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*Morals, rights and practice in the human services: Effective and fair decision making in health, social care and criminal justice.* **By M. Connolly and T. Ward. London and Philadelphia, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008, paperback, 181 pages.**

Considering the prominence of the concept of human rights in statements of the values and ethics of the social work profession (ANZASW, 2008; IFSW, 2000; Payne, 2006) a thorough analysis of the concept and how it applies in practice is welcome. Indeed the authors of this volume observe that human rights has actually been 'an undeveloped area of professional concern' (p.9). They identify as having been missing from previous literature a 'meaningful interpretation of rights-based ideas, the subtleties of rights-based thinking, and an appreciation of the ways in which a rights-based analysis can help us to negotiate the complexity of competing interests and claims' (p.9). This volume attempts to fill this gap.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One seeks to establish a foundation of a thorough analysis of rights-based ideas, including acknowledgement of some of the challenges to the concept and responses to these challenges. Chapter One is described as the 'theoretical chapter' (p.10), and indeed provides a dense theoretical definition and analysis of the concept of human rights and other relevant concepts, together with a philosophical argument justifying their importance. Human rights are distinguished from other concepts such as moral claims (related to how people should ideally behave towards one another), with human rights being ultimately understood as the minimum conditions required to enable people to live a life that is recognisably human. Being deprived of these conditions is likely to result in great harm to the person concerned, a life of desperation and misery. These human rights are identified as the freedom and the minimum conditions necessary (factors including material subsistence, physical security, equality before the law, freedom from discrimination, recognition and respect) for the individual to pursue their own goals and conception of a good life. In seeking to justify the requirement that human rights be recognised, the authors assert that both ontological and utilitarian arguments are needed. Drawing on moral philosopher Alan Gerwith, they suggest two steps, that every person or 'agent' accepts that they have the rights to well-being and freedom to enable them to pursue

their own goals, and that accepting that one has these rights logically demands acceptance that others have the same rights.

Chapter Two addresses culturally based critiques of the concept of human rights, including that the concept is rooted in Western individualistic discourse and not relevant to more collective cultures. In response the authors assert that all cultures contain elements of uniqueness and similarity with other cultures, some balance between recognition of the individual and the collective, and elements of internal diversity and debate. Cultures are also dynamic, continuing to change and evolve, including as a result of contact with other cultures. The authors observe that a level of individual rights is a necessary pre-condition for the recognition and implementation of group rights. In addressing issues of cultural practices considered controversial from a human rights perspective, such as female circumcision, they advocate the importance of a thorough knowledge of the culture concerned, exploring the function of the practice within the culture, engaging with any debate within the culture and exploring possible alternative ways of meeting the function (assuming that function is consistent with human rights).

Chapter Three is a somewhat unusual chapter in that it explores two quite distinct themes. Recognising the increasing prominence of faith-based agencies in the mixed economy of welfare provision in many Western countries, the authors explore the rights of non-government organisations to express their values in the services they provide, without being compromised by factors such as funding contracts restricting them from public advocacy on areas of concern. This right is held in tension with the rights of service users to receive a service free from spiritual or religious indoctrination. The chapter also addresses the contribution of the consumer rights movement to human service delivery. An interesting example of contested human rights is the possibility of deaf parents wishing their children to grow up as part of a rich deaf culture, denying them the possibility of a hearing future that could be available through technological advances.

Part Two of the book explores the application of human rights concepts to various specific fields of practice, with chapters including addressing how human rights apply at different stages of the developmental life span, working with offenders, and disability. Chapter Seven explores cultural values and children's rights, particularly focusing on the issue of physical discipline of children, which the authors argue ultimately contravenes human rights. Chapter Eight explores the practice area of child protection, with a thorough analysis of the complexities of the relationship between the family and the state. The authors note a tension between ideals of family-centred and family-supportive responses often enshrined in legislation (including Aotearoa-New Zealand's Children, Young Persons and their Families Act, 1989), and increasingly risk-averse approaches to practice, with an emphasis on professionally dominated forensic investigation that can lead to adversarial relationships. The authors observe that the more professionally dominated the approach to practice is, the less likely it is that human rights will be respected. Recent English moves to refocus child welfare services to a more inclusive, family and child needs-oriented practice are described, with the caution that this could actually lead to excessive state intrusion into family autonomy. The authors do not address the possible tension between their advocacy of complete intolerance of physical discipline in Chapter 7 and their advocacy of minimum state intrusion in family autonomy in Chapter 8.

Part Three advocates the importance of integrating human rights-based values into agency practice frameworks (Chapter 9) and legislation and policy (Chapter 10).

Overall the book provides acknowledgement and thorough analyses of the complexities of human rights issues. In particular there is fair and balanced analysis of situations of competing rights, without giving prescriptive answers to ethical dilemmas.

Criticisms include that parts of this book are heavy-going to read. In particular Chapter One is characterised by dense philosophical argument, with somewhat pedantic language such as repeated references to people as 'agents' and human rights provisions as 'goods'. Indeed it could be suggested that use of such terminology is actually dehumanising of people. Some of this argument does get a little repetitive, and there are further examples of some repetition of arguments from Chapter One in later chapters, possibly a concession to the likelihood that some readers may only refer to chapters related to their specific areas of concern rather than read the whole book. It could also be suggested that there is an over-emphasis on the practice fields of child protection and offender rehabilitation, at the expense of other fields of human service and social work practice. In particular the area of health, including issues of rights of health service consumers, and compulsory assessment and treatment in mental health, is a significant omission. Finally I found one example of typological errors and apparently incomplete labelling in a diagram.

Nevertheless this book will be of interest to social work educators, and probably more advanced students, and practitioners particularly in the areas of child protection and criminal justice.

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*Researching resilience*. **L. Liebenberg & M. Ungar (Eds). Canada, University of Toronto Press. Published 2009, 317 pages, paperback.**

If there is one thing I have learned from being a student of the social sciences it is that those who get to do the writing are equally as relevant as what gets written. With that in mind I began this book review by looking at the 18 contributors to this book and discovered that they seriously know about research. Fifteen of them hold PhDs, 11 are associate professors or professors, and between them all they have centuries of community-based research experience. As educators and internationally renowned researchers (including our very own Robyn Munford and Jackie Sanders from Massey University) they offer a colossus of knowledge and wisdom. These writers seriously know their work, both academically and as practising researchers.

Resilience is a fairly recent concept that shifts the focus from the problematic and dysfunctional to factors that enable people not only to survive adversity, but to also thrive. Social

workers who are guided by strengths-based practice within a holistic framework (like Te Whare Tapa Wha) celebrate this shift in focus. An integral part to social work is 'informed practice', which is where robust research comes in.

*Researching resilience* is well structured and easy to follow. It is purposefully and informatively put together, with a meaningful flow throughout its 12 chapters. It provides a theoretical depth to the emergence of resilience as a concept, along with a road map of practical considerations for researchers of resilience. Topics discussed include research ethics, participatory action research, research in a cross-cultural context, the diverging and evolving definitions of resilience, and the interface between qualitative and quantitative research designs. The book provides a range of research examples, along with a sample research proposal. Considering the calibre of the contributors it is no surprise that the chapters are well crafted, informative and substantial in their debate. A background in the social sciences certainly assisted me in being able to grasp some of the more theoretical components.

Once I had completed the book I reflected on the consistent proposition that inclusion, participation and 'voice' of those being researched is essential to all phases of the research process. I asked myself, is reading a book on resilience research part of the research process? While there were a few quotes from those being researched within this text, I wondered if there was any way to integrate this 'voice' more centrally in order to action the principle of inclusiveness within a research-orientated text. A chapter written by the 'researched' enabling them to share their perspective on considerations like … 'What advice would you give those researching you? How could researchers most effectively and respectfully walk alongside you in their research journey?' could prove insightful.

Knowing that this book was published four years after the 2005 'International Pathways to Resilience' conference held in Halifax, Canada (and the seed to this book) highlights the perseverance and focused dedication Linda Liebenberg and Michael Ungar have as editors. A sign of resilience in its own right! Their efforts have enabled those of us who were not at that conference to share the evolving 'resilience' journey. Personally, I have most sincerely appreciated this opportunity.

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*Social work practice in mental health: An introduction.* **By R. Bland, N. Renouf & A. Tullgren. Allen & Unwin, Australia, 2009. Paperback, 265 pages.**

An understanding of mental health and ill health is fundamental in any social work practice or, as the authors say, 'mental health literacy is fundamental to all social work practice' (p. 6). The quality of this book leads me to recommend it to all members. It will be a book I will use frequently in the future.

Normally I am wary of 'foreign' material and have a bias towards the indigenous, however this book, although Australian, is useful in our context and 'speaks a similar language'. It makes reference to Aotearoa mental health policies and practice and much of the material on things like the recovery model is used here and relevant.

The material in the book seems to follow an integrated model, starting with the broader context of thinking about mental health. There is an emphasis on the consumer movement and the recovery model, and while evidence-based practice is discussed regularly it is not assumed to be 'the way'. The authors then discuss policy and current thinking about practice before presenting a chapter covering some of what they identify as the more prevalent disorders. This was the most unsatisfying aspect of the book as it was partial. They could have either attempted a wider coverage of disorders or left this section out. Having said this, what was covered was clear and useful, especially for a busy practitioner who can access information quickly about what they are most likely to come across day to day in their work.

Part two of the book looks at practice skills with individuals, groups, families and the organisation. This was done is a way which could be useful to both mental health and other practitioners, although some sections would be more relevant to them than others. While not the intention, core social work practice is explained so well it would also be useful for students to get clarity around basic assessment and intervention practice. Practical examples were supplied throughout this section which gave colour to, and made real, what was being discussed.

There were a number of things I particularly liked about this book. It is well written and clear. It is engaging and well paced. It uses an integrated practice model as its framework and most importantly is emphasises hearing the voices of 'consumers' and their families. The third author, Ann Tullgren, is a social worker who is a mental health consumer and her lived experience of mental illness is included. This demonstrates congruence between what is being written and the authors' practice.

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*Inter-act : Interpersonal communication concepts, skills, and contexts.* **By K. S. Verderber, R. F. Verderber & C. Berryman-Fink. Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, 12th Edition. A4 bound paperback, 447 pages.**

This is a fantastically presented book which explores in detail all aspects of interpersonal communication. There are 14 chapters which are then subdivided off into further categories related to the chapter topic. This 12th edition retains some of the features from previous editions but with a twist to incorporate aspects of our ever-changing society, namely technology and how this is leading our traditional interpersonal communication to a more advanced cyberspace activity. The book addresses many interpersonal exchanges. It not only describes theories and frameworks of communication but assists in understanding by providing material to aid the social worker or student to create positive and effective interactions managing multiple variables, for example, culture, gender, life cycles, working styles and social perception.

This is a useful book in relation to the skills needed for social work practice. The concepts, frameworks and theories are supported by research. In each sub-section there are practical features and activities: illustrations (some of which are quite amusing!), ethical question scenarios, a 'Spotlight on Scholars' page on which professors add their research, experiences and opinions, and a resources page/s which gives key words. Improvement plans, skills

practice and an interact with the media (enabling the reader to relate to a particular television episode) are also included in the book, giving examples of the concepts portrayed and displayed in the media. The book provides opportunity for the reader to critically reflect on their practice and self-perception and learn aspects about themselves in a professional and personal capacity, along with examples of ethical dilemmas. Especially useful is the section devoted to communication across culture, and although devoted to working from a western perspective there is relevant reading to link to Aotearoa that may assist practitioners/students in their work with Maori and Pacific. The focus of this section is more along the lines of how mass migrations and globalisation of trade enhances the diversity of cultures and how this impacts on communication.

There is just so much valid content in this book that it would be a long review to list it all. It is all relevant from a perception of process. Dialectical tensions, managing conflict, power, team relationships, organisational and work styles, culture and gender variations and all the basic elements of interpersonal communication are considered.

Who would utilise this book to its potential? Social work students at the beginning of their studies or as preparatory reading before starting the course; those considering a career as a qualified social worker; people involved in social work education and training, and staff in multidisciplinary settings who want a better understanding of interpersonal relations.

This book is really well structured and easy to follow. It would be a great resource not only for students but to any professional that works consistently with client, professional, agency or company complexities.

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*Critical social work: Theories and practices for a just world* (second edition). Eds J. Allan, L. Briskman & B. Pease. Allen & Unwin, Australia, 2009. Paperback, 352 pages.

On the back cover of this book a quote from Kate van Heugten 'sums it up'. She states this book is 'on the cutting edge of thinking about social work and its goal of social change'. It is 'cutting edge' and challenging, using critical theory to consider a range of ideas, issues and fields of practice. It is the second edition of an edited book with 19 authors, all with different interests and backgrounds. In my opinion this is a must read for all practitioners and social work students, acknowledging as I write this my bias towards critical theory.

The book begins with some general chapters explaining critical social work and its theoretical underpinnings which are clearly written and thought provoking. An example of this is the challenge of evidence-based practice for a critical social work. Pease (2009) describes the close relationship between the ascent of evidence-based practice with neo-liberalism and new managerialism. He argues for social workers thinking broadly about what evidence is. Other chapters consider human rights, globalisation and social work; thinking global and acting local. These are pertinent in a world racing to embrace (if they haven't already) global capitalism; critical theory provides a framework of understanding, and tools with which to challenge, dominant discourses.

Eleven chapters deal with either fields of practice, particular issues or ways of incorporating other theoretical positions such as anti-racism and feminism with critical theory. Chapter topics include grief and loss, disability, mental health, families, childhood, working 'with indigenous peoples', addressing violence and human rights. The authors use critical theory to consider each topic.

While the book is Australian I found most chapters either relevant to our context or interesting because of their difference. Some authors included more Australia-specific context and policies; this was particularly the case with the chapter on rural and remote social work.

Each chapter is reasonably short, which makes them easier to absorb, but there were a few I would have liked 'more from'. This is as much the nature of an edited book rather than this book in particular. Some of the theoretical chapters could have been 'fleshed out' but I am being fussy saying this. If you want to pursue an area of interest an extensive reference list is supplied.

I rationed my reading of the book to a chapter a day so I could savour and ponder each one. It was reassuring to know there are still critical theorists doing, thinking and writing about social work. This is a book I will use regularly, refer to and re read. I found it inspiring, stimulating and encouraging. I hope it does the same for you.

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*Economics for social workers: The application of economic theory to social policy and the human services.* **By M. A. Lewis and K. Widerquist. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. 182 pages, paperback.**

If a textbook about economic theory doesn't sound like your kind of thing, then this is the economics textbook for you! I selected this book to review (placing it low on my list of preferred reads) out of a sense that I 'ought' to know something about economics, rather than from any innate fascination or interest. After making it past the boring text-booky cover, I was rewarded by a book which not only increased my knowledge of the realms of economics considerably but which managed to do so with sensitivity to my reluctance! (At one point, the authors warn that the following two chapters contain 'sometimes tedious theories and definitions' but encourage the reader to 'Hang in there; it's worth it' as indeed it proves to be!)

Set out in 11 easily-read chapters, this book assumes no prior knowledge of economic theory and takes the reader on a journey through from the complete basics of 'supply and demand' and 'cost-benefit analysis' through to a consideration of both market and government failure. At each step, the concept being introduced is explained clearly and simply (supplemented with a comprehensive and clear glossary at the back). In addition, the reader

is told why each economic concept is relevant to the social work profession with a variety of issues and case studies used. Later chapters look specifically at the economics of labour, poverty and health care. The one obvious draw-back is that the book is written from a northern American context and thus some of the case studies assume a slightly different setting to our own. Nonetheless, the concepts are easily transferable to our situation and a range of practice and policy issues.

If you have much prior knowledge of economic theory, then I imagine this book would be of limited interest, however the direct application to some of the key concerns of social work may still be valuable. If you consider yourself mathematically-challenged or feel your mind dragging at the sound of 'economics' yet have a passion to understand poverty and social inequality more fully, then this book is an excellent place to start. As stated on the back cover 'The dominance of economics in social policy debates means that advocates of policies must demonstrate at least a basic understanding of the economic aspects of their proposals if they want to be considered credible participants'. This book certainly meets this aim and, as such, would be valuable reading for all ANZASW members.

Liz Langham
Full member ANZASW.