Sexual surveillance and control in a community-based intellectual disability service

Michael Feely

Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

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Abstract

Within contemporary policy documents regarding intellectual disability and sexuality we often find a progress narrative that contrasts a dark past, when the sexuality of disabled people was suppressed, with an enlightened present, when we recognize the sexual rights of all human beings. In this paper – which pertains to the Republic of Ireland – I take up the Foucauldian and Deleuzian position of treating such progress narratives with suspicion. From this perspective, I offer an alternative reading of the treatment of intellectual disability and sexuality in the present, and I seek to map just some of the subtle but effective ways this population's sexuality continues to be controlled today.

Keywords

Assemblage, Deleuze, Foucault, intellectual disability, sexuality, surveillance

Within contemporary policy documents regarding intellectual disability and sexuality we often find a progress narrative that contrasts a dark past, when the sexuality of disabled people was suppressed, with an enlightened present, when we recognize the sexual rights of all human beings. In this paper – which pertains to the Republic of Ireland – I take up the Foucauldian (1977) and Deleuzian (1992) position of treating such progress narratives with suspicion. From this perspective, I offer an alternative reading of the treatment of intellectual disability and sexuality in the present, and I seek to map just some of the subtle but effective ways this population's sexuality continues to be controlled today.

Corresponding author:

Michael Feely, Department of Social Work, Trinity College, Dublin, Republic of Ireland.

Email: mfeely@tcd.ie

The paper begins by suggesting that recent decades have seen the de-institutionalization of Irish people with intellectual disabilities but have not seen an end to fears regarding their sexuality. It then outlines some theoretical insights into modern and postmodern surveillance and social control that were taken up, altered, and combined in mapping some of the ways contemporary sexual control works. At this stage, the paper details aspects of a qualitative research project that utilized Deleuze–Guattarian assemblage analysis to explore the treatment of sexuality within a particular community-based service for adults with intellectual disabilities. It explains how assemblage analysis was used to analyze sexual stories told by staff and service users. Finally, the paper offers a selection of narrative vignettes told by staff and service users as case studies that help explicate, in greater detail, both the operation of and resistance to surveillance and control.

Deinstitutionalization and shifting discourses around sexuality

Over the course of the 20th century, the material environments that Irish people with intellectual disabilities inhabit have changed radically. The Department of Health (DOH, 2012) explain that, up until 1950, the only service option was residential care in large-scale congregated settings. However, in the second half of the 20th century, these institutions began to fragment into smaller-scale community based services, which are now fragmenting further (DOH, 2012; McDonnell, 2007). Today, whilst many Irish adults with intellectual disabilities attend congregated day-services, they also live, work, and socialize in mainstream community locations. Alongside these processes of de-institutionalization, the 20th century also saw significant changes in discourses around intellectual disability and sexuality. Here, however, I wish to propose that what occurred was not an end to discursive fears regarding sexuality, but rather a series of shifts in the nature of these fears.

Discourses around reproduction

The sexuality of people with intellectual disabilities has often troubled Western societies. Over time we witness an oscillation between discourses that construct this population as sexual innocents in need of protection from society and, paradoxically, as hypersexual predators that society needs protection from (Desjardins, 2012; McCarthy, 1999; Parmeneter, 2001). The belief that people with disabilities posed a sexual threat was particularly strong during the early 20th century when eugenic scientists argued that rapid reproduction amongst ‘the unfit’ posed a grave threat to the future of humanity. The eugenics movement aimed to reduce the number of people with intellectual disabilities by preventing them from reproducing (Hollomotz, 2011; McDonnell, 2007; Trent, 1995). While institutionalization and sterilization became the preferred eugenic approach in many Western nations, the Catholic Church’s opposition to birth control meant that institutionalization and segregation according to sex became the preferred strategy in certain Irish contexts (McDonnell, 2007).

After the atrocities of Nazi Germany, reference to eugenics became taboo and preventing reproduction can no longer be an explicit aim for contemporary disability services. However, the existent Irish research suggests many parents of adults with disabilities and staff members in services continue to oppose the idea of adults with disabilities becoming parents (Cuskelly and Bride, 2004; Drummond, 2006). Overall, Begley et al.'s (2009: 117) literature review of Irish and international studies suggests that: 'the research that exists in this area documents widespread negative attitudes towards the idea of women with intellectual disabilities becoming pregnant and taking on the role of parent'. The Irish public appears to hold similar views (see McConkey and Leavey, 2013). Indeed, the National Disability Authority's (NDA, 2011: 52) latest survey of public attitudes suggests that only a minority (37%) of Irish people agree that adults with intellectual disabilities should have children if they wish.

Similarly, in the realm of empirical social science research – while degeneracy theory is discredited and explicit discussions about whether marginalized groups should be allowed to reproduce are taboo – in recent decades a body of research has emerged that links reproduction amongst intellectually disabled people with threats to the welfare of their children (Begley et al., 2009). The perceived threats include neglect (Crain and Millor, 1978; Katz, 1992), abuse (Helfer and Kempe, 1974; Schilling et al., 1982), and malnutrition (McConnell and Llewellyn, 2000). Thus, arguably – in terms of attitudes as well as in terms of empirical social science research – the demise of the eugenics movement brought about a shift in, rather than an end to, fears concerning reproduction. In short, dominant discourses used to construct reproduction as a threat to society's gene pool. Dominant discourses now construct reproduction as a threat to children. It is not my intention to argue that contemporary discursive fears are/are not justified or to take a binary position on whether adults with intellectual disabilities should/should not have children. I simply contend that Irish society's problematization of reproduction has mutated rather than abated.

Discourses of morality and vulnerability

Disability service provision in the Republic of Ireland can be baffling to the outsider. The Catholic Church came to dominate service provisions in the late 19th century and today, whilst they receive state funding, many continue to hold an explicitly Catholic ethos (McDonnell, 2007; Power, 2009). Catholic teaching on sexuality, of course, forbids premarital sex, homosexuality and contraception, which, in turn, can affect policy and attitudes in services (Drummond, 2006). Now there is little doubt that this Catholic influence has waned considerably over recent decades due to multiple factors, including the publication of a series of reports detailing extremely widespread historical practices of sexual abuse within Irish institutions (see Brennan, 2008; Pilgrim, 2012). However, with the decline in influence of the clergy, lay professionals (social workers etc.) have become increasingly important agents in policing sexuality. With this transition we witness the

growth of a new, secular discourse of vulnerability and abuse. This discourse abandons differentiating between moral/immoral sexual behaviours and begins to differentiate between appropriate/inappropriate behaviours. The new discourse constructs disabled adults as inherently vulnerable to abuse (for a critique see Hollomotz, 2011). It is again linked to the emergence of a body of international empirical research which details high rates of sexual abuse of, and amongst, adults with intellectual disabilities (for example, Brown et al., 1995a, 1995b; Brown and Turk, 1992; Sobsey, 1994; Valenti-Heim and Schwartz, 1995; Young et al., 1997).

The discourse of abuse and vulnerability also manifests itself in Irish legislation and policy documents. Although legislative change is forthcoming, at present, Irish law effectively criminalizes consensual sexual intercourse with a 'mentally impaired' person and, arguably, between 'mentally impaired' people (Law Reform Commission, 2013). Additionally, Ireland has not ratified the United Nation's (2006) *Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities*. Moreover, the Irish public's support for equal sexual rights for adults with intellectual disabilities remains marginal at 51% (NDA, 2011: 10). While Ireland has not introduced sexual rights, national policies do require services to provide ongoing training in the prevention, detection, and reporting of abuse (Health Information and Quality Authority, 2009, 2013). Thus, within services, staff and service users are trained to watch each other and report any suspicions of 'inappropriate' behaviour. Irish academics have suggested that an emphasis on preventing abuse, coupled with a comparative silence on sexual rights and pleasure, can come to characterize service provision within individual services (Kelly et al., 2009; McConkey and Ryan, 2001). Meanwhile, self-advocates with intellectual disabilities have drawn attention to rules that have been introduced in many Irish services forbidding all on-site physical affection (hugging, hand-holding, and so on) (Connect People Network, 2013).

In short, and again, recent decades have arguably seen a shift in, rather than an end to, fears around intellectual disability and sexuality. Dominant discourses used to prohibit sex with, or between, people with intellectual disabilities because it was inherently immoral. Dominant discourses now prohibit sex with, or between, these people because it is inherently abusive. My argument is not that measures to protect adults with disabilities are/are not necessary. Rather, my contention is simply that, like the religious discourse which preceded it, the discourse of vulnerability and abuse encompasses practices that can profoundly affect the sexual lives of adults with intellectual disabilities, often in thoroughly unintended ways. Furthermore, for adults who wish to lead a sexual life, the new discourse does not bring sexual opportunities after a period of religious oppression, but rather a new set of problems and barriers.

Theories regarding social control

Before detailing a qualitative study of a contemporary service, I wish to outline some theoretical insights into modern and postmodern social control that were taken up, altered, and combined during the analytic process.

Foucault on disciplinary societies

Foucault (1977) explores how, in the disciplinary societies of early modernity, humans were trained, domesticated, and rendered docile within a series of enclosed institutional settings (e.g. prisons, schools, asylums). During this period, he suggests, *surveillance* and *normalization* became important mechanisms of social control. To demonstrate how surveillance works, Foucault offers the example of the panopticon, a 19th-century prison design that featured a circular building of cells and a central watchtower. Every inmate in this prison knew that, at any time, there was a possibility they were being watched by the prison authorities. Thus, 'unsure when authority might in fact be watching, the prisoner would strive always to conform his behaviour to its presumed desires' (Boyle, 1998: 186).

Foucault maintains that similar practices of institutional surveillance spread throughout modern institutions: pupils were subjected to hierarchical surveillance by teachers in schools; workers by managers in factories, and so on. Institutional surveillance was often facilitated by open-plan institutional architecture, which allowed those in authority to watch their underlings. The era was also characterized by an explosion of record keeping, and individualized case files enabled institutional 'experts' to design personalized disciplinary interventions to reform problematic bodies.

The emergence of disciplinary institutions was inextricably linked to the rise of the human sciences (psychology and so on), which discursively constituted new and devalued subjects (e.g. 'the homosexual' or 'the moron'). In addition to constituting subjects, these sciences served to establish statistical norms regarding a range of human traits and to divide the human species into 'normal' and 'abnormal' populations (e.g. intellectually 'normal' and 'abnormal' human beings). Whilst presented as objective facts, statistical norms often became moral norms, fuelling social processes of normalization that served to eliminate human diversity (Crossley, 2006). For example, in the United States, widespread IQ testing was accompanied by attempts to control those identified as intellectually 'abnormal' through institutionalization and/or sterilization (Goddard, 1913; Trent, 1995). Processes of normalization do not, however, simply involve 'normal' populations attempting to reform, control, or eliminate 'abnormal' populations. Often 'abnormal' human beings, who accept their pathology, will come to desire normality and endeavour to normalize themselves. For example, until relatively recently, some 'homosexuals' elected to undergo mainstream scientific treatments designed to normalize their desires (see Bancroft, 2009).

O'Byrne and Holmes (2009: 59) suggest that, cumulatively, the processes of disciplinary societies served to create self-policing subjects and 'to ensure that everyone had adequately learned to maintain his/her behaviour appropriately'. However, Foucault's (1978, 1988) later work explores how subjects retain a capacity to resist power. Moreover, subjects can exercise agency through *practices of the self*, which involve choosing and moving between the available subject positions

and associated practices of one's time and place (e.g. a person with an intellectual disability might choose to become a 'Special Olympian' or a 'self-advocate').

Developing Foucauldian insights, queer theorists such as Warner (1999) have explored how we are all involved in policing a whole range of socially constructed sexual norms (e.g. monogamous/promiscuous; in private/in public; same generational sex/intergenerational sex). In short, subjects whose behaviour falls on the devalued side of a normal/abnormal binary are socially punished (i.e. we ridicule, reject, or imprison them). Meanwhile, the 'abnormal' subject may experience unpleasant embodied affects such as 'shame'. This ensures that subjects will often act to police their own behaviour in line with hegemonic norms but may also question, resist, and subvert injurious norms (Butler, 1990, 1993). More recently, within disability studies, cripqueer theorists have developed these insights further and initiated a project of uncovering, and sometimes contesting, the sexual, embodied, and cognitive norms that limit and constrain disabled people.¹

Deleuze on societies of control

Deleuze (1992) broadly agrees with Foucault's portrait of early modern societies but suggests that, during the 20th century, disciplinary societies began to mutate into *societies of control*. The advent of societies of control is characterized by 'a generalized crisis within all environments of enclosure' (Deleuze, 1992: 3–4). He notes that the enclosed total institutions of modern disciplinary societies have all begun to close, fragmenting into smaller-scale open institutions and community care. In contemporary control societies, bodies are not confined to a single institutional space. Rather, a body passes between, and is a subject of, a range of open institutions (e.g. the family home, the workplace, and the university). Social control works in different ways in these conditions. For a start, digital technologies allow flows of surveillance data to pass between multiple institutions. Digital technologies also allow bodies to be monitored at a distance (e.g. through internet surveillance) and to be granted or denied access to information or physical spaces (e.g. through pin numbers or swipe cards). Social control, Deleuze warns, isn't necessarily better or worse in the present, but it is different.

Research details

I worked in disability services for seven years and often provided counselling for adults who were having 'issues' around sexuality. Over time I came to see that for these adults, and for many reasons, finding love or leading a sexual life was often an extremely difficult thing to do. I became interested in the treatment of these adults' sexuality in the present. In this paper, I focus on a particular intellectual disability service called Rathbeg Services (a pseudonym) that encompasses a series of day centres distributed across the suburbs of a city and some smaller towns. Rathbeg Services was one of the services I worked in and was familiar with.

My primary method of data collection was in-depth narrative interviews with a strategic sample of five service providers and four male service users.² The service providers sample included three frontline service providers, a clinical professional, and a service manager. Meanwhile, the service user sample encompassed men who attended a variety of day centres. The sample sought to include what Mason (2002: 124) calls a relevant range of perspectives, whilst not claiming to be directly representative or to be generalizable (i.e. findings are only tentative and suggestive).

The in-depth narrative interview schedule followed Johnson's (2002) guidelines for in-depth interviews, whilst borrowing strategies from Holloway and Jefferson (2000) for eliciting narrative data. Participants were invited to tell stories about the treatment of sexuality (broadly defined) within the service. This process led to the collection of a huge number of stories, told from a variety of perspectives, which were thoroughly anonymized. Stories told by participants were then sorted into themes including 'stories about sexual surveillance and control', the subject of this paper. The theme of sexual surveillance and control was treated, and analyzed as an *assemblage*, which became known as The Rathbeg sexual surveillance assemblage, using a creative and experimental version of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) assemblage analysis.

Assemblage analysis

A Deleuze–Guattarian assemblage is a heterogeneous mixture of components, both material and discursive, that work together to produce a social phenomenon (in this case, sexual surveillance and control). The aim of assemblage analysis is to explore how the phenomenon works.³ The assemblage analyst assumes that multiple orders of existence, often treated as separate by researchers (e.g. the technological, the biological, the discursive, and so on), could potentially be working together to produce the phenomenon. Moreover, the assemblage analyst assumes that the relationship between these orders of existence is not vertical and hierarchical (i.e. biology does not determine discourse or vice versa) but rather horizontal (i.e. biology and discourse are intricately entangled and mutually affecting). As such, the assemblage analyst is committed to mapping how the complex, multidirectional, or *rhizomatic*, interaction of multiple orders of existence produces the phenomenon in question.

Assemblage analysis is a thoroughly post-positivist methodology. The researcher starts with and seeks to map an actual and concrete social problem. This said, it is fully acknowledged that the researcher will necessarily become entangled in, and inevitably affect, the assemblage they map (Coleman and Ringrose, 2013). Moreover, the significance of these entanglements is explored in analysis rather than downplayed (see Youdell, 2011). In this case, my methodology (assemblage analysis), the subject positions I occupied (e.g. 'male', 'staff member', 'disability rights activist', 'researcher', and so on), the embodied affects I experienced (e.g. 'empathy' and 'anger'), and the theoretical concepts I took up

(i.e. ideas from Foucault and Deleuze) all affected, but did not unilaterally determine, the map I produced. This map aims to allow us think differently about a social problem, to consider it from new perspectives, to notice new things about it. However, the map is necessarily partial, perspectival, incomplete, and open-ended. There will always be more perspectives to be considered (e.g. parents), alternative conceptual frameworks that could have been utilized, and so on. No matter how detailed our maps, there is, as Deleuze often reminds us, always more (see May, 2005).

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) encourage us to use assemblage analysis in creative and experimental ways. However, they do provide some suggestions for mapping an assemblage's components, considering its flows, and exploring how it is maintained and changes over time. These suggestions were drawn upon in a three-step analysis of the narratives told by staff and service users.

Mapping components

Because assemblages are made up of, and involve complex interactions between, both material entities and discursive statements, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest we can think about, and map, their components along a *material/discursive continuum*. Identifying the heterogeneous components of the Rathbeg sexual surveillance assemblage involved reading all stories relating to surveillance and control whilst continually asking: *How are material and/or discursive forces affecting this story?* To explain by example, this narrative, told by a staff member about a female service user who is 'caught' kissing in a mainstream gym, is affected by material technologies (e.g. CCTV) as well as staff, parental, and public attitudes:

Katie: And her mother is so overprotective of her, which is difficult, because she wants to have a sexual relationship. Apparently herself and Sally Dean (*another female service user*) have been snogging the heads off each other in the hot tub in the gym.

Interviewer: Oh, ok.

Katie: And were found on CCTV camera, and the mothers were informed.

Interviewer: Wait... It was found on CCTV camera, in where?

Katie: Spin Fitness Gym. The receptionist saw them and she told the mothers. And then both of them ended up then with no TVs and no phones and all this kind of thing. But when she tells me she has feelings for Sally Dean, I'm trying to get across to her that *it's ok*.

Overall, sexual narratives were found to be affected by a range of material forces including:

- The architectural spaces they occur within (e.g. the layout of day centres)
- A plethora of information technologies (e.g. CCTV, the internet).
- Visceral affects experienced by biological bodies (e.g. 'shame', 'fear', or 'protective instincts').

Meanwhile, sexual narratives were also found to be affected by heterogeneous discursive forces such as:

- Service rules (e.g. regulations that prohibit physical contact such as hugging and hand-holding on site; instructions given to frontline staff to avoid discussing sexuality with service users and to refer all issues on to clinical professionals; and policies on reporting and investigating all suspicions of ‘inappropriate’ behaviour).
- Managerial discourses that divide all bodies into a hierarchy of institutional subject positions (e.g. director, managers, frontline staff, service users) and make everybody responsible for watching underlings and, simultaneously, watched by, and answerable to, their superiors.
- Psychiatric discourses that divide all human bodies into a hierarchy of intellectual types (‘normal’, ‘mild’, ‘moderate’, ‘severe’ and ‘profound’) and moral discourses that, in turn, problematize sexual relations between these types.
- Staff and parental attitudes regarding sexuality (staff members tend to construct themselves as liberal and parents as comparatively conservative).
- Public attitudes (members of the public are often described as hostile to the conflation of disability and sexuality).
- National policies and legislation around intellectual disability and sexuality.

Mapping flows

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) also propose mapping how any assemblage encompasses, and acts upon, flows of substances belonging to various orders of existence (e.g. chemical flows, semiotic flows, digital flows and so on). In the case of the Rathbeg sexual surveillance assemblage, I was interested in using stories to map flows of sexual surveillance data (visual, oral, and digital) pertaining to service users and staff. This involved reading all stories whilst asking: *Where has this narrator got their information from?* To explain by example, in this vignette about a service user called Tommy, the staff member Katie appears to have received flows of surveillance data from the service users’ family home, a colleague, and neighbourhood gossip:

Katie: The sister ((*Tommy’s sister*)) came up to his house one day and went in to clean his bedroom.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Katie: And underneath the bed, there was about 40 bras (*giggles*).

Interviewer: Ah okay: he has a bra collection.

Katie: And they couldn’t figure out where he got them. They thought he might have robbed them off clothes lines. . . . And lots of them were pre-teen bras. It was like: ‘Eeww: that’s a bit worrying as well’. And then Helen (*Katie’s colleague*) . . . You know the way she’s from around the neighbourhood? She said like loads of the girls in the

neighbourhood, they'd go: 'Oh there's Tommy'. And in the summer time, when everyone would be sunbathing, they say he goes out on his bike, kind of pervin' on the girls, you know?

Overall, this process suggested that sexual surveillance data is collected in, and flows within, the disability service in a multiplicity of ways:

- Staff watch and follow potentially sexually service users within (and around) the service.
- Staff engage in eavesdropping.
- Staff and service users trade sexual gossip regarding peers and colleagues.
- Service users report sexual incidents involving themselves or peers to staff.
- Individualized service user case files detailing problematic sexual behaviour are kept by, and read by, staff.
- Suspicions regarding 'inappropriate' behaviour are voiced by service users and/or staff, investigations follow, and the subjects of these investigations become the subject of widespread gossip and speculation, regardless of guilt.
- Digital surveillance data is collected by the company's internet surveillance software.

Assemblages are not closed systems or seamless totalities (DeLanda, 2006). The stories also suggested that the Rathbeg sexual surveillance assemblage makes regular connections with, and trades data with, other surveillance assemblages. This allows flows of sexual data to pass in and out of the service in a variety of ways:

- Data is traded with service users' families, the police, and service users' employers.
- Scandalized members of the public regularly report sightings of intimacy in the community.
- Service users are captured kissing on CCTV in mainstream locations.
- Service users' voices are recognized on confessional radio phone-shows and their profiles are spotted on mainstream dating sites.

It is these flows of data in and out of the service that enable the service to learn of, and intervene in, service users' sexual lives outside of service hours and within the mainstream community.

It is important to acknowledge that, as a staff member, I was involved in many of the practices I am mapping. Moreover, as a researcher, I am not detached from, but an active component in, this surveillant system. This paper, if anything, opens up new and transnational flows of sexual surveillance data. It allows stories concerning the (anything but) private lives of Irish adults with intellectual disabilities to reach an academic audience that includes you, the reader. It is also important to add that every story collected during this project was passed along a complex chain of human narrators (e.g. staff members, service users, and researcher) and

non-human narrators (e.g. CCTV, Dictaphone, and word processor). All of these narrators (including myself) are unreliable: they affect the data they receive and pass on, transmitting certain details and omitting others. Stories that flow from unreliable narrator to unreliable narrator ceaselessly morph and mutate. In short, the relationship between the narratives presented in this paper and actual events remains unavoidably problematic.

Reterritorializing/deterritorializing sexuality

In order to think about processes of change and continuity within an assemblage, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) offer a *reterritorialization/deterritorialization* continuum. Reterritorialization refers to the ways continuity, boundaries, and sameness are maintained within the assemblage. Meanwhile, deterritorialization refers to the ways change occurs, boundaries are subverted, and difference is allowed to flourish. In this section, I will present a selection of narratives that allow us to explore how sexuality is reterritorialized (i.e. how reproduction and sexuality are regulated) and deterritorialized (i.e. how regulation is resisted, norms are subverted, and new sexual possibilities emerge). It is important to forewarn readers that, while Deleuze and Guattari (1987) are interested in deterritorialization and the proliferation of difference, reterritorialization isn't necessarily all bad and deterritorialization all good. In this case, in exploring how sexual norms are maintained and subverted, I am not arguing that that all norms should or could be discarded. With this noted, I will proceed to offer a relevant range of stories about reterritorializing sexuality.

William: A story about being watched

William tells me about his attempts to have a relationship with a woman in his training centre. Problems begin to arise for the couple when staff members decide the relationship is illegitimate because they believe William to be 'more advanced' than his girlfriend:

William: I'm more advanced. They said the girl I was with wasn't advanced enough. ...

I went out with a girl in the day centre.

Interviewer: Yeah?

William: And they weren't very happy.

Interviewer: Right.

William's initial reaction to what he deems 'interference' is resistance. He refuses to accept staff members' construction of his relationship as exploitative and correctly points to the fact that his centre purports to be for adults with a particular 'level' of disability:

William: But it's like: 'Why am I here? If I'm more advanced? You know? Should I be in some other place?'

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

William: So I didn't listen to them.

Interviewer: Right.

Thus William exercises discursive agency and resists subjectification as an exploiter. However, he then goes on to describe how ubiquitous surveillance inside his training centre made a physical relationship a practical impossibility:

William: But the problem was I was scared to do anything with them looking over my shoulder all the time.

Later he explains that staff surveillance was not confined to his training centre, and when the couple tried to pursue their intimate relationship *outside* the training centre (in this case at a nearby bus stop) staff members continued to intervene:

William: I was meeting her ((*Irish slang for kissing*)) at the bus stop. And they watched. They said: 'Don't do that. Don't do this'. They were watching me *like a hawk* ((*stressing words*)) in Rathbeg.

Interviewer: Okay.

William: And I felt like I was being watched all the time.

Interviewer: Yeah?

William: And every time I tried to make it physical, they went: 'NO!'

Interviewer: Yep, yeah.

William: And I was like: 'Oh I can't deal with this anymore'. So I, like, ended it with her.

William is clear that this was not something he wanted to do but rather something he felt compelled to do:

Interviewer: So did you end up breaking it off with Sarah [or did...]

William: [Oh. I had to.]

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

William: Hard thing really, 'cause I liked her.

William's account reminds us that it is difficult to decide if a story is about power *or* resistance. In many cases these stories are about both. It is clear that William continues to resist staff members' construction of his relationship:

William: Like there is 'not able people' but the people I was with *were able*.

Interviewer: Um hum. They were able to make their own decisions about whether they wanted to go out?

William: Yeah.

Moreover, William expresses no desire to reform himself as a subject and gives no indication that he experienced shame. Nonetheless, this is also a story about

reterritorializing sexuality because surveillance ultimately makes an intimate relationship a practical impossibility for the couple.

Bernie: A story about watching

William's phenomenological account of hawk-eyed staff members ceaselessly watching him may well reflect actual practices in the service. In another day-service, the staff member Bernie tells a story about a man who found himself in a similar predicament to William. This story helps elucidate some of the reasons staff might watch and follow service users. In short, Bernie describes a heterosexual relationship which occurred in her day centre. The couple had a series of covert sexual encounters 'on site' before staff learned of the affair. Bernie expresses somewhat ambivalent views concerning the relationship, suggesting at one point:

Bernie: In my opinion they were two consenting adults. They knew what they were doing. They had kind of a nod to say: 'Well here, let's go.'

However, Bernie is also answerable to the woman's family, who do not share her relatively permissive construction:

Bernie: They seen it as the male service user taking total advantage of their child.

After much discussion, the staff members in Bernie's centre eventually settle upon, or at least decide to act upon, a similar construction to the woman's family, judging the male's behaviour to be exploitative, possibly criminal:

Bernie: You had the whole thing of: 'Well, was it statutory rape, was it not? 'You know?

Interviewer: Um hum.

Bernie: They're two consenting adults *chronologically*, but the fact that he was mild and she was moderate? Was she really a consenting adult in her own right? So there was an awful lot of toing and froing and an awful lot of investigation and everything. So, as a result the male service user, obviously, was transferred to a different day service.

Thus, ultimately, the relationship is judged to be illegitimate, by reference to parental attitudes as well as legal and psychiatric discourses, and the couple are physically separated. However, totally separating the pair proves difficult due to social events when service users from multiple day centres congregate and socialize. At these events, and in accordance with the wishes of the woman's family, Bernie must prevent the couple from covertly re-uniting. In describing her actions, Bernie articulates just how intense staff surveillance can be:

Bernie: When we'd have the Christmas Party – where every service user would be together – we would be... We'd have to assure the family that I would be solely responsible for their family member.

Interviewer: Oh okay.

Bernie: That family member would have to sit beside me; that family member would have to go to the bar with me; that family member would have to be accompanied to the toilet [by me].

Interviewer: [By me], okay.

In Bernie's account of the woman's behaviour at the party we find some indication that, while the relationship has been discursively constructed as illegitimate, and has been terminated by practices of segregation and surveillance, the woman's desire for her former partner has not been extinguished, and her body remains resistant rather than docile:

Bernie: And, in fairness, I mean, there were occasions ((*at the Christmas party*)) she would deviate towards him ((*her former partner*)).

Interviewer: Yeah.

Bernie: And I was running after her saying: 'No! You need to go that way' ((*Pointing away from the woman's former lover*)).

Interviewer: Yeah.

As Bernie culminates her story with some empathetic speculation as to what the woman she watched and followed that night felt, we catch, perhaps, a final glimpse of the ambivalence of a subject who – working within an extremely difficult system – knows there are no easy answers:

Bernie: You could see where she probably felt: 'Well hold on a minute. He's after being taken away from me.'

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Bernie: 'Those feeling I was getting with him. I'm not getting now.' You know? So...

Interviewer: Yeah. I suppose [it's...]

Bernie: [It's very complex.]

Interviewer: It's *their* relationship as they see it [and...]

Bernie: [Yes], very, very complex.

Grace's story: 'Scarlet'

Frontline staff members have no permission to provide sexual supports and to do so can be very dangerous. A story told by Grace, for example, demonstrates how staff members that attempt to facilitate rather than suppress the sexuality of service users can find themselves becoming the object of sexual surveillance and the embo-diers of shameful affects. In brief, Grace describes working with a female service user called Kathleen. During a private conversation, Kathleen discloses that she and her partner experimented with anal sex and, whilst she enjoyed aspects of this, she experienced considerable physical pain:

Grace: ((*Serious tone*)) Basically she was explaining that it was really, really sore. There was a little bit of blood there. But that she did like it and would like to try to do this again.

Interviewer: Right. (...)

Grace: I was like: 'Was it dry? Was it terrible? Was it whatever?' (((*Laughs nervously*)))

Interviewer: (((*Laughs nervously*))).

Grace: And she was like: 'No, no, no, no, it was very dry'. And I was like: 'Well maybe you should use some lubrication?'

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Grace: And she had never even heard of this before.

Grace knows that Kathleen, who has literacy issues, needs help to find the right product. So she does some internet research and finds a picture of the correct lubricant to show Kathleen:

Grace: So Kathleen went off anyway and she bought the lube, lubrication and she was like ((*in an excited high pitch voice*)): 'Jesus! That was much better!' ((*Laughing*)) (...) ((*Ceases laughing and reverts to a serious tone*)) Anyway, Monday, the phone call comes through to my manager. And my manager calls me into the office and is like: 'I have to talk to you about something embarrassing and I don't really know how to bring this up.'

Interviewer: ((*Laughs*))

Grace: And is like: 'HR just rang me there. They were after doing some kind of a check on the computers at the weekend and something came up on yours.'

And so Grace, who has become the object of a form of surveillance characteristic of control societies, must explain why she was googling Durex lubricant and visiting internet sex sites while at work. This, to borrow her phrase, leaves her 'scarlet'. 'Scarlet', of course, is both an Irish colloquialism for embarrassment and a description of an embodied affect, the blush: an involuntary rush of hot blood to the capillaries of the cheeks, staining the pallid Irish complexion. Grace's blush reminds us that resistance to sexual power can, and does, have embodied and affective as well as discursive consequences. Moreover, this and many other stories told about staff members and service users experiencing embarrassment and shame under surveillance suggests that embodied affect can serve a reterritorializing role and encourage conservative sexual behaviour.

Grace: A story about entrapment

At this stage I wish to explore how sexual surveillance and control works in the mainstream community. I will begin with another story told by Grace about a male service user named Colin who has a history of problematic sexual behaviour. Staff suspect Colin is initiating 'inappropriate' conversations with women on public buses (they receive a phone call and surveillance data from the bus depot).

Armed with this intelligence, staff set about entrapping Colin. In short, they instruct a very 'attractive' female staff member, who Colin did not know and would not recognize, to follow him after he left his day service, to sit near him on the bus, and to report back:

Grace: Yeah, they put a plant on the bus. (...) He fell hook, line, and sinker for it ((*Irish colloquialism for 'taking the bait'*)). Absolutely fell hook, line and sinker. Actually, she was a stunner come to think of it. (...) I'm surprised they didn't put her in a mini and a pair of high heels. Anyways ...

Interviewer: ((*Slight laugh*))

Grace: She was basically told to go on Colin's bus route and see would he, you know, come in beside her and start talking? And, yeah, in he goes and says: 'Do you go out at the weekend?' Like, the conversation started off very innocent: 'How are ya?'; 'Where do ya live?' and blah, blah, blah. 'Do you go out at the weekend?' And she was like: 'Emm', trying to give him an answer like anyone else in the community would. And she's like: 'Yeah, I go to nightclubs' or something like that. Colin started then saying: 'What would you wear?' And she's like: 'Oh, I'd just wear a dress and a pair of heels'. And he's just kinda like: 'Would the dress be short?'

When the 'attractive' female staff member reports back to the day centre, a bespoke disciplinary intervention is planned. Colin's father and a local police officer are contacted and asked to attend a meeting in the day centre. At this meeting the police, the service, and the man's family form a temporary coalition and explain to Colin, in great detail, the potentially disastrous consequences of continuing to behave 'inappropriately' in the community. In short, they attempt to scare Colin into reforming his character in line with the sexual norms of his community. In this, like many other narratives, surveillance proves to be a self-sustaining and self-perpetrating practice and the data gathered by staff about Colin, in turn, justifies more intense surveillance. Grace goes on to describe how an individualized and intense surveillance procedure was agreed on, and adopted by, staff members around watching Colin.

Bernie: A story about nudity

In another day centre, Bernie tells a story about a middle-aged man named Robert who lives on his own in a rural area and begins leaving his house in the middle of the night for walks, completely naked:

Bernie: He lives at home independently with some support from family.

Interviewer: So he lives in his own house?

Bernie: He lives in his own house, out in the sticks ((*slang for countryside*)).

Interviewer: Gee, okay.

Bernie: So he's walking up the road ... And they're lanes, I mean, you wouldn't call them roads.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Bernie: And he was picked up one night, lucky enough it was by the Gardai ((*Irish police*)): starkers ((*means stark naked*)). And they brought him back to the family home.

Robert's disability means he escapes possible entanglement in a web of sovereign power (police custody, courts of justice, and so on) and instead his unruly body is passed over to the disability service to be rendered docile through the soft power of disciplinary training. And so the professionals of the disability service begin to work discreetly in order to normalize Robert's behaviour, despite the fact that this 'abnormal' behaviour is occurring in, and around, his private home:

Bernie: So an awful lot of work had to be done around that with him and that was a challenge.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Bernie: Because he lives at home, independently.

The intervention involves professionals visiting Robert's home and sticking an accessibly designed poster on the inside of his front door featuring a naked man with an X through it. The poster reminds Robert of the binaries of sexual power, encourages him to reform his behaviour in line with hegemonic norms of his community, and reminds him to cease leaving his home while naked:

Bernie: Now we are very lucky, in that those, those kind of things have ceased.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Bernie: It took a lot of visuals on his front door. So if he even thought about going out he saw 'X' and ((*a picture of*)) a naked man.

Interviewer: ((*Chuckles*))

Bernie: Then once he approached the door he'd know: 'No. I can't do that'. And he'd revert back.

Interviewer: And did, did it work?

Bernie: And it worked. Emm, I mean it worked ((*slight laugh*)) very well actually!

So, in this story, 'appropriate' and 'normal' sexuality is re-established in the community through a flow of sexual surveillance data between the police and the disability service, leading to a discrete, bespoke and effective disciplinary intervention within the binary transgressor's home.

Cillian's story: The best class ever

For that minority within a minority of service users who live independently and are in heterosexual relationships, sexual surveillance also reaches into the bedroom, striving to prevent reproduction. Parenting classes provide one example of how the service subtly attempts to prevent reproduction. These classes are targeted at service users that staff members suspect might desire children. As part of the course,

service users are asked to care for an electronic doll over a weekend. These dolls, initially developed to discourage teenagers from reproducing, are programmed to cry sporadically and frequently night and day, to electronically record parental response times, and to ensure a very challenging weekend. Here Cillian describes the experience:

Cillian: We did the baby class.

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Cillian: I actually enjoyed it but Jean ((*Cillian's partner*)) hated it.

Interviewer: And what did you do in the class?

Cillian: We took the baby home ((*electronic doll*)) for a weekend.

Interviewer: Okay

Cillian: And they ((*the organizers of the class*)) had the baby on at night. Like when you go asleep the baby will scream and cry. And Jean was like: 'Look after that baby.' And I'd look after it and then it'd go off again and then it'd go off again. And that's what happens when you have a baby. If you had a remote control baby that you can knock off in life it'd be brilliant: but you can't. (...) But I thought that ((*class*)) was good. It was one of the good stuff that Rathbeg did. (...) Because it gets you thinking about it. (...) It'd be frustrating and very stressful.

So, far from objecting to this professional intervention into his family life, Cillian actually found the parenting course to be extremely useful:

Cillian: At least you know what's going to go on if it does happen. So I thought it was one of the bestest courses that they ((*Rathbeg Services*)) did.

As someone familiar with the history of eugenics, I remember wondering at this point if Cillian realized that *only* adults with intellectual disabilities were asked to care for crying dolls. With this in mind, I share these thoughts with Cillian:

Interviewer: 'Cause I was wondering, if you think is it fair? Because, you know, other people aren't made to take home screaming babies.

Cillian: Well Juliette and Vincent and Kelly did it too ((*other service users who were asked to take the class*))

A particular mode of thinking – viewing the present through a historical lens – means I read parenting classes as a subtle strategy for preventing reproduction (albeit a very understandable one in current social and economic conditions).⁴ For Cillian, however, a different pattern of thinking – comparing himself to peers – leads him to understand the classes as perfectly normal. Moreover, the class does contribute to dissuading Cillian from starting a family:

Interviewer: And do you have plans to have kids?

Cillian: No. Not at this present moment.

Deterritorializing sexuality

I now wish to turn my attention to some stories that demonstrate how sexuality is simultaneously deterritorialized within the assemblage by presenting a relevant range of stories told by staff and service users.

Jenny's story: Turning a blind eye

All staff members were professionally responsible for regulating the sexuality of service users but most expressed considerable unease about this aspect of their job. Many stories collected suggest that a common strategy of resistance amongst these ambivalent agents of control is to turn a blind eye to displays of physical affection, thus thwarting flows of sexual surveillance data. Jenny, for example, told me that when she and another 'lenient' staff member called Mark brought service users on community outings they chose not to correct couples for holding hands and showing physical affection:

Jenny: Like I would be more lenient than other staff would be. I do not have a problem (...) with two service users who are boyfriend and girlfriend holding hands walking to the bus stop. I have no problem with that. If they give each other a kiss on the ... Like, I don't mean have a wear at the bus stop (*slang for French kissing, shortened version of 'wearing the face off each other'*)).

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jenny: Like if they want to have. ... If they want to sit beside each other on the bus; if they want to walk around the shopping centre holding hands; and sit down and have their lunch together. I don't have a problem with that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jenny: But other staff do.

In a sexual surveillance assemblage, where containing flows of data is extremely difficult, even gentle acts of resistance by staff, even being slightly more 'lenient' than one's colleagues, carries with it considerable risks. In this case, Jenny explains that the community outings supervised by her and another 'lenient' colleague became increasingly popular with couples looking for an opportunity to escape sexual surveillance. However, as these couples begin refusing to go on community trips with 'less lenient' staff members, the 'lenient' duo begin to fear being exposed and constructed as sexually 'inappropriate' by colleagues who uphold the rules:

Jenny: But, you know, they (*service users*) all start dropping like flies (*from community trips with strict staff members*) saying: 'We only want to go out with Jenny and Mark. We only want to go out with Jenny and Mark.'

Interviewer: (*Chuckles*) Yeah.

Jenny: And then me and Mark are worried, saying: 'Oh God, if our manager asks them why: 'Oh 'cause they let me snog me boyfriend.' You know?

Jenny's story reminds us again of the risks of resistance but also that staff will, at times, take these risks, creating blind spots, albeit temporary, in the panoptical gaze – thus allowing service users rare opportunities to hold hands, or perhaps to kiss, someone they love.

William's and Stephen's stories: The quiet room

Blind spots do not have to be created by staff members. Service users also create these spaces themselves, creatively re-appropriating institutional spaces as sexual spaces. I collected an assortment of stories about illicit encounters in toilets and storerooms. However, one particular space reappears continuously. The Snoezelen© room, also known as the quiet room or relaxation room: a dimly lit space with soft lighting, soft furnishings, and soft music. According to their marketing material, Snoezelen's© (2013) rooms can empower people with disabilities 'to enjoy a range of sensory experiences – either actively or passively – which enhance therapy, learning and relaxation'. However, William and Stephen (his peer and interview supporter) provide a much more succinct guide to how these spaces are used by both staff and service users:

William: The only private space ((*in the training centre*)) is the quiet room.

Stephen: Yeah.

Interviewer: The quiet room? What's the quiet room?

William: The quiet room is where people go to have a break.

Stephen: Yeah, to cool down if they're angry during class.

But the quiet room is not just a space that staff can direct unruly bodies who disrupt classes towards. William alludes to another use:

William: ((*Tone dripping with sexual innuendo*)) Yeah, but I didn't use it to cool down.

Interviewer: ((*Gentle chuckle*)).

The quiet room's soft lighting, furnishings, and music make it a perfect 'make out space', and William is not alone in recognizing this. Staff members also shared a multiplicity of stories about service users, in a variety of day centres, making subversive use of this architectural space.

Grace's story: Is that sexuality?

Within queer theory, anomalous sexual performances are understood to have the potential to subvert and expand our normative understandings of sexuality (Butler, 1990, 1993). At the beginning of her interview, Grace defines 'sexuality' in a normative fashion as referring to essentialist orientations (heterosexual, homosexual) and intimate interpersonal relationships. Later, however, as she begins to tell stories about what sexuality means for the men she works with, her definition

begins to expand. Here, for example, she tells a story about Ronan, a service user whose family would like him to have a girlfriend but who expresses no interest in this. However, while Ronan has no interest in relationships, staff in his day-centre soon find out, through internet surveillance, that he does enjoy videos of corpulent posteriors crushing items of food:

Grace: Well actually what happened, HR ((*laughing*)) rang my manager up. (...) And wanted to know who was on 'www.burgerporn.something'.

Interviewer: ((*Laughing*)).

Grace: ((*Laughing*)) Scarlet! My manager was like: 'What, what, what?' So HR could actually trace which computer it was on.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Grace: And Ronan ((*service user*)) had logged on the computer. So it turned out it was Ronan. Ronan admitted that it was him.

At this stage, Grace phones the young man's parents and tells them of their son's online interests. However, in an interesting twist, the family are unashamed:

Grace: And I had to, obviously, inform his dad. And his dad said 'Oh he's always at that'.

Interviewer: Okay, yeah.

Grace: His dad was fine.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Grace: With him looking up whatever he wants. You know he ... He'd prefer if he was looking up nude women but he's not. He's looking up squishing burgers.

Interviewer: Well that was reasonable of him.

Grace: But that's how. That's how ((*laughs*)) we found out.

Interviewer: And was Ronan embarrassed about the whole thing?

Grace: No.

Like his family, Ronan is happy to talk openly, and without shame, to Grace about desire and pleasure. And for Grace, this experience seems to have expanded her conception of 'sexuality':

Grace: Like, when I spoke to him about that. Like, he said, you know, he gets feelings and stuff like that when he sees this so...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Grace: I mean, like... Is that Ronan's sexuality?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Grace: Like clearly he's getting some kind of a positive gratification out of looking at this on the TV.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Grace: He doesn't want a girlfriend. He'd never talk about having a girlfriend. But he likes looking at this on the TV, okay?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Grace's story is not unique, and alongside stories of disciplining sexuality I found multiple accounts of staff thinking about and coming to accept rather than attempting to normalize queer performativities: from men who are attracted to shoes, to middle-aged couples who have been intimate for decades but have no interest in trying sex, to pan-sexual and poly-amorous young men. Thus, surveillance that serves to normalize sexuality can, it seems, simultaneously and paradoxically serve to expand our normative conceptions of sexuality.

Discussion

This study suggests that, in a country where intellectual disability and sexuality remains legally and socially problematic, and within a community-based service, sexual surveillance and control works through a messy mixture of Foucauldian discipline and Deleuzian control. Within the day-centres, Foucault's (1977) observations concerning disciplinary institutions remain pertinent. Frontline staff members are professionally responsible for watching and following service users and are, in turn, watched by managers, and so on. This means that, even if staff members are very supportive of sexual rights, simply by doing their job they will deny service users private space. However, not all surveillance within the service involves the direct watching of bodies. Many of the stories indicate that internet surveillance has become an important technique for disciplining both service users and staff.

In a historical moment when discourses of abuse and vulnerability dominate service provision, and within a service where everybody is trained to watch everybody else, the fear of being constructed or investigated as sexually 'inappropriate' will encourage extremely cautious behaviour around issues pertaining to sexuality. It is not that people necessarily *are* sexuality conservative; it is that they must be seen to be sexuality conservative. Nonetheless, and despite the considerable risks involved, staff members often demonstrate considerable courage in resisting practices they believe to be unfair. Meanwhile, service users also remain extremely resilient and resistant, finding creative ways to escape sexual control within day-centres. Institutional architecture, for example, doesn't simply facilitate surveillance; service users also creatively re-appropriate architectural spaces (e.g. relaxation rooms) as sexual spaces to escape surveillance. Similarly, information technologies don't just aid surveillance; they also allow for new forms of resistance (e.g. accessing sexual information or online dating sites).

Within the mainstream community, Deleuze's (1992) observations concerning contemporary techniques of control become increasingly pertinent. The temporary connections the disability service makes with, and the data it exchanges with, other institutions and individuals (e.g. family homes, the public bus service, the police,

and scandalized members of the public) means its surveillant reach actually extends far beyond the day-centre walls and into the community where service users live and socialize. This allows the service to intervene in service users' 'private lives' in the mainstream community and outside of service hours through a plethora of subtle techniques. There is little doubt that, if a person transgresses the sexual norms of their community, the label of intellectual disability can help them escape institutions of sovereign power (the police, courts, and so on). At the same time, sovereign power is tempered by specific rules about what constitutes legitimate surveillance, admissible evidence, and so on (see The Irish Council for Civil Liberties, 2010). This is not the case when one is subject to the soft power of the disability service. Here the rules are made up on a thoroughly ad hoc basis. This paper does not seek to unequivocally defend or to unconditionally condemn all sexual surveillance and control. Rather, in adopting an assemblage approach, it has simply sought to map of some of the ways sexual surveillance and control work in the present and, as such, to provide a starting point for thinking about how they could be made to work differently.

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Notes

1. To elaborate, queers and cripqueers tend to question assimilation through normalization and argue that normative conceptions of propriety must expand to encompass sexualities, bodies, and minds that are different: 'A cripqueer stance... refuses corporal conformity and questions the legitimacy of "appropriate", "acceptable" and "normal" sexual behaviour' (Solis, 2006: 250). Moreover, cripqueer theorists sometimes attempt to think affirmatively and productively about the anomalous sexual performativities of people with disabilities (e.g. Goodley and Lawthom, 2011; Shildrick, 2009).
2. Staff members were recruited directly through the service and adults with intellectual disabilities (who attended the service) were recruited through a self-advocacy group. The findings of the project were made accessible to, and discussed with, the self-advocacy group. These discussions contributed to the creation of accessible and inclusive presentations that were delivered in disability service and universities around Ireland.
3. Haggerty and Ericson (2000) develop and use the concept of a surveillant assemblage to consider surveillance in general. Here, I borrow some of their insights to map surveillance within a specific disability service.
4. In current social and economic conditions, staff members may have good reason to believe a particular adult with an intellectual disability might struggle to care for a child. Parents, meanwhile, may have extremely good reason to suspect that they would have to care for their child's child. For a discussion of these issues, as well as an exploration of some subtle strategies utilized to prevent reproduction in Quebec, see Desjardins (2012).

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Michael Feely completed a PhD in Sociology at Queen's University Belfast. His thesis explored how the 'problem' of sexuality was produced within a service for adults with intellectual disabilities. He is now an Assistant Professor of Social Work at Trinity College Dublin with an ongoing interest in critical disability studies. He is also a disability activist and a supporter of the Connect People Network's self-advocacy group, a group of adults with intellectual disabilities who are calling for legal and attitudinal change around disability and sexuality in the Republic of Ireland.