

VOICE, IDENTITY AND COERCION:
THE CONSUMER/SURVIVOR MOVEMENT
IN
ACUTE PUBLIC PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES

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Abstract

This thesis argues that current treatment in acute public mental health services is counterproductive for the wellbeing of those subject to such services. The consumer/survivor movement's activism against the coercive nature of treatment is analysed according to new social movement theory. According to social theorists such as Alain Touraine, new social movements are characterised by a struggle over identity. Consistent with this theme, what is identified in this thesis as central to the consumer/survivor movement's objection to the nature of treatment in acute public mental health services is the failure of services to respect patient's identity as persons. What might account for this failure is analysed in this thesis through an examination of the question of the conceptualisation of the subject in the theory and concepts of psychiatry, in the practice of psychiatry, in mental health law and in government policy.

As a counterposition to the above perspectives, the work of R.D. Laing, Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur are considered in an attempt to develop a conceptualisation of the subject grounded in a historical narrative. Further, Emmanuel Levinas' and Axel Honneth's work is drawn on to identify the practical implications of Honneth's claim for a politics of recognition, which also supports the consumer/survivor movement's demand for recognition as subjects in mental health services.

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