

Book Review

Bisaillon, Laura. 2022. *Screening Out: HIV Testing and the Canadian Immigration Experience*. University of British Columbia Press. \$32.95. ISBN 9780774867481.

Screening Out provides a critical analysis of the Canadian state's immigration procedures. This book explores the medical surveillance that immigrants face, specifically the experiences of immigrants in relation to HIV and AIDS. The author (Bisaillon) uses institutional ethnography (IE) to investigate the bureaucratic and medical texts used to process and monitor people attempting to immigrate to Canada. IE is a critical approach to social science research that focuses on how expert knowledge and governing texts are used to create ruling relations that erase the lived realities of people. The institutional ethnographer follows texts around to different government agencies to explore how office workers use these texts and what the effects are on people in the everyday world. *Screening Out* provides an excellent example of how to undertake IE. The book is also an example of participant activist ethnography (PAE) since the author is contesting this system of ruling and calling for transformative change. *Screening Out* reveals the importance of IE as a method for investigating and confronting forms of inequality and injustice.

In IE, one key methodological device is standpoint, which involves a focus on the situated knowledges of people who are encountering ruling relations. In *Screening Out*, the author adopts the standpoint of people attempting to immigrate to Canada who have HIV. Bisaillon interviewed 33 people who were screened and processed by Canada's immigration system (p. 18). The author worked closely with these respondents to understand the challenges they faced, the surveillance and stigma endured, and the ways that these people tried to navigate the hurdles and barriers that multiple Canadian government agencies created. Bisaillon also interviewed 28 people working in this medical and legal institutional complex about their work with texts.

Chapter 1 examines the immigration application process. The current immigration regime was enacted in 2002, and includes a number of policy documents regarding immigration and HIV. The immigration

medical exam requires mandatory HIV testing, a decision made by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. This is the regime that immigrants must navigate. In Chapter 1, the author provides a map of this medical and legal institutional complex (p. 39) which they then investigate in subsequent chapters. A really important practice in IE is what IE scholars call the mapping of institutional complexes and ruling relations. By following texts and interviewing people who work in government agencies about how they fill out specific forms and interpret data, the institutional ethnographer can map out the complete chain of text work that occurs in government. These maps in IE are often revealing of how governance happens and at what stage the everyday / every night realities of people are erased or categorized in ways that have dire effects for their lives. As the author shows, immigrants to Canada do an onerous amount of work and waiting simply to begin the process. It can take months or even years waiting in limbo for a decision, resulting in uncertainty and shame. In addition, there are many hidden fees and expenses (p. 56).

Chapter 2 focuses on the immigration medical examination process. This medical examination is socially and textually organized in ways that label and categorize immigrants living with HIV / AIDS. Bisailon explores the stress that people feel as a result of trying to navigate this bureaucratic system. Throughout this process people feel as if they are accused persons (p. 90) during these medical and legal interrogations. When people receive medical news or diagnoses, they are also classified and stigmatized (p. 108). Some people end up being treated as “bad immigrants” or “problematic files” and there is little they can do to overturn such a decision and categorization once it happens (p. 132). There is a parallel here between the immigration system and the criminal justice system. The whole set of procedures resembles the process of criminalization. The work happening in various government and medical offices creates patterns of medical inadmissibility that have huge effects on the lives of immigrants.

Chapter 3 further explores the way people are translated into numbers and categories. The author argues people are sorted into acceptable and unacceptable, good and bad, as they are filtered by medical and legal knowledges (p. 170). The fees and expenses that people face also vary depending on what categories they are sorted into. Bisailon

explores how people make sense of the multitude of forms, lists, and directives that shape the immigration process and result in the kinds of categorization and classification noted above. People and their lived experiences are perversely translated into figures, levels, or data doubles that stand in for them in these evaluations and measurements.

In the conclusion, the author reiterates the main arguments of the book. Bisaillon contends “the Canadian state’s ideological work related to the policy on mandatory HIV testing, the medical examination, and decision about medical inadmissibility usher in a set of institutional practices that are highly problematic for immigrants living with HIV” (p. 217). There is a need for government agencies to revisit these laws and policies because they are doing harm to people who are trying to immigrate to Canada. Bisaillon notes that Canada is an outlier among Western countries in the degree to which it screens out immigrants based on health status. The author argues this approach to sorting and screening out is at odds with so-called Canadian values of inclusion and recognition. Bisaillon also reflects on strategies for social change, including revising or even repealing this current regime. In these ways, the author makes a compelling argument that immigrants with HIV / AIDS are subject to more surveillance than any other category of immigrant and that risk-based surveillance operates to pathologize immigrants who are among the most vulnerable people in society.

Screening Out is an excellent example of how to do institutional ethnography. I think the book is also a good example of participant activist ethnography, since Bisaillon works so closely with participants and works explicitly to identify and contest the injustices of the Canadian immigration system. The voices of the respondents really are clear in the quotes and vignettes that the author analyzes. I think the book is a must-read for anyone in the social sciences generally and the justice disciplines (criminology, criminal justice, socio-legal studies) specifically who wants to use IE and PAE in future research. *Screening Out* is also crucial reading for people interested in immigration and refugee studies in Canada and beyond.

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