Growth fetish. **Clive Hamilton. Australia; Allen & Unwin, 2003. Paper back, 262 pages.**

Recently I have noticed a number of dogs 'out and about' wearing outfits. It may be my upbringing on a sheep farm but I find this trend disconcerting and disturbing. It has left me wondering what kind of society we live in where people dress up their dogs, shopping is a valid way to deal with emotional distress (retail therapy) and self-obsession leads people to humiliate themselves publicly for a moment of celebrity. Clive Hamilton gives answers to this in his discussion of the ideology he calls growth fetish, which is our obsession with economic growth. Political success is measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rather than whether or not society is good to live in. Individuals buy into the belief (hegemony) that no matter how rich you are, in order to be happy you need to be richer, creating a malaise of discontent. Hamilton argues that as capitalism is the dominant discourse it is taken for granted that consumerism and economic growth are vital for a 'good society'. For capitalism to sustain itself citizens need to feel dissatisfied with what they have so they will continue to consume and consume.

Hamilton is an economist and spends some time considering measures of prosperity other than GDP. He suggests that GDP is a 'blunt instrument' measuring only economic growth, missing out crucial aspects of what makes up a 'good society'. He proposes an alternative measurement, genuine progress indicator (GPI) which incorporates 20 other aspects of well being, such as environmental health, in order to measure activities outside of consumption. This would acknowledge that happiness comes from leading a life with meaning, strong social relationships and spirituality rather than optimising income in order to consume.

Different aspects of growth fetish are considered. He criticises the 'third way' political position suggesting that rather than being a viable political position it just puts a 'nice face' on neo liberalism. He also argues that those on the left of the political spectrum have had no answers after the fall of the Berlin Wall which has handed political power to neo liberals. Current work patterns are explored and Hamilton looks at the way the language of flexibility, change and project work dominates, having replaced concepts like loyalty and service. He suggests we are overworking in order to increase our ability to consume and in his conclusion suggests that collective downshifting will create a more rewarding, post-growth society. The environmental impact of consumerism is considered and Hamilton describes modern cities as being 'like huge vacuum cleaners, sucking in resources and then blowing out huge volumes of waste that must be buried, dumped in the oceans, or vented into the atmosphere' (p. 184). He suggests we should measure economic activity against environmental impact as opposed to the neo-liberal view which is that humans have priority over the natural world.

The author believes that rather than continuing with the discourse of neo-liberalism we need a politics which 'allows people to achieve liberation, to find authenticity, and to value community and relationships above wealth and status … we need a politics that encourages people to pursue a rich life instead of a life of riches' (p. xvii). This includes a respect for that environment based on its intrinsic value rather than the value it may have in the market place.

He finishes by talking about the potential for a post-growth society where social structures take account of more than economic growth and consider factors like social connections and

being able to pursue personal interests, factors which enable people to live fulfilled lives rather than materially rich ones. In this sense he is referring to mass downshifting where people who have enough give value to things other than increasing their income. This would mean that people who have so much they clothe their animals and shop as a hobby reduce their consumption and put energy into activities which contribute to their community.

This is a must read in my opinion as it provides a timely critique of western society and offers suggestions for a way forward. My only criticisms are the size of the book itself (it is a smaller than usual size which I found a little difficult) and that only one chapter discusses the potential for change to a post-growth society. I felt this was not enough to explore how to construct a better society and what that would look like. It seems vital in a world where we have growing inequality and have destroyed our planet, yet we are richer than ever, that we consider other ways to structure our lives that are not based on capitalism and we construct our identities based on things other than what we consume.

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The age of supported independence: Voices of in-home care. **By Beatrice Hale, Patrick Barrett & Robin Gauld. London, Springer, 2010. Hardback, 131 pages.**

The authors suggest that many older people – as well as the family members who become carers – remain in a state of 'liminality': unable to make sense of their new situation and experience. Despite assumptions that ageing-in-place sustains social connectedness, many are excluded from their communities. This book delivers references from the experiences of older people and their transition into supported independence at a vulnerable stage of frailty and disability. Rather than being a celebrated transition into a new life stage, this stage can be an excruciating one with the older person having little power and negotiation over the assessment process followed by a loss of autonomy, privacy and authority in their own homes.

The idea of supported independence suggests enablement and empowerment to continue to remain at home, however when the home become a site for formal care there are many emotions experienced by changing, adapting and handing over spaces in the home. Individual identity is altered by having in-home care. With personal care the body moves from a state of intimacy, privacy and self-presentation to a site of care. For practical supports the public view of devices, walking frames etc., indicates a changed identity. There is lack of control by the older person in relation to time when care is being provided in the home. The differences between the time in relation to the clock and the care worker, and the time in relation to the older person, the disability and frailty and the time of having a shower or bath that can be so quick and disempowering.

Disruptions caused by the onset of frailty and disability and the need for in-home care can increase periods of anxiety, frustration, learning new skills, grief, loss and exhaustion as interactions change. Alongside of these are the challenges in dealing with issues of frailty for both the carer and the care recipient. The role of the social worker is to support autonomy and choices for older people. Different strategies are required to support self-determination in the changing interactions as dependency increases, both with family members who become

informal carers along with the interactions with care workers, agencies and assessors. The service sector needs to be strengthened to support people in their interaction in receiving care in the home, using a holistic perspective from the separation to reconnection process.

It is important for social workers therefore to reflect on their mode of practice to ensure that people of frailty and disability are not disempowered but rather encouraged in their autonomy. Are we advocating for positive care relationships and qualitative emotional connections that are a part of a caring, supported independent life stage? The social worker ought to practise in a way that assists the older person and their family through the anxieties, uncertainties and feelings of disconnection from their former selves through to reconnection, hence, restoring the individual, their family, and support network. Definitely a great book for social workers who advocate for the positive perspectives of aging in place to optimise autonomy and control when liaising with home care agencies.

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Room **by Emma Donaghue, Picador Publishers, hardcover, 320 pp, 2010.**

This is a novel that captures the reader from the first paragraph. Jack is the five-year-old son of Ma and they have lived in 'Room' all of Jack's life. The book takes the reader through Jack and Ma's journey through their everyday life in a room measuring 11 foot by 11 foot to their escape and shows how Jack and Ma try to integrate and re-integrate into society. The reader is invited to see and feel Ma and Jack's bravery, Ma's persistence and her incredible love for her son. *Room* is relevant to social work practice in that it gives an amazing insight into the tenacity and fragility of the human mind, and of love. It provides a wonderful description of attachment and bonding and how a secure attachment improves the odds for a child to survive the unsurvivable. Jack remains with you as you turn the pages and long after you have turned the final page of the book. This comes highly recommended and was on the Man Booker Prize shortlist for 2010. The content, inspired by the Fritzl story, is relevant to social work practice now and will be in the future.

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My child is gay – How parents react when they hear the news. **Edited by Bryce McDougall, Allen and Unwin, paperback, 189 pp, 1998.**

The book contains a range of letters/vignettes written by parents, both in New Zealand and Australia, of children who have 'come out' as bisexual, transsexual or gay. The vignettes were written so that other parents could access help and support, and come to terms with their feelings when their child comes out. It can also assist people thinking about sharing the truth about their coming out stories. The book is relevant to social work practice as a tool to help parents of children who are in the process of coming out. All too often I have heard 'It's just a phase. S/he will grow out of it'. Statistics show that the most at-risk group of young people for suicide is the bisexual, transsexual, gay and lesbian community in the

process of coming out and of the importance of being accepted rather than judged for their sexuality. This book may provide positive support and save the lives of some of our young people. Parents have included lists of 'most helpful' books.

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I came to say goodbye: Who is left when a family falls apart? **Caroline Overington, Bantam: Australia, paperback, 295 pp, 2010.**

This is a fictional novel that provides an amazing insight in to how mental health and care and protection issues impact in a ripple effect on a wide range of people. It describes the confusion of family members when privacy issues are raised and used to such an extent that family members are excluded completely from decision making. The book left me horrified at the lack of empathy and understanding from social workers toward clients and their families. It reminded me of some experiences I have had in my own working life and of the way that some social workers hide behind 'processes', and flex their (agency) muscles to disempower families. It shows how the medical model of 'expertise' can, and does, undermine a strength-based, solutions-focused and narrative approach to intervention. The novel also provides insight into the need for self reflection on practice; the need for accountability to ones self; ones clients; families and agencies. It shows how lack of continuity of service delivery can have devastatingly negative impacts on the client and wider family. It shows how paper work can be used to weigh people down and how processes can overtake humanity and common sense. It reminded me of the deaths of children in our own country and how even now children are dying from horrific abuse. This novel comes highly recommended as a tool for trainee and practising social workers and all others working in the social service delivery arena.

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Hughes, M. & Heycox, K. (2010). *Older people, ageing and social work: Knowledge for practice.* **Crows Nest, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin. ISBN: 978-1-74237-060-6. 336 pages. Paperback. Approx $70.**

Social work with older people receives relatively little attention in the published literature, an indication of its low regard in the social work practice and skills hierarchy. The above book, written within the Australian context, is thus a welcome addition to the literature. Both authors have considerable experience working with older people and in conducting related research.

Gerontological theory, research, policy and practice-wisdom are all addressed in this book aimed at those working with older people in a range of settings, not just those in specific elder care settings. The authors posit that this field of practice requires high-level skills along with in-depth knowledge of the issues facing older people and service interfaces. Their objective, 'to stimulate an ongoing critical and reflective engagement with the complexities involved' (p. 295) is met. In challenging the stereotypes which pervade our society, they seek to break

down the artificial barriers associated with old age. They emphasise the importance of the experience of ageing, both subjective and objective, rather than of an arbitrary old age cut-off point. The concept of 'research-mindedness' is analysed and emphasised along with a critically reflective social work stance.

There is a logical progression in the way the chapters are ordered, and links between them are clearly stated. While some of the chapters focus more specifically on the Australian context, they nonetheless provide a good starting point for discussion and critical analysis on our own reality. A clear overview of and introduction to various bio-psycho-social-cultural and political approaches to ageing are offered. This leads on to exploration of issues around diversity and ageism, and discussion on disability, health and the importance of advocacy skills. Various issues related to caring, both informal and formal, and the importance of networks are also covered. Dementia, housing, relationships and intimacy, risk and abuse, end of life issues and meaningful ageing are all critically analysed.

Chapter five offers a thoughtful discussion on ageism and diversity. The section on indigeneity / race and age is brief, and I would like to have seen a more in-depth critical analysis of the social and political background, and the 'double jeopardy' of age and ethnicity, so important in an Aotearoa New Zealand bi-cultural context. While issues of social justice and injustice as experienced through older age and ageing were not the purpose of this book, they offer opportunities for further study and research by others.

The examination of traditional and current risk-management and -minimisation approaches adds to the growing understanding of the importance and validity of risk taking, an approach that comes out of the empowerment, and disability rights discourses, and which is an area of strong personal interest.

Interspersed throughout each chapter are practice examples which contextualise the discussion, lending a level of reality, along with critical reflection questions, which offer a chance to pause and reflect on one's own ageing as well as on the wider experience of old age.

This book offers valuable reflection and insight on older people and ageing in a social service context. I recommend it to all social workers, regardless of their dominant field of practice. It is an excellent resource for students, and would fit well into an enquiry-action pedagogical approach.

For us in Aotearoa New Zealand, having such a well-researched and well-written text from Australia is the next best thing to having our own.

Mary Farrelly,
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The role of social science in law, edited by Elizabeth Mertz. Published in 2008 by Ashgate Publishing, 611 pages.

This collection of essays is one volume in the extensive series of *The International Library of Essays in Law and Society*. This volume focuses on the role that social science plays in legal

decision-making. The essays cover a range of scholarly perspectives by exploring ways in which social service knowledge can be best used by lawyers.

The book appears to be written primarily for a legal audience and as such, the reading may became laborious at times for a reader versed in social sciences. Nonetheless, several of the individual essays are thought-provoking and relevant to social work education today, although other essays appear to be dated and less pertinent. Legal theory is combined with specific case studies through a range of topics including family violence, anti-discriminatory laws and expert testimonies.

Overall, I consider that this book has some value as a resource for teachers of law in social work education, but the content may be too specialised for many social work practitioners. There is no discourse within the volume directed at an Aotearoa New Zealand audience. Another drawback with the book is in its presentation, with the individual essays being printed in a range of styles and fonts which provides an inconsistency when reading. Given these factors, I would consider that there are other relevant books exploring the relationship between social services and law that may be more user-friendly for social service practitioners and educators.

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