

To what extent did
lennox castle fit
goffman's account



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In order to answer the above question I will need to determine what Erving Goffman meant by the term 'total institution'. I shall also look at his theories on the characteristics of such an environment and the concept behind the label. I shall then write of Lennox Castle, how it operates, its inhabitant's experiences of care, concluding with the extent to which Lennox Castle fits in with Goffman's total institution ideas.

On page 70 of the reader, (Allott and Robb 1998) K. Jones and A. J. Fowles outline Goffman's definition of 'total institution' as a workplace and residence where a like-situated group of people, cut off from society for the foreseeable future, lead a sheltered and formally administered life.

Goffman's four characteristics of total institutions are laid out in Unit 8 (p. 127), the first being batch living. This is where a person lives under surveillance and when authority is defining his or her life. They will have no choice of friends or freedom of movement, living each day with the same group of people and participating in a life of repetitive routine.

I note at this point that two groups of people have appeared in the above description - the inhabitant and the rule makers/ authority. This is one explanation of Goffman's second characteristic of total institutions - binary management. I refer again to page 71 of Allott and Robb, where Jones and Fowles note that total institutions typically consist of two groups of people, the managers and the managed. The managers are able to place a social distance between the two groups allowing any contact between the two groups to be minimal and official. Unit 8 (p. 127) names Goffman's third characteristic of total institution the 'inmate role'.

It is defined as the stripping of a persons' past role and/or identity. A resident is made to break with his/her past and become an inmate type figure. This depersonalisation is teamed with institutional perspective, the fourth characteristic. Not only is the inmate stripped of his identity he is also lulled into an artificial sense of community. Jones and Fowles, in Allott and Robb, Chapter 8 (p 73), state that Goffman attributed this to formal events being organised for the inmate that give minor possibilities of role release but in reality, only reinforce the power of the institution.

I shall look at the extent of the similarities and differences between Lennox Castle and Goffman's idea of total institution further on. So what is meant by the concept of institutionalisation? Unit 8 (p. 127) introduces the idea that, having been so used to living under the conditions of an institution, that it would be impossible for a resident to live an independent life. Goffman attributes this to the routines, depersonalisation and binary management discussed earlier.

The introductory clip of the DVD, "" Lennox Castle hospital: a hidden history", introduces the inhabitants as a community cut off from the everyday world. The description and historical discussion that follows does not portray a positive image of the Castle with talk of unnecessary and cruel practices. Researcher Howard Mitchell again paints a bleak picture with his comparisons to Victorian asylums of the 19th century.

Goffman, as written in Unit 16 (p. 129), suggests that total institutions can be identified by the barriers between the building itself and the outside world, i. . locked doors, barbed wire etc. It is possible to label Lennox Castle

as a total institution from first glance as the building is secluded and situated at the end of a long tree-lined driveway, making sure that its inhabitants are kept at a distance from society. The DVD footage shows that, to help with this situation, Lennox Castle would not employ local people. Goffman's inmate role theory is relevant at this point as many of the Castle's new residents would have had to cut ties with local acquaintances and leave their old jobs and community.

They would have to re-adapt, possibly against their will, to a whole new world. I will now look at the effect such an environment had on both residents and staff employed at Lennox Castle. It is expected at this stage to see three very different perspectives and my findings can be used to further determine the extent in which Lennox Castle fits into Goffman's theories of total institution. The DVD documentary introduces Mr Colin Sproul, a male nurse who was employed by the hospital for thirty-eight years. Colin paints a fairly negative picture of his employment and his employers.

Colin talks of a Mr Chislett, the authoritarian of the hospital who used his position to his own advantage. Colin refers to this man as a "big shot" and "God Almighty", a man who made staff and residents work for him and the hospital, both officially and unofficially, in return for ten cigarettes per week. This type of relationship between employer and employee can be labelled binary management, as Mr Chislett determined the use for his staff and residents and dictated how they should 'serve' him. Colin also goes on to recollect many situations that can be listed under Goffman's batch living title.

He also recollects the financial downfalls of working for the Castle and the poor quality of life the Castle offered in return for full-time work. Colin recollects that for full bed and board his employers took over half his salary each week and that the establishment provided bland food in a menu that never changed. This would indicate that staff, as well as residents, became institutionalised, living a regimented lifestyle dictated by the hospital. Colin also refers to the strict punishment strategies for those residents that posed problems for the staff.

Troublemakers were forced to wear white moleskin suits and were fed only bread and tea. It would seem that human rights were an issue within the Castle and I am reminded of the unnecessary and cruel treatment of residents spoke of earlier. A life-long resident of Lennox Castle, James Lappin, talks of living his life under the scrutiny of others and I can again associate this to Goffman's idea of Binary Management. The young James courted a laundry worker but their relationship was short lived due to the segregation of men and women and the rules and regulations led down to keep them apart.

It could be possible then that his negative attitude towards marriage is a direct result of learning to accept and abide by these rules for so many years. It seems he may not be able to think any other way after such conditioning. Margaret Scally also came to live in the Castle at a very young age and tells of the dismay of all residents having to share clothes including underwear, hence being given no opportunity for personal identity. This takes Goffman's idea of batch living to the extreme.

No compassion or human dignity was given to the residents and it is horrifying to believe that drugs were forced on those who simply 'misbehaved'. Margaret talks of being given paraldehyde jags when she was upset and other medication everyday since she was six years old. She also describes the scenario of being made to scrub floors wearing nothing but short nightgowns from which stemmed a dislike for her superiors. This is a prime example of Goffman's binary management. The staff used their power to control the patients in a derogatory manner.

All three individuals showed a lack of positive experience from, or enthusiasm for, such an establishment. Margaret showed hope by detailing a positive relationship that she built with the nursing staff that treated her well, however, Howard Mitchell's findings do not paint a positive picture of life within the Castle. There are many other factors and events that position Lennox Castle as a total institution, such as the football and sporting events that could be listed under Goffman's inmate role and many rules and regulations that resulted in the loss of an individual's identity.

However, to make a fair analysis of the extent to which Lennox Castle fits the total institution label I need to find ways in which it does not fit Goffman's model. All four of Goffman's characteristics seem to cover all aspects of life within Lennox Castle but perhaps to a lesser extent, the Institutional perspective. Again, Goffman's institutional perspective dictates that a person is denied his/her own perspective and validates that of the establishment. In James' case this may be true, with his attitude towards marriage and his acceptance of the strict rules laid upon him.

Margaret has been able to break away from her institutionalisation and experience life as an independent human being living in a normal society, and always knew the importance of her own independence regardless of what punishment she may have had experienced. Colin also has his own opinion of the establishment's perspective on how staff and residents should be treated and can now, after living in a normal society, see how inhumane the authoritarians really were.

James and Colin remembered the tea dances with fondness yet their enjoyment was overshadowed again by the extent to which they were allowed to enjoy themselves. Again, they found themselves subjects of binary management and batch living. In conclusion, it looks as though Lennox Castle hospital is a prime example of a total institution and after this research I agree with the narrators conclusions of Lennox Castle, describing it as a strong impenetrable society of people working and living side by side, while their lives are dominated by the hospital.

Jones and Fowles, in Allott and Robb, Chapter 8 (p 72), note that as the resident's stay is prolonged, there becomes a greater loss of personal identity and I think that this relates particularly to resident James, who I would argue has been institutionalised. Three completely different people could have emerged if James, Colin and Margaret had of been allowed freedom of expression, personal identity and basic human rights.