Family values may not have worked for the Republican party in the last U.S. election, but they enjoy considerably more success in helping to shape the agenda in specific areas of institutional practice. For example, groups composed of the families of diagnosed schizophrenics called "The Friends of Schizophrenics" have gained a more powerful voice, both within the psychiatric literature and in the popular press, than their schizophrenic relatives whose interests they claim to represent. Twenty years ago, a book entitled Schizophrenia and the Family (Anderson et al., 1968) would accept the family as the essential framework of the therapeutic process and, unlike twenty years ago, could ignore the organization of society as an element of oppression.

The rise and fall of R.D. Laing's theories and influence offer a microcosm of the execrable trends of radical thinking on this subject and the downfall of the Freud/Marx synthesis, particularly on this continent. Further, this story reflects the timidity of the 60s in North America and its premature radical consensus. It is also an example of a science caught within its positive and liberal premises and a critical practice that cannot reconstitute itself when its theoretical assumptions are shot-down.

Of more immediate interest is how family values entered into this debate before, and considerably more effectively, than Dan Quayle's attack on Murphy Brown and the "notoriously" liberal media. The current attempt by the Ontario government to bring in advocacy legislation has encountered the wrath of the Friends of Schizophrenics, an organization that is to the psychiatric patients' rights movement what Red Women is to feminism. This legislation (Bill 74: An Act Respecting the Provision of Advocacy Services to Vulnerable Persons) and the responses it to show how issues of human nature, subjectivity, institutional power and ideology become entangled and how schizophrenia not merely affects a conception of human nature or a specific institutional practice, but also reflects how we deal with, what breadth of issues we bring to, and what paradigm we use on social issues.

In Sanity, Madness and the Family, R.D. Laing and Aaron Esterson presented a series of interviews with schizophrenics and their families. They found a constant pattern of double bind relationships, which the schizophrenic was inevitably at the bottom of a hierarchy of contradictory and hidden duties within the family. This was as obvious as the denial to the schizophrenic that he or she was being talked about covertly when it was obvious that the family members had been doing just that. Others were more complicated but the point is the same. Laing and Esterson feel that they had discovered clear patterns of oppression within the modern family. Like the class structure of capitalist society, the family had a boss, middle management and workers, and in this economy of rational subjectivity, schizophrenics were the underclass.

As we can see from the final report of the 1980 provincial inquiry on mental competency, edited by David Warden, the idea of an economy of rationality subjectivity is actually embedded in legal/psychiatric practice.

In this regard competency to make psychiatric decisions may be considered to be one dimension of the multi-dimensional competency matrix which helps to shape the relationships and relative power of individuals in society. Competency or capacity within any one dimension may be seen as forming a coalition ranging from absolute incompetence at one end and absolute knowledge and rationality at the other, and along this continuum the wider the competency gap between any two points the greater the relative power of the more competent over the less competent. Within the medical competency division while lawyers, judges and average lay persons are considered to be normally competent, and therefore relatively more competent than patients whose competency is in question, the medical profession is seen (by virtue of education and professional accreditation) as being super competent and therefore more competent than average or less than average persons.

In this conception of the economy of the subject, the 'economy' is directly related to institutionalized power and the ability to determine the competency of the subjectivity of others. In fairness, this is merely a formal hierarchy and competency is connected to super-competency only after the fact, and not implicitly. By contrast, R.D. Laing's idea was of an unconscious economy of the subject where the parents (or, broadly speaking, the winners in the family context) were specifically and individually responsible for the lack of rational subjectivity on the part of their schizophrenic offspring. The attribution of blame makes the parents of schizophrenics morally culpable and the schizophrenics victims. This is then linked with an underlying concept of reason (taken rather awkwardly from Marx) which we no longer find necessary. Actually, the institutional explosion of the economy of the subject is much more straightforward: the inherent contradiction that people see a forlorn less competent than the "super-competent" doctors is technically not a double bind since it is admitted here or at least brought into the open. When, for example, they say we have power over you because our education and social position give us this power, at least the power structure is clear, regardless of what one's position is in relation to this power. Laing wanted more. He wanted to be able to humiliate a middle class family and say that certain individuals were to blame. Further, his insistence that schizophrenics were not crazy, but on a voyage of self-discovery, while the parents of schizophrenics were their oppressors was contradictory at best. If there is nothing wrong with being schizophrenic what is he blaming his parents for? This type of research, which linked madness to a more general critique of society, was actually fairly well received (at least by comparison with the vacuum of social and politi-
cat thinking in mainstream psychiatry today. If anything, the reality of double-binds is more common than Laming and Esterson suspected. Far from being limited to the family, we find the same kinds of deals in office politics and elsewhere. Mainstream psychiatry has made one major criticism of Laming and Esterson's work. The families of schizophrenics are not that unusual. The amount of double-binds (which involves both a competitive struggle and the perception of the existence of this dead end) in a schizophrenic's family is not altogether unusual and it is not clear whether the excess of double-binds can be attributed to the families themselves (or schizophrenicigenic), or to the stress of having a schizophrenic family member. In fact mainstream psychiatry has gone much further than Laming and Esterson in a number of areas. It has dropped the need for blaming specific family members and made an important distinction between families that are good for schizophrenics to return to and families that are not, based on a measure of expressed emotional intensity in those families. Further, cross-cultural studies of schizophrenia indicate that extended family structures help spread out the emotional conflicts simply because these are more emotionally significant people with a broader range of political and affective mechanisms to talk to. So while the nuclear family may be a psychological anachronism, blunting individual family members is a contradictory proposition. This attribution of blame inevitably becomes scapegoating of the weakest link. In fact psychiatrists were looking for the schizophrenogenic mother (it's all mom's fault in other words), this was not convincing for long, but offered an accurate snapshot of society. Lock up the economically unproductive and blame their mothers. Significant, though, is the loss of the critique of society from the understanding of schizophrenia. This process was resisted by the unwillingness on the part of the psycho-analytic and existential left even to debate the biology, thereby delaying the development of a model which accepts the biological evidence as descriptive, but rejects the normative interpretation of that description. This bias between the biological and psycho-social approaches allowed the grooming of a generation of social workers and other health care professionals who thought the parents of schizophrenics were guilty of some vague subversive activity. Parents of schizophrenics were harassed not only by the traditional institutional structure, its red tape and self-protection, but also by a collection of left-wing title-hunters (or schizophrenogens) who were variously located within the institutions. In this context, it is not surprising that these families began to organize themselves both to get some straightforward answers from the system (what is schizophrenia?, what is the cure? how long does it last? is it inheritable? what can we do?), and to push for increased consultation with the authorities in the community. If the answers to these questions remained muddled with complicated psychoanalytic, sociological or political ideas by the old guard, there was an emigrant simpler approach to schizophrenia in the form of biological reductionism. At this point in the story, a complex of political, economic, cultural and scientific forces comes together. First, there are the above-mentioned parents of schizophrenics looking for answers and input. Second, there are major advances in the understanding of biological research, which accelerates interest in this area. Third, we have a rationalization of biological research for maximum publicity. The impact on medicine and psychiatry becomes increasingly clear as multinational pharmaceutical companies organize seminars, inclusive doctors and researchers and everyone makes more money. In fairly straightforward capitalistic rationalization, the search for profit re-aligns research goals, diagnostic criteria and psychoanalysis (which is altogether useless for any serious mental disorder in any case) to explore the model of schizophrenia which is just as useful, but at least less complex and so on. These psychiatrists were able to give the parents of schizophrenics the answers they wanted to hear namely that schizophrenia is a genetic disease which they do not completely understand yet, but which is controllable with maintenance therapy. The parents' group came to equate the red tape and the theorizing with an all-embracing attack on the family. We see how a fairly typical model of attack against an overhead layer that presumes that it can impose a constructed truth onto communities or families without taking their day-to-day to account. As a consequence, we have a swing to the right and yet another push for the elimination of politically critical research, the maximization of profit for corporations and the elimination of expensive government programs. This confusion of forces makes it difficult to examine the organization of those groups of 'the Friends of Schizophrenia' (there are regional, provincial and national versions) to see if they started out with reactionary intentions or came about this way. Simultaneously, we could blame the naiveté of the sixties 'radical' synthesis and the romanticism of the Freud/Marx approach to critiquing society. We could blame, for example, that there is no authoritarian personality even if we've met the model as a conservative bureaucrat that term evokes. Both Freud and Marx present us with political and practical problems today that were not so obvious twenty five years ago, but the reason we do not explain why Laming could not go beyond his particular theoretical framework. The point was missed that widespread psycho-social oppression of the nature that Laming was hypothesizing might not be locatable to specific families, or even specific individuals. The focus on the family itself might be an overvaluation of the role of the family in the development of the individual. Part of the problem surely lies in attempting to instrumentally use the family as a fundamental conceptual frame of reference. One overlooks why the issues of work, technology and patriarchy weren't thrown into the mix. In any case, both the relationship of schizophrenia to their families and the structure of the authoritarian personality turn out to be at least as irrational and complicated as the market and society within which they are now developing. While I make no attempt to explain what schizophrenia is, let me preface some of the complexity that gets into my discussion of schizophrenia that attempts to go beyond apocalyptic research areas. This complexity has helped spawn two generations of dissenting thinking. The relationship of class to the institutionalization of schizophrenia is a dissonant story because of the divergences in different countries. For example in the U.S., the working poor are hospitalized more frequently in large urban centers than in smaller communities or in the country. Meanwhile in India, according to Richard Wernher in Recovery From Schizophrenia: Psychosocial rehabilitation within the middle class that is most frequently institutionalized as schizophrenia. One hypothesis is that it is members of the class most exposed to discrimination, whether it's the laboring poor or the underclass status and life-threatening poverty who are the most likely to be institutionalized for schizophrenia. It is therefore arguably the people with the greatest class related stress, and not a specific transcultural (or even trans-urban) class, who are at greatest risk. Seemingly straightforward biological research is even more complicated. While drug therapy is by and large considered the most useful intervention, it is actually complicated by drug side effects. Drug use can only mean remission, which happens spontaneously (i.e., without the help of psychiatrists) about forty per cent of the time, but only when these have not been long term maintenance drug therapy. Geasic studies are also confusing. The most significant work comes from studies with identical twins of schizophrenic parents (who are raised separately), but they show a concordance rate of 50% percent (rather than the expected 80%). Thus we are left with the idea that there is an inherited predisposition for schizophrenia which requires an environmental trigger. Further, there is some evidence that those people with a schizophrenic relative have a better prognosis than those without. At the same time it is not clear what percentage of diagnosed schizophrenics might have that genetic predisposition. So one can talk more accurately of the schizophrenics as a group of related disorders. The major problem in the literature is the attempt to solve or solve this complexity by oiling up the family as a fundamental concept, frame of reference. One overlooks why the issues of work, technology and patriarchy weren't thrown into the mix. In any case, both the relationship of schizophrenia to their families and the structure of the authoritarian personality turn out to be at least as irrational and complicated as the market and society within which they are now developing.
schizophrenics (as sub-competents) would generally do worse and tend
towards the lower or less functional strata of the population, ignoring that
this implies that schizophrenics in India are upwardly mobile and that
schizophrenics in smaller towns and the countryside are stable socio-economically.

In any event, the Friends of Schizophrenics are quick to respond to
any development that might have an
impact upon schizophrenia. They
oppose the current patient’s advocacy
legislation that the NDP in Ontario is
introducing because it removes the
family as the primary locus of social action.
Their articles appear in the newspapers
where they spread disinformation and
instill a sense of fear in the general pop-
ulation about madness in the streets,
and so on. The recent killing in Toronto
of a schizophrenic by a cop is a good
equivalent. The Friends of Schizophrenics
responded that this was unfortunate
and that families should be better
informed, but they did nothing to allimi-
ate the public impression that schizophrenics are dangerous. Nor did
they make a plea for training pro-
grames for police officers. In fact,
schizophrenics are less dangerous than
so-called normals, but this is another
issue. The basic point which the
Friends of Schizophrenics makes is that
the family is the proper locus of analysis
and treatment and that any legislation
which purports to deal with issues on a
broader social basis amounts to an
attack on the family. Notice as well that
they do not call themselves families of
schizophrenic or relatives of schizophrenia, but rather the
counter "Friends" of schizophrenia. As the say-
ing goes, "with friends like these..."

The family may have been
given too much exposure during this
current debate and we can learn some-
thing from what is common to the fail-
ers of R.D.Laing and Dan Quayle,
insisting in public debate that complex
issues be brought back to the family for
analysis might well be a losing proposition,
whether this is done from the left or
the right. The best thing to do may be
to ignore this ideological construct (and
most efficient consumption machine)
called the nuclear family and hope it
just goes away. At the very least it is a
mistake to use a theory of family inter-
action to critique the family (i.e., Freud)
and it is confusing at best to blame fam-
ilies (i.e., Laing), for what are broad
issues of subjectivity and power.

Alix Fanosz is a writer living in
Toronto.

Further Reading

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* Laing, R.D., and Featherstone, Anthony. Man, Madness

* Goldberg, Peter. Psychoanalysts. Harper & Row

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  Compentence Final Report, 1993, Queen’s printer
  for Ontario.

by Jeremy Stolow

I have always thought I knew what
multiculturalism meant. After all, I’m
supposed to be living it, aren’t I? I’m a
Jewish anglophone and my "ex" is a
Catholic francophone. I enjoy Indian
food, I listen to African music and I
wear South American sweaters. I’ve got
friends from Argentina, Haiti, Hong Kong, St.
Lucia, Italy, Ghana and Germany.
‘Being’ multicultural feels good.

HERE INDEED ARE SYMBOLS OF CANADA’S
GLORIOUS PAST...

WHOSE HISTORY?

MUL-TI-CULTURALISM IN THE ESL
bUREAUCRACY

EXCURSIONS