worked through using 'relatively normal' practices often used in outpatient care for those not 'requiring' confinement, restraint, and so on: If you're feeling anxious about the war, here are some deep breathing exercises you could do, or you might try positive aphorisms. 'Parallel' to one another, and certainly 'politically,' some people are being psychologized in such a way to accept their implication in war with less anxiety and uncertainty, and some are being psychologized in such a way that the rest of us can accept their indefinite detention and torture. This was a 'parallel, political' process to what I understand took place at the treatment centre where I worked. Both processes created discursive contexts within which people could engage in ethical practices of self-formation (see Mahmood, 2005). These ethical practices would, in turn (Foucault, 1990), reify the taken for grantedness of these discourses of rationality and inevitability and, through them, people would constitute themselves as agentively 'willing' to do the material acts also necessary for the sustenance of systemic oppression, such as directly perpetrating violence themselves or electing officials who choose war, indefinite detention, and torture.

Furthermore, resonant with our staff retreat to deal with secondary trauma, and also with newspapers advocating deep breathing and affirmations for anxiety about war, Arendt writes the following of what we might call Eichmann's 'positive self-talk':

he had not forgotten a single one of the sentences of his that at one time or another had served to give him a 'sense of elation.' Hence, whenever, during the cross-examination, the judges tried to appeal to his conscience, they were met with 'elation,' and they were outraged as well as disconcerted when they learned that the accused had at his disposal a different elating cliché for each period of his life and each of his activities. In his mind, there was no contradiction between 'I will jump into my grave laughing,' appropriate for the end of the war, and 'I shall gladly hang myself in public as a warning example for all anti-Semites on this earth,' which now, under vastly different circumstances, fulfilled exactly the same function of giving him a lift (1964, pp. 53-54; on this last point, see also Ahmed, 2006, for a critique that may also pertain to my project).

And what was assumed in all this, what held it all together, but which has no foundation, is an enduring normal state, free of emotional discomfort, even in the face of violence and oppression, that we and the children were both in the process of being normalized *toward*, parallel to one another, but *distinctly*. Following restraints, we 'debriefed' new staff to help them feel at peace with perpetrating these forms of violence, and then we 'processed' with the child who had just been restrained, *requiring them* to accept 'full responsibility' for having individually

caused the entire situation (see Jenkins, 1990). Any suggestion from a child that staff, other kids, or the system played any part whatsoever in their individual choices or actions would result in another fifteen minutes of locked confinement, after which we would give them another opportunity to take ‘full responsibility,’ unless some other duty delayed us, which sometimes happened but was never our responsibility either. Their discursively construed and structurally coerced ‘responsibility’ shaped their--and our--ethical and political possibilities of becoming who we were becoming. We were all being trained to more fully inhabit our respective positions within systemic oppression and to feel fully responsible or not at all, accordingly.

The importance of alternative accounts to processes of ethical self-formation

Significantly, we were not aberrational in our normalization of our particular kind of violence. It is normative, at least for those living in our time and place with systemic privilege, to imagine the inevitability of the police, the army, psychiatric confinement, prisons, and so on. I struggled initially with *my role* in this place and practice, but it was not until I left the job that I began to imagine a world without such places and practices. “As Eichmann told it, the most potent factor in the soothing of his own conscience was the simple fact that he could see no one, no one at all, who actually was against the Final Solution. He did encounter one exception, however, which he mentioned several times, and which must have made a deep impression on him” (Arendt, 1964, p. 116).

In terms of encounters with exceptions, critiques and alternatives, a difference between Eichmann and I is that I had direct and sometimes very close relationships with every one of the children I ever restrained. They said that what we were doing was “contrary to morality”, they “appeal[ed] to our feelings” (Arendt, 1964, p. 131) in deeds and words of a wide variety of forms and intensities. But one of the things that today I find so astounding in thinking back on this is that all of those words and deeds only served to justify what we were doing (see Chapman, 2009; Jenkins, 1990, 1991). The necessity of our “Nonviolent Crisis Intervention” (Crisis Prevention Institute, Inc., 2010) was proven by their violence (see Butler, 2004; but also Citizens Against Restraint, 2006). And even when they asked about what we did in calm, articulate, curious ways, or through tears, *even then* we were entirely sure about the morality of what we were doing or at least its inevitability. This was just how things were, and the only people who could change that were the children: if they were never violent again, we would never be violent. Simple.

Unlike Eichmann’s solitary exception, I also had access to several critiques from the margins of the staff team. These shook up my certainties more than the kids’ protests, but it wasn’t until I left the job that my uncertainties really flourished. At one point, I visited a former coworker who’d moved away. She had been ‘night staff,’ which meant that, according to local beliefs in the centre, she was less capable, less knowledgeable, and so on, when it came to dealing with the kids. Sometimes, if a child were upset, ‘day staff’ like me would stay late until the child was asleep, because it was generally understood that ‘night staff’ didn’t have the skills to deal with the kids when they were upset. They didn’t do counselling and they didn’t do restraints, so one of us had to be around if there might be a need for either. The difference between night and day was a hierarchical one; we were more skilled and competent. Although I was friendly with the night staff and was only hired on as day staff because of my gender, it never occurred to me that there might be alternative ways of understanding this. But what this former night staff told me during our visit was that they didn’t feel too incompetent to restrain children. They were rather ethically opposed to it. She said something like: “you day staff: a child cries and you go in and tell them to stop or we’ll lock you up. Kids were sometimes upset at night after all of you left. We read to them or just sat with them or got them a cup of milk. That’s what you do when

kids are upset. You care for them. You don't threaten to lock them up. When any of you heard about it, all you could say is: they're manipulating you, don't be so soft. But that's what you do when kids are upset." These are responses I would much prefer if I were upset, and it is certainly what I would want for my son if he were, which invites all sorts of reconsideration of the ways we made sense of parents and families. But sticking with the issue of restraint and ethical navigation, night staff never *had to* restrain kids, *because of what they did*, she said, implying that we *had to because of what we did*. I think this significantly influenced my decision to leave the job, although I wasn't sure I agreed with her. The very possibility that she *could* believe it shook me up. And I was very surprised by her anger about it. Why was she angry about how I was with the children? I was great with them. I thought everyone knew that.

And then there was a woman who, in the three years I worked there, was the single person who clearly conscientiously objected to physical restraints. On her first day, we restrained one of the children. She wasn't involved, but I knew that witnessing it would have been disturbing to her, so I approached her to 'debrief,' again, depoliticizing her response as psychological and requiring correction, rather than ethical or political. She gathered up her stuff and said, "That was horrible. I can't do this," and she left, tears in her eyes.

I recall that staff mobilized non-professional discourses of psychopathology--'not right,' 'not healthy enough,' 'too emotional,' and similar phrases in order to contain this person's response as aberrational and about *her*, rather than about what we had done. Perhaps we couldn't use terms from the professional psychologies--which we used liberally in other contexts, because this would raise questions about how she got hired in the first place, which might even unsettle the normal/abnormal binary that we needed to feel okay about restraining and confining other people's children. So she was narrated as occupying an interesting informal middle category that people seem to use to situate abnormality within the margins of normality and yet outside of professional intervention: phrases such as 'nervous breakdown' or 'not right.' The implication was something like this: maybe she just had to work on her positive self-talk or her deep breathing or even see a private therapist, and maybe then she'd be healthy enough to restrain children.

While not a coworker, a friend accompanied me to the centre one day. One of the kids hung out of his window to happily greet me and, in front of this friend, I 'directed him' to go back into his room, knowing that he was surely in his room for some disciplinary reason and shouldn't be hanging out of the window or generally enjoying himself. My friend was shocked at how I spoke to him. The carefully crafted 'adult/child boundaries' me, Chris the 'child care counsellor,' was not the Chris she knew. And again, I found her anger at me, for how I had spoken to a child, very disruptive to my sense of what was what. I had already set my departure in motion, but this certainly heightened my sense that things weren't right.

And when I drove away from that city, I only then knew with complete certainty that I would never do those things again.

Alternative accounts, ethics, and accountability in the social work classroom

So what does this all have to do with what I do today in social work classrooms? I'll briefly outline one example here (although I describe another aspect of this course in Chapman, submittedb, and describe a social work ethics course motivated by these same concerns and ideas in Chapman, 2010). I designed and teach a full-year history of social work course at Dalhousie University, in which I privilege accounts about the helping professions from groups who are overrepresented as non-voluntary clients. I want students to be able to perceive their

future clients' protests as something other than proof of our necessity and benevolence. If a kid says, 'you're ruining my life,' I want them to think of the various histories we've read in which at times well-intentioned experts and professionals really did ruin people's lives. To this end, we read First Nations, anti-racist, mad movement, prison abolitionist, and disability studies histories of professional helping, as well as reflexive critical accounts of these histories written by helping professionals.

But what I also try to do in this course is have students generate what Michael White called a 'territory of preferred identity' (2004b, 2006) from which to situate themselves in these critiques. This involves encouraging them to relate to how the histories resonate in their own lives--not so differently from what I've done here with Arendt's Eichmann – *both* in relation to the ways that they might have lived some aspects of their life at the margins, as members of oppressed communities, and also in relation to the privileges that they embody or, at the very least, will embody as a paid professional social worker, and perhaps in the ways that these two intersect, along the lines of my particular manifestation of what I experienced as an 'alternative' masculinity playing a role in obscuring my recognition of my role in colonial, ageist and ableist domination. Creating this 'territory of preferred identity' is, I believe, what made it possible for me to write this exploration of my own perpetration of violence against disabled Aboriginal children. I can inhabit an ethical and political territory that is clear about restraints and locked confinement being wrong, which allows me to explore *how* I was so clear about it being right--or rather alright even if 'unfortunate'. Writing this wasn't easy for me to do, but I'm now able to perceive the associated discomfort as a political aspect of my life – which can potentially obscure my privilege and domination if I treat it as psychological, and this allows me greater options in terms of what to do ethically and politically with that discomfort. It is this increase of options that I hope to facilitate amongst my students.

Conclusion

Whether or not there ought to be some people in our communities who are paid to be 'the helpers' is an important question, although it's one I haven't touched upon. But as long as there are professional helpers, and likely there will continue to be professionals, even if we do abolish this particular hierarchical structure, those who help need to be aware of the likelihood that we will also harm. We need to become better at becoming ethical and accountable, both when those who we're supposedly helping tell us that we're doing harm, and when our consciences do. My hope for this paper is that it might assist others in this process of becoming ethical.

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