Book Reviews


DOI: 10.1017/S0047279403217712

This text book provides a refreshing and innovative approach to teaching inequality. In contrast to most inequality publications that emphasise the objective elements of inequality, this book gives considerable attention to *perceptions* of inequality as an important component in the maintenance of inequality. The authors introduce this approach by asking why inequality continues to persist. While acknowledging structural and political explanations, they also point to the importance of the way individuals and society perceive inequality. If inequalities are not perceived, then inaction is understandable. Fortunately, the authors do not overstate perceptions of inequality, doing an admirable job in balancing the objective and subjective aspects of inequality.

To help them achieve this balance, the authors structure their book on a model of inequality that has three facets: theory (mainly sociological theory), lived experience (the subjective) and empirical reality (the objective). These three facets are examined in three broad domains – the body, the self and politics – which define the three parts of the book. The inclusion of the body and the self are interesting approaches to inequality in themselves and reflect recent developments in social theory.

Part I of the book focuses on the way the physical bodily attributes generate inequality. Following the authors’ tripartite conception of inequality, it opens in Chapter 2 with an examination of different conceptions of the body: bodies as natural, bodies as cultural mirrors, bodies as structurally produced, disciplined bodies and post-modern, self-constructed bodies. Chapter 3 looks at sickness. Critiquing notions that sickness is an outcome of genetics or lifestyle, it highlights class distributions of illness. Chapter 4 looks at the way female, aged and disabled bodies are constructed as sick or less valued, and subsequently generates inequality.

How the individual experiences inequality is the focus of Part II. Chapter 5 discusses the inequality of social resources. It summarises Australian inequality and class research since the 1960s and discusses recent changes in income and wealth inequality. Chapter 6 looks at cultural differences by examining various ways cultural identity is conceptualised, Australia’s policy of multiculturalism and the social construction of aboriginality. The inequality in life choices is discussed in Chapter 7 through an analysis of the distinction between sex and gender and the experiences transsexuals face in choosing and performing gender. As an unusual topic, this chapter is highly stimulating and thought provoking.

Part III deals with the politics and collective aspects of social inequality. Chapter 8 provides another outstanding analysis of inequality. It discusses how (in)equality is embedded in Australia’s national identity through the myth of egalitarianism (and mateship). The authors note how this myth hides its exclusion of non-British immigrants (the notorious White Australia policy), Aborigines and women. The chapter also looks at the embedding of ‘fairness’ in the development of Australia’s peculiar welfare state. Chapter 9 gives attention to the historical political struggles in Australia’s nation building for labour market, gender and cultural equality.
Chapter 10 examines the debates from the 1980s over the meaning of (in)equality when some challenged the emergence of a new, tertiary-educated elite class noted for their ‘cosmopolitan’ outlook including support for affirmative action, increased immigration, political correctness, revisionist approaches to Australian history, environmentalism and special interest groups. This debate has led to a redefinition of (in)equality and strengthened the conservative politics of now Prime Minister John Howard and of Pauline Hanson.

There is much to recommend in this book. Despite the focus on Australia, much of the content reflects experiences in other western countries. However there are also interesting analyses of Australia’s particular character which should interest non-Australian students and teachers, including Australia’s immigration policies from White Australia to multiculturalism, the experiences of indigenous Australians, the myths of egalitarianism and mateship and Australia’s wage-earners welfare state with its system of industrial arbitration. Other clear strengths are its examination of transsexualism and perceptions of inequality. It also has useful study questions and further readings for each chapter.

The book does, however, have some important weaknesses. The book is largely informed by sociological writings. While this provides important conceptual insights, the book is rather weak on the specifics of Australian social policy, opting for a broad brush approach. The book underutilises quantitative research, showing a preference for qualitative approaches. This seems to reflect the authors comfort zone, as evidenced by the incorrect reformulation of the ‘bottom quintile’ as the ‘bottom 5 per cent’. Although published in 2003, the book appears dated in its references and lack of discussion of key recent debates about ‘social exclusion’, the ‘digital divide’, ‘work for the dole’ and asylum seekers. Nor is there discussion of John Howard’s policies favouring the wealthy and the individualisation of risk.

Despite these reservations, I strongly recommend the book as a supplementary text or reader for courses on social inequality and social exclusion.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279403227719

I agreed to referee this book with some enthusiasm. As a longstanding advocate of community development, and as someone who finds the term ‘youth and community work’ (still adorning some training courses in this country) misleading (in the sense that it is usually youth work, obviously about working ‘in the community’, but rarely with a community development perspective), I thought it might address some of my concerns. Given particularly the current mini crisis about the problem of ‘yoof’ (drugs, street crime, school absenteeism, political abstentionism, etc.) in Western Europe, and noting that the contributors included one R. Coles, I settled back to read the weighty tome (nearly 450 pages) feeling that I would be rewarded with some contemporary and telling insights about policy and practice which would complement some of the recent European literature (see for example Andersen and Jensen, 2000).

Well, yes but largely no. Let us start with the nos. It is a book by North Americans, for North Americans and about North Americans. That in itself is not necessarily a bad thing but – and even here I have to make the obligatory nod in the direction of what we have now
all learnt to call nine-eleven and the subsequent increasing isolation and introspection of most of the USA population – there appears virtually no attempt to draw on the experience of those working with young people elsewhere. Whilst several of the thirty-plus contributors work with minorities within the USA (Latinos, American Indians, Haitians, African Americans, etc.), none of their short biographies indicates any connection with work outside the USA. Of course there is no reason why a reader of this kind has to be international in its scope but it does pose a very severe problem for a review in an international journal because a reviewer is left having to identify the areas within the text which might – but only might – be of wider interest beyond the shores of the USA. Further, the promise of the title (at least for this reviewer) was not fulfilled: community youth development, for the editors, means ‘providing youth with the opportunities to acquire a broad range of competencies and a full complement of positive connections to self, others and the larger community’ which in only a few chapters translated into something recognisably about community development.

So what might be of more general interest? It is tempting to say that, because of its size and scope – with almost twenty chapters covering such diverse foci as mentoring, gender issues, sexuality, leisure, disability, competence, character development, skills and professionalism in youth workers, the criminal justice system and youth civic development – there must be something for everyone here and there probably is. For example, I found some of the short sections on mentoring, chapters on working with migrant groups, and the case studies relating to disability, of some interest. There are detailed practice and service-oriented discussions from a range of perspectives and organisational contexts. But the almost total absence of any serious debate about the structural reasons for what we tend to call disaffection, or political strategies for addressing it – both locally through community development-informed strategies, and through national policy-making – is striking. Perhaps political debate about young people takes place in different ways within the USA but no-one could produce a book like this about ‘yoof’ in the UK or elsewhere in Western Europe for example and expect it to sell like hot cakes; and I can’t imagine that Sage will be overwhelmed by demand for it outside of the USA. (And no, by the way, to do him justice, it wasn’t Bob Coles).

Reference

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279403237715

The regulation of healthcare is clearly a good business to be in: powerful people love it; it grows in scope and resources every year; and when it disappoints (as it usually does), we simply invent more of it. But what actually is regulation, and what is it for?

The starting point might be Selznick’s definition: ‘sustained and focused control exercised by a public agency over activities which are valued by the community’ (1985: 363), but that begs almost more questions than it answers.
Part of the problem is that such regulation has several purposes. These include social imperatives (ensuring the delivery of social policy), political demands (responding to the changing needs of the political process), on-going organisational needs (performance management) and often an economic agenda (avoiding market failure). When these conflict, whose criteria of success predominate?

Another problem is that we know so little about what works in regulation. There has been very little attention paid to the evaluation of different regulatory frameworks or techniques, and every regulator seems perversely determined not to share their experience with each other.

Despite this, there is little sign of doubt or scepticism about regulation per se. For many years in the USA — and with fevered enthusiasm since 1997 in the UK — governments have reached for the regulatory solution to an ever-more diverse list of problems. As Kieran Walshe puts it: ‘The history of healthcare regulation in the UK and the USA could be construed as the continuing triumph of hope over experience’ (p. 237).

He explores the experience of healthcare regulation in the contrasting settings of these two countries. The book begins by setting out a model for evaluating regulation, and then applies it to selected key healthcare regulators in both countries. The final chapters aim to identify what does and does not work well, and — in the words of the subtitle — to prescribe for improvement.

What emerges is a helpful list of problems to avoid, many ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’, and a framework of ten factors that are important to effective regulation in healthcare. These range from focusing on improving performance and being responsive as a regulator, to accountability and independence and evaluation. A helpful list, but the central problem remains: How does one best deliver these, given the inescapable contradictions inherent, for example, in the need to be simultaneously both rigorous and flexible, accountable and independent? And further, what does one do about the multiple unintended consequences and unknown costs of regulation?

The book offers the outline of an answer, in the concept of ‘responsive regulation’ — a third way between the classical approaches of deterrence and compliance. However, this seems to be as much about being open about the contradictions, as it is about actually reconciling them. Beyond this there is an eminently sensible plea for would-be regulators to think clearly about whether more regulation is the answer, and for much more evaluation of regulation.

The analysis focuses on the micro-level issues about how regulation works, rather than on what broader purposes it might serve or consequences it might have. It also has little to say about the ‘social’ impact of regulation on those who are regulated — what does regulation actually feel like, for example, and how do organisations build their defences against the regulator. Overall, a lot of information is presented effectively in multiple tables, and the description of key parts of the regulatory landscape will be valuable to all those who have failed to keep up with the pace of change in the last few years.

All regulators — and would-be regulators — should read this book, and think clearly and honestly about what it is they are trying to achieve, and whether different approaches might not be better. But our love affair with regulation seems to have some way yet to run: ‘In both the USA and the UK, healthcare regulation is endemic...the regulatory ratchet appears to ensure that regulatory requirements are rarely relaxed or disestablished, and that each year regulation bites a little more tightly into the work of healthcare providers’ (pp. 221—2).

If regulators would commit themselves to more evaluation of what they do, then we might eventually be able to answer two fundamental questions: What can regulation be expected to achieve, and at what cost?
This book uses Hakim’s previous work on preference theory to explore the choices that men and women make regarding paid work and family life in Britain and Spain. Hakim argues that five historical social and labour market changes are producing a qualitatively different and new scenario of options and opportunities for women. These changes have to do with control over fertility, equal opportunities legislation, the expansion of white-collar jobs and jobs for secondary earners, and the increasing importance of attitudes, values and personal preferences. It is Hakim’s contention that change on these dimensions makes it possible for women to exercise real choice as to how they combine work and family. Employment, family models and sex role preferences have become ‘lifestyle choices’. In Hakim’s view, Britain has entered this new scenario of options and opportunities, whereas Spain is still in the process of so doing (for example, there are few part-time jobs for women as second earners), which explains the differences she finds in behaviour between the two countries. Thus something like the extent of childcare provision is not in and of itself important for understanding women’s choices; lifestyle preferences determine which practical constraint is seen as important. Even housing tenure, which Hakim does find to be a determinant of lifestyle preferences (families with mortgages are likely to need two earners) is conceptualised as a lifestyle choice.

Hakim’s findings for Britain and Spain are based on a survey of 3,651 adults aged 16 and over in Britain and 1,211 adults in Spain aged 18 and over. She identifies three lifestyle preferences of women – the home-centred, the work-centred and the ‘adaptive’ – by using three questions: whether the respondent accepts or rejects patriarchy; whether their ideal family model is equalitarian, role segregated or a compromise; and the extent of their work commitment. Hakim finds that sex differences are small, women are not more egalitarian than men and she concludes that ‘sex and gender are becoming redundant concepts’ (p. 88).

Hakim’s key argument for those interested in social policies is: given that women are increasingly in a position to make real choices, we may expect more diversity rather than more homogeneity. She argues that this is particularly important in relation to E – level policy, which is increasingly based on the adult worker model family, with childcare delegated to the public services (puzzlingly, Hakim equates this with the Swedish model of the family, however in fact this country provides as much childcare via cash payments for parental leave as by services). The fact that behaviour in respect of how paid and unpaid work is combined is indeed diverse among women is important, and Hakim’s point that policy makers have tended to ignore this has been highlighted in other recent analyses of the assumptions underpinning policies, including my own. However, the notion that individual choice has become key (or is becoming so in the case of Spain) is more controversial. There is no clue here as to why men make seemingly relentlessly career-oriented choices, with relatively little change in the amount of unpaid work that they do, while women are set to become increasingly ‘diverse’. Furthermore, there is now considerable

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279403247711

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evidence that women may have similar preferences but very different capacities for overcoming constraints (e.g. McRae, 2003).

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DOI: 10.1017/S004727940320218

There has for many years been a singular dearth of historical studies of Welsh — and indeed Scottish — health and medical history. Given the new regional/national political configurations of Wales and Scotland, there is now some urgency to the enterprise of historical work in this area, to provide context and, perhaps, points of reference, for the development of new regional strategies for health and medical care. It is, therefore, timely that 2003 has seen the appearance of several books on the history of health and medicine in Wales. Two have a North Welsh focus: Pamela Michael’s (2003) excellent study of the care of the mentally ill, and Edward Davies’ (2003) personally engaged account of the quarry hospitals and the health and welfare of the quarrymen. The collection of essays edited by Anne Borsay reviewed here has a more general focus on the principality as a whole, as well as a less specific subject remit.

Of the three volumes, the Borsay collection offers the most, in terms of its breadth of subject coverage. It is, however, a curiously bifurcated volume, thematically divided between the issue of the public and the private, which dominates, and that of Wales, which comes a poor second. Despite the topicality of the public/private theme for current policy development, there is no overt political message, and no claim to political relevance. The introduction, by Borsay and Dorothy Porter, chooses to focus on modernity and postmodernity, and on Jürgen Habermas’ ideas on the ‘public sphere’ and the dichotomy between ‘public’ and ‘private’. It is argued that Habermas’ dichotomy is too narrow a concept adequately to describe the provision of health services, and that it should be replaced by ‘the concept of the mixed economy in which the public or state sector and the private or commercial sector are conceived as separate from the charitable or voluntary sector and the informal sector comprising relatives, friends and neighbours’ (pp. 12–13). The reality of the mixed economy certainly comes over strongly in many of the essays that follow. Borsay and Porter also note class and gender issues as being neglected by Habermas, and these too are significant themes to be integrated into the concept of the mixed economy. The Welsh dimension to the book receives fairly scant attention in the introduction. This is a pity, as it disappoints expectations raised by the title: was there, in part or in whole, any distinctively Welsh experience of medicine? Is it possible or likely that one will be forged in the new political configuration?

The question of Wales and Welshness, or rather, its absence, is one of the problems with this book. In many respects it is an admirable compilation of high-quality essays. A broad range of topics is covered, including water supplies, school medical services, nursing, midwifery, health visitors and inequalities in health and medical care. The public/private theme is present in all to varying degrees. But, as a collection, these essays are not, with rare exceptions, specifically about the situation in Wales; the Welsh case tends to be a passive example of more
general considerations. The reader does not come away with any clear sense of a Welsh identity (or lack of identity, or identity subsumed in common patient experiences) in health and medicine. Nor are most of these essays about medicine: they are about health services — a very different matter. The reader will come away no wiser about the distinctive Welsh mortality and morbidity patterns, about hospitals and hospital practice in Wales, about the distribution and activities of general practitioners, or about the activities of the lively medical research establishments at Cardiff University and Cardiff city health department. Yet the issue of public/private touches all these also. Steven Thompson’s contribution on club practice in South Wales, which provides a tantalising glimpse of the politics of Welsh medical provision, and Pamela Michael’s subtle account of the emergence of institutional provision for potential suicides, stand out as contributions to both Welsh history and medical history strictly defined. Both demonstrate that a rich potential exists for studies which seriously engage with medicine in the particular social, cultural and political context of Wales. There is, these two essays suggest, a particular Welsh identity that is relevant to medicine’s history there. And if it comes to future health provision, it would be as well for policy makers to be aware of the contours and nature of that distinctive, historic, Welsh identity.

References


The majority of this book is the outcome of a study funded by the Department of Health undertaken by Moira Siddell, Jeanne Katz and Carol Komaromy from the Open University between 1995–99. It has to be one of the most comprehensive studies undertaken in the field of older people dying in care homes to date. Much of the research has already appeared in a number of different journals, however the book itself offers a very accessible text for those interested in promoting the care needs of older people dying in care homes.

The methodology of this four-year study is set out in the introduction (Chapter 1). There were two phases to the study. The first phase included a survey of 1,000 care homes across the Northwest, Southeast and West Midlands of England. Out of this sample 100 care home managers were interviewed and a further 12 homes acted as ‘case studies’ for more in-depth study. The second phase looked at the training needs of care home staff. Following a ‘needs analysis’, training material was subsequently developed around a ‘learner-centred’ approach, and piloted in 17 care homes (Chapter 8). Macmillan Cancer Relief is currently undertaking the publication of the full training package.

Following the introduction, Chapter 2 details policies that have influenced the separate development of residential homes and nursing homes from the early part of the twentieth century prior to bringing all care homes under National Minimum Standards in 2001. The reference to the ‘death and dying’ standard then sets the scene for the next five chapters
Throughout these chapters reference is made to vignettes and case studies of residents who died in the 12 case study homes. The demographic data from the survey is reported alongside the differing dying trajectories to be found in care homes. The authors emphasise the difficulty of defining/diagnosing dying when a resident’s decline does not follow a straightforward path of continuous deterioration. The wider concept of the palliative care approach from this point gets drawn into a discussion specifically around death and dying, albeit structured around the principles of palliative care. Attention is given to the needs of relatives and other residents when a death occurs, and the vital relationship with care homes that GPs and district nurses have. At the end of each chapter suggestions on how to improve aspects of care are discussed in light of current literature. Particular attention is given to the practical application of palliative care in the residential sector in Chapter 9. From a critical stance of the text in these chapters, I felt there is a slight overplay of the reference to ‘pain’ as a major feature of the actual dying process in older people. In my clinical experience in this field, ‘anxiety’ is often mistaken for pain especially in the final dying phase. Where more attention is necessary is to the appropriate assessment and management of pain in residents who are still mobile and especially in residents unable to articulate their needs.

In Chapter 10, Miriam Moss and her colleagues from the USA give an insightful discussion of end-of-life care in nursing homes from the other side of the Atlantic. Although within a differing reimbursement system, the same pressure to provide for the elderly dying is common to both countries. There appears to be a far greater uptake of advance directives in the care plans of residents in the USA, with a report that 58 per cent of the nursing home population had completed an advanced directive in 1996. However, there is contradictory evidence as to the operationalisation of these directives.

The final two chapters (Chapters 11 and 12) give some important pointers on how current palliative care knowledge might be incorporated more fully within the care home sector. Relationships play a major role at the micro level within the care home and with the immediate care providers, but also have a place at the macro level. For the expert care of residents dying in care homes both aspects of these relationships need to be more formally established. Visionary initiatives such as collaborative models, and the greater use of specialist palliative care knowledge and geriatric care are encouraged to augment the already vital end-of-life care that care homes give to their residents.

This book is an important springboard for the enormous challenge ahead if care homes are to meet their full potential in the important area of symptom control and the holistic care of residents facing the last few weeks of their life. The emphasis in this book is on death and dying rather than the wider concept of the ‘palliative care approach’. The book is an extremely accessible text and a most insightful read for anyone wanting to improve care given at the end-of-life in care homes. It also provides valuable insight for anyone considering palliative care research in this important care context.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279403277710

This book highlights the ‘rapid escalation in the range and scale of parenting interventions’ (p. 3), under New Labour, by various government departments with different, sometimes conflicting,
priorities. For Henricson, the lack of an accompanying umbrella statement of expectations of parents or of parents’ relationship with the state, is a problem. Focusing on England and Wales, she discusses how this situation might be remedied, and, in particular, the possibility and utility of incorporating a statement of parents’ rights and responsibilities into a parents’ code.

This is an interesting and ambitious project. Henricson draws together different strands of government policy into three main chapters on financial support, care and control of children and identifying who is a parent. The final chapter reviews developments in selected other jurisdictions and provides a draft of a parents’ code.

Overall, Henricson does a good job of reviewing government policies and identifying tensions between them. The chapters on ‘who is a parent’ and ‘care and control’ are the more assured and raise several interesting issues. For example, in the light of the high incidence of single parenthood and serial partnerships, she suggests that the government should recognise that most of the burden often falls on women and should clarify the differences in nature and degree of parental responsibility between resident and non-resident parents (pp. 64–5). She argues for a statement indicating that child support obligations derive from a genetic connection to a child and do not reflect or bestow parental responsibility (p. 66). She highlights the general lack of government statements as to parents’ role in caring for their children and in providing for their physical safety (pp. 52–3). She also criticises the government for bowing to public opinion on ‘smacking’ and provides a principled suggestion, based on the Swedish experience, for how policy could change in this area (p. 52). These, and several other points, support Henricson’s argument for a principled policy review.

Henricson’s preference for a code of rights and responsibilities as the end product of this review is clear. It is reflected in the structure of the three main chapters, each of which is subdivided into four sections: rights, responsibilities and the questions and ambiguities raised by each. This structure is interesting in providing pointers as to how well government policies fit a rights-based analysis. However, Henricson’s argument for a code is undermined by her pragmatic approach to certain issues, including parenting orders (pp. 45–7).

Similar and other criticisms may be made of the chapter on financial support. On the one hand, Henricson rightly highlights this government’s commitment to eradicating child poverty through a raft of benefits and tax credits and support for childcare, many of which have benefited families, particularly those with a parent in work (pp. 16–18). She also criticises the greater emphasis on conditionality attached to benefits and the geographical targeting of programmes including Sure Start (pp. 19–20).

However, the chapter disappoints in its lack of assurance with respect to concepts of poverty, and of universalism and of means-testing or targeting in relation to the tax and benefits system. Strikingly, she does not mention the still high rates of child poverty in the UK (Sutherland et al., 2003), nor its effects on family life. Further, she seems to dismiss relative poverty as a concern, and questions ‘how far . . . can [the government] go in reducing financial differentials and consequently relative deprivation’ (p. 19). The opportunity of raising questions as to whether recent increases in tax credits for children may be undermined by not raising benefits for their parents, notably those not in work (Ridge, 2002), is also missed. Similarly, Henricson accepts the government’s emphasis on ‘work to welfare’ without scrutinising the adequacy of benefits for those not in work, nor the gendered effects of these policies, particularly on lone parents (Rake, 2001). Henricson does refer to the emphasis in Nordic welfare systems of rights (including for children) as a citizen but does not develop this idea fully and, on pragmatic grounds, does not include any right to any particular level of financial support for families in her draft code (p. 99). These omissions might well undermine many poor parents’ trust in the motivations behind a code.
Overall, Henricson does not make an entirely convincing case for a legislated code as opposed, for example, to a public education campaign using various media, such as television advertising as in Scotland. She is more persuasive with respect to the need for a policy review, incorporating a long process (as in Sweden) (p. 85) of public consultation and education. While emphasising the need for a code to reflect the diversity of parenting among different cultural and socio-economic groups, Henricson provides few suggestions as to how this debate might take place. If the idea of a code is to take root in a legal culture less accustomed to such approaches, and a political culture which has preferred to highlight punitive rather than supportive measures for parents, a long and inclusive process of development would seem particularly important.

References

DOI: 10.1017/S0047279403287717

This is a most welcome publication that not only challenges assumptions concerning disabled people as parents but also explores this relationship through a wide range of influential factors. From the outset, the authors adopt a social model approach, which locates the experience of disability as one of ‘social organisation, access and equality of opportunity’. Furthermore, they define parenting as a ‘social role’ that many disabled people are excluded from by a number of barriers. They expand on these explanations throughout the text whilst drawing on perspectives that differentiate between impairment and disability, as well as highlighting the marginalised position of parents with learning difficulties and mental health distress. The use of the narrative extracts of their research participants is particularly poignant in marking these distinctions, as well as underpinning debates. In effect, this comprehensive study builds upon previous literature on disability and parenting (Booth and Booth, 1994), as well as supporting life course transitions from adulthood to parenthood (Priestley, 2000, 2001). However, this is the first substantial UK study that examines the views of disabled parents and their families.

I particularly liked the format in which this book is presented. Each chapter has an introduction to the main themes and a well-rounded conclusion. This effectively provides a series of short discussion papers, although these are by no means isolated because they interact extremely well together. The main thrust of the argument begins in chapter 1 when it is acknowledged that disabled parents have been increasingly active in demanding recognition, yet their role as parents remains low on the agenda. The following investigation, therefore, sets out to scrutinise this situation in the form of a literature review. It demonstrates how this exclusion has taken place in mainstream research on parenting and families, and within a social policy context. Various examples of UK legislation and policies, which inform professionals and
practice, are used to illustrate how this invisibility is maintained. Disabled parents are viewed as recipients of ‘care’ themselves, as opposed to providers of it, while numerous medicalised reports have been devoted to the negative consequences for children whose parents are disabled.

Chapters 3 and 4 go on to tackle some of these concerns by utilising the research findings in relationship to support and access issues, as well as the complex arguments surrounding children as young ‘carers’. The case studies highlight that the needs of disabled parents are really no different from non-disabled parents. Rather, it is the barriers experienced in participating in parenthood that present dilemmas. The authors argue that broader economic and social divisions need to be focused on, particularly in relation to disadvantage and gender — these requiring greater awareness than specialised welfare arrangements geared towards parents so-called ‘special needs’. Part of this attention needs to be directed towards the role of children in families and relationships. It is this section of the study that I found interesting, especially the first-hand accounts of parents’ and childrens’ understanding and interpretation of ‘caring’ and domestic work. This fine piece of research certainly challenges many of the assumptions concerning the children of disabled parents as automatically being ‘young carers’. Nonetheless, the conflict participants experienced with professional, and an understandable mistrust with formal service provision, further compounded their dilemmas.

The final chapters explore the more ‘personal side’ as well as the fluid nature of both disability and parenting. Using a life course approach (also see Priestley, 2000) the authors again integrate narrative data to illustrate the changing dynamics and ways in which parents manage their roles in different times and circumstances. These personal accounts serve to reinforce the argument that professionals who are involved in the lives of disabled adults appear unaware of their parenting responsibilities. Such lack of awareness is underpinned by prejudices and the continuing ‘moral responsibility’ argument that disabled people should not have children. (Beresford and Wilson, 2002).

The book concludes with an examination of the parenting process and sets out recommendations for future areas of study. In so doing the researchers acknowledge the limitations in their study, and draw our attention to the persistent under-representation of disabled fathers and disabled parents from minority ethnic communities. Thus, the book goes some way towards challenging ideas about disabled parents as well as bridging a vital gap in our understanding of the daily lives and experiences of disabled people. I suggest that these accounts present a number of issues regarding assessment and services for those in the ‘caring’ professions. Indeed, I would recommend this as fundamental reading for social workers, healthcare and childhood studies students as well as being an important contribution to disability literature.

**References**


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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279403297713

Parenting in Poor Environments utilises an ecological approach to explore social support as a potential buffer to parental stress in economically disadvantaged environments. This is a welcome and timely work, given the continued interest in social capital, and offers a UK perspective on the role of both community ecology and statutory services in the task of child-rearing. Using data gathered from questionnaires and qualitative interviews, Ghate and Hazel's starting point is the hypothesis that in disadvantaged communities it is the fractured nature of the communities rather than the correlates of poverty themselves that make bringing up children an activity more stressful than in more affluent areas. Their findings demonstrate that deprived communities do not appear to suffer from high degrees of social fragmentation but that parents within them can still experience significant barriers to utilising support. The work also looks at the role of semi-formal and formal support services and offers sections defining and evaluating the respective forms of support in the lives of parents.

With respect to informal support they show with quantitative data the disparity often experienced between the size of the social network and its valence, the term they use to describe the strength of network connections between people. This second factor is critical as the authors show how having access to a potential number of supporters does not necessarily entail a subjective feeling of being supported or being able to draw upon this potential community resource. In explaining this disparity they suggest those with smaller networks who feel more supported get better ‘value’ out of their networks and highlight the case of single parents, who, although citing smaller networks, received higher levels of actual enacted support. They also express concern that ethnic minority parents feel less supported in disadvantaged communities and have lower incidences of enacted support.

A strength of this work lies in its complex construction of support as a measurable entity. Their finding that parenting is a relatively unsupported activity in disadvantaged communities and that support is experienced subjectively in complex, counter-intuitive ways may be of use to practitioners. Perhaps of more use to such readers are the sections on access to formal measures of support. Here they illustrate how formal support services can be inappropriately tailored to the needs of potential users and how, crucially, they may be viewed as undermining parental autonomy and be seen as a sign of failure by potential users. There is good use of qualitative data to show how the needs of parents can be mismatched to available formal support services.

There are limitations to this work however, such as their citing of individual factors (the ‘temperamentally disadvantaged’) as an explanation as to why some parents feel unable to access community level social capital. The work is stronger investigating the beliefs of parents regarding access to community-level support when it begins to uncover more convincing underlying causes for feelings of isolation. However, the qualitative side of this project, from which such insights can be drawn, is not given the centre stage that the positivistic work receives and at times, especially in sections on informal support, reads like an add-on in an attempt to offer methodological balance. That said, this book should still feature on reading lists of researchers interested in exploring the relationship between families and their wider communities as well as having something to offer to on-going discussion around social capital (although the authors resist locating their work firmly within the context of this debate). Additionally, social work practitioners may take something from the recommendations for policy and practice that conclude this volume, in particular the suggestions that formal
measures of support be tailored to enhance parental autonomy and meet parents’ self-defined needs.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279403307718

This book is another product of the Young Carers Research Group at the University of Loughborough. For well over a decade the authors, Jo Aldridge and Sarah Becker, have been accumulating an impressive body of evidence about children and young persons who find themselves having to care for parents or other family members. Young people living in these circumstances can too easily find themselves in a liminal world, facing competing demands and obligations from those who need their care, but also from their siblings, peers and formal organisations like schools, colleges or employers who have expectations of them. Unlike groups of adult carers, young carers face these issues at a time when their identities, social and educational competencies and self awareness are still at a formative stage. As such, young carers can be perceived as a particularly vulnerable group, and only since the mid 1990s has their circumstances in the UK been acknowledged in legislative and policy terms.

In the present book, Aldridge and Becker shed light on a sub-group of these young people, namely those caring for parents with severe and enduring mental illness. Assumptions about the relationships between signs of mental health, parenting capacity and effects on children are scrutinised in the first two chapters. In reviewing the evidence the authors draw pivotally important conclusions. First, it is suggested that little sound evidence can be found in support of a link between a parent’s diagnosis of mental health and indicators of neglect or harm in children. Over-deterministic medical research that pathologises families living with mental illness is seen as shaping perceptions about the likelihood of such links. Evidence drawn from studies about caregiving children, on the other hand, suggests that a more complex set of relationships needs to be understood that takes account of co-residency, caregiving and wider social relationships, with all their associated obligations and opportunities. A second key conclusion to be drawn from the evidence is that the onset of parental mental illness does not necessarily imply long-term loss of parenting function, though it can result in what the authors describe as parental ‘absence’ and a lack of reflexivity that may require children to fulfil caregiving roles when others are unavailable. Expeditious (life event) and enduring factors (for example poor housing, financial problems, other chronic health conditions) are seen as linked factors invoking the need for care by children.

Consistent with much of the literature on adult family caregiving, it was found that many of the children in the study depicted caring in positive terms, reflecting filial closeness, an increased sense of maturity and improved empathy for other vulnerable people. Further, it appeared that children did not necessarily seek consistency of parental health, but rather continuity in their relationships with their parents. In pursuit of this latter goal it was evident that children were keen to resist separation from parents by almost any means. Herein lies a central dilemma for professionals – in a culture of risk and a commitment to child protection, how can young carers of parents with mental illness be supported to maintain valued relationships with their parents? One would have to ask, in light of the case illustrations provided, whether the typical
stances assumed by professionals on this matter are swayed unduly by some of the outworn assumptions about the risks of child abuse and neglect in contexts where children are caregivers.

Refreshingly the authors avoid unidirectional thinking that assumes stress and burden among caregiving children, but they offer some telling accounts about how things can escalate when mental illness in parents is further complicated by social and environmental problems as well as by other co-morbid conditions. The central message here is that a sensitive appreciation of children living in such circumstances requires, from professionals, an ecologically rooted and systemic view of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the family as a whole. Though a clear exhortation, implementing this will require careful resolution of competing adult mental health and child protection policies within which children caring for parents with mental illness too readily lose out.

This book provides interesting evidence about triggering as well as maintenance factors in young caring. As such it will help to alert professionals to the range of obligations, demands and rewards that operate in such situations. It concludes with an attempt to map the experiences of children along two continua, respectively the nature of illness and the caring role. Though not wholly convincing as a device to sensitise the reader to the range of interactions between (mental) illness and caregiving, it is a step towards understanding a complex world that still requires much more research. Personally, I would like to have seen more use of critical writing on social models of disability and illness, and of the growing body of evidence about resilience in children and families following loss, trauma or the onset of disability in developing a framework for understanding how children care. However, the authors have illumined a neglected twilight world in some very interesting ways, and the synthesis of the experiences of young carers, parents and professionals well serves its primary purpose. This book deserves to be widely read by academics, policy makers, students and all people working within mental health and children’s services.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279403317714

*Children’s Rights and Power: Charging up for a New Century* is the latest book in a series that concentrates on the theme of children’s rights and empowerment. Number 9 in the series, the book engages with the issue of power and control, a subject which is often neglected, but which is fundamental to understanding children’s capacity to realise and exercise their rights. To inform her analysis, John weaves children’s own experiences as the central thread of her enquiry, and this provides us with a complex and fascinating array of social, economic and cultural insights, which illustrate the sheer diversity of children’s lives. Her analysis is extensive and the book is divided into five parts that look in turn at psychology and children, children and the economy, children’s capacity to survive and endure, their experiences of war and labour and their capacity to be active social and political citizens.

In the first section of the book, John provides a stringent critique of psychology and the ‘genetic fallacy’, the focus on what has already happened rather than in the meaning and significance of the present and future. She argues that this leads to ignoring children’s lived experiences and meanings, which are located in the present here and now. Although she acknowledges that psychology has progressed in its approach to children, she challenges whether children’s contributions are still really seen as anything other than developmental milestones, rather than recognised as significant insights into their lives in the present.
In her analysis of children and the economy she exposes the adult centric nature of statistical accounting and the overall invisibility of children in the economic world. Social, economic and political strategies have a profound impact on children’s lives, and John presents a powerful indictment of our failure to account for children and the devastation that war and political manoeuvrings, such as sanctions, can bring to their lives and well-being. This provides a compelling and thought-provoking reminder of the harsh realities of many children’s lives in unsettled regions of the world today.

To explore the economic and cultural pressures that increasingly shape children’s lives John focuses on children living in the developed world. She reveals the entrapment of children in a consumer society, which leaves them relatively powerless, and in thrall to the illusion of choice and the orchestration of desire. John argues powerfully that in the face of the ‘corporate construction of childhood’, children are hostages, ‘conscripted into consumption and rendered powerless in powerful ways’. This is an important insight into the shaping of children as consumers. However, her analysis of the impact of consumer culture on children in low-income families is rather negative and one-dimensional. It is suggested that these children are socialised into accepting poverty and powerlessness and implicitly collude with the inevitability of continuing disadvantage. Yet other research (Roker, 1998; Ridge, 2003) shows that children who are poor are active social and moral agents, who endeavour to make sense of their lives in constructive and imaginative ways. Their experiences of poverty and their responses to being poor are diverse and multi-dimensional, and certainly far more complex that John’s analysis would lead us to understand.

In the third section of the book, John looks at children as survivors, warriors and workers. Here children’s capacity for endurance and resilience is fully revealed. Next we gain a valuable insight into the ways that children adapt and respond to the challenges they face in ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. Finally children’s role as active citizens is addressed, and their political participation, protest, activism, environmentalism and political engagement are explored across a wide range of different arenas. In this final section of the book, John argues persuasively that children are increasingly repositioning themselves, not as ‘powerless and dependant but as partners in a new relationship with adults involving reciprocal relationships’. However, she also points to the difficulties in developing and sustaining initiatives which truly liberate children when other issues circumscribe their lives, including their dependence on adults for the distribution of resources.

Overall this is a book of hope, which engages with children’s own values and meanings, and shows that children are capable, resilient and enduring. It is about empowerment, the exercise of power and the search for a voice that will be heeded. In many ways is a deeply personal book, and John draws on half a century of experience to set out her vision of a world in which children have a right to be heard, and the right to be treated as people regardless of age, circumstance or context. To do so she places children’s lives and experiences squarely in the centre of a thoughtful and passionate analysis of children rights and their experiences of power on a global scale.

References

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These are two edited collections in two of the Ashgate series which focus on the social security and social policy fields. Bradshaw's book is Volume 8 in the *International Studies on Social Security* series, which is comprised of collections of papers from the annual conferences of the Foundation for International Studies in Social Security, in this case representing papers from the June 2001 conference on the theme of Children and Social Security. Buck and Smith's is in the *Cash and Care* series associated with the work of the Social Policy Research Unit at York and edited by Bradshaw himself and (until her recent untimely death) Sally Baldwin. Both volumes are also collections of papers taken from academic conferences. Bradshaw's as explained above and Buck and Smith from a conference on 'Reforming the Social Fund', which the editors organized in Leicester in November 2001.

It is not surprising therefore that both of these books exhibit many of the strengths and weaknesses of conference collections. In both cases there is a wide range of diverse contributions. There is diversity both in subject and in focus, with a number of international contributions in Buck and Smith's collection, which might be expected to have a narrower concentration on UK policy development. Diversity brings breadth, but it also courts diffusion; and to some extent both books suffer from a lack of a clear and central theme linking all contributions. These collections also usually take a while to bring to fruition. Both of these are based on events in 2001 (and the papers therefore refer to even earlier times) so there is the concern (ever present in social policy) that significant recent developments may have overshadowed some of the messages contained in the contributions here; and in the case of Bradshaw's in particular this is to some extent the case.

Of the two my feeling is that Buck and Smith's collection has the clearer structure and focus. This may simply be a product of the fact that its subject is one particular feature of UK social policy; and this is counter-balanced by the fact that Bradshaw's collection contains an excellent introduction and overview provided by the editor. This includes a summary compilation of comparative data about, and recent trends in, child poverty in OECD countries. These data, taken from OECD and EU sources, is inevitably rather dated and largely predates the UK government's recent policy commitments to reduce (and then eliminate) child poverty. Nevertheless it makes rather grim reading for a UK audience, with the UK towards the upper end of comparative child poverty levels and with trends up to the later 1990s showing levels increasing here at a greater rate than in comparator nations (Figure 2, p. xxii).

Bradshaw's book is then structured around three themes: international comparisons of child poverty, child benefit packages and other aspects of social security for children. The first section expands on some of the comparative evidence. It includes a contribution from the US, where Danziger explores why child poverty is so much higher there than in Europe despite economic boom and welfare reform – in short because, 'Americans must demonstrate a greater willingness to spend public funds' (p. 19) to supplement recent policy reforms (although he does not hold out much hope for this). Middleton and Adelman write from the UK presenting data from the recent Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey and conclude (in an interesting contrast with US policy practice) that, 'employment cannot be the only answer to ending child ... poverty' (p. 34). This section also contains contributions from Sweden and Belgium, and includes some analysis of the major international poverty dataset, the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS).
The section on child benefit packages also provides useful comparative information on different policy practices, for instance, in Australia, Canada, the UK and US, and New Zealand. There is also, for the technically minded, econometric analysis of intergenerational transfers and their impact on child poverty. The final section, as the name suggests, is somewhat less focused but includes a useful review of recent child support reforms in the US and UK, and chapters on South Africa and Switzerland. This is therefore a wide-ranging comparative text and will be useful to those wanting to examine research evidence on the subject across a number of OECD nations.

Buck and Smith’s book is an examination of the working of the Social Fund, introduced by the UK government as part of the social security reforms of 1988 (actually legislated for in 1986). At the time of its introduction there was quite a bit of academic debate about and research on the new fund, most notably the official evaluation carried out at York (Huby and Dix, 1992). Most of this, including the official evaluation, was also very critical of both the aims and the workings of the fund. Since then, however, little has been said, and less done, about the Social Fund, although, as is clear from the contributions to this book, most of the problems identified by the early critics have continued to dog its practice – and to deprive its potential clientele.

The 2001 conference, and this collection, was therefore an attempt to resurrect academic and policy interest in the fund and the re-open the research questions that have been left largely dormant for the past decade or so. This was a desirable and necessary task, for the problems experienced by means-tested benefit claimants who cannot afford to purchase or replace major household items remain a major contribution to the experience of poverty and social exclusion in twenty-first century Britain. And, despite the protestations in occasional ministerial statements, the new Labour government do not seem to have seen policy development in this area as a central feature of their renewed commitments to combating poverty and ‘modernising’ social security.

For those who wish to understand the context and development of this area of social security policy, therefore, this is an excellent collection, and includes ‘A Brief History’ by one of the earlier critics, Gary Craig. There is also some interesting comparative discussion of how similar provision has developed in other EU countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands and France. Like Bradshaw’s the book is divided into three themes: historical and political context, meeting exceptional needs in practice and the prospects for reform. However, it is not clear that these do strongly structure the content (why is the example from France in Part III, for instance?); and readers will probably simply select chapters from their individual titles. Here there are some interesting choices, with contributors focusing on broader issues such as politics and social justice, and more practical subjects such as the nature of claimants and the decision-making process. Most readers will probably gravitate towards the editors’ final chapter on ‘The prospects for reform’, however. This provides a useful overview of the earlier contributions and concludes that there are ‘fundamental weaknesses’ in the current constitution of the Social Fund, requiring a programme of ‘substantial and radical reform’ (p. 214). No surprises here, perhaps; but two years after the conference we are still waiting for any political recognition of this – hopefully the publication of the book will re-ignite some further debate.

Reference

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This book, edited by the Norwegian researcher Torild Hammer, is one in a row of studies on inclusion and exclusion that have been published during the last couple of years. Several of them, including this book, report on comparative research projects that were carried out in the context of the EU’s fourth and fifth Framework Programmes. *Youth Unemployment and Social Exclusion* reports on a study that took place in ten European countries: Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Scotland, Spain and Sweden. The number of countries makes this project undoubtedly one of the largest social scientific investigations funded by the 4th and 5th Framework Programmes.

The EU funded research projects on social exclusion in general and social exclusion of young people specifically reflect the various methodological traditions present in current social scientific research. Some are based on large-scale, extensive data collection techniques, while others use a more intensive, qualitative research design; unfortunately, only few projects use a combination of these research strategies. The research project coordinated by Torild Hammer used the former research design. The book is based on a survey, carried out in 1996/97, among the impressively large number of 17,000 young people in the ten countries involved in the project. The criterion used in sampling was three months of continuous unemployment in the half year before the moment of sampling. The survey took place about one year after sampling was carried out. This procedure made it possible to compare various groups of young people that went through a period of unemployment: a group that managed to enter employment, a group participating in education, training or other activation programmes and a group that was still unemployed.

The empirical results of the study are presented and discussed in nine chapters. In addition, there is an introductory chapter, a methodological chapter and a concluding chapter. Details on the sample and attrition are elaborated in an appendix. Fortunately, the authors have decided not to present their empirical results in country-by-country chapters, as a major disadvantage of such structure can be that comparative analysis receives relatively little attention. Instead, each of the nine chapters discusses one aspect of Youth Unemployment and Social Exclusion, presenting and comparing data from all, or part of, the countries that participated in the project. Thus, there is a chapter on unemployment and labour-market inclusion; a chapter on temporary employment; a chapter on recurrent unemployment among young people; two chapters on activation policies; a chapter analysing financial circumstances of young unemployed people; two chapters on health and psychological well-being; and one chapter on political participation of unemployed young people.

As one may expect given the large number of respondents and countries involved in this research, the book presents a wealth of data and information on young unemployed people in the European Union. And, as mentioned before, it does so on a variety of issues relevant in the context of research into youth unemployment. Given the general research question underlying the project, which addressed ‘the degree to which labour market position correlates with other social circumstances in the lives of young people’, one may conclude that the research team has lived up to expectations. As far as the originality of the project and the book are concerned, this lies mainly in its comparative dimension and in the scale of the investigation. The way the concept of exclusion is used in the book, is quite traditional and pragmatic. It maps the situation of young unemployed people in a variety of domains and respects. It does not, however – as the book cover suggests – answer the question whether unemployment leads to exclusion.
Whether or not, and if so to what degree, unemployment is the causal factor in explaining the situations young unemployed people are living in, is a question that, in my view, should have received more serious attention in the book. The book does also not – although this is suggested on its cover as well – answer the question how young people cope with unemployment. In my understanding, ‘coping with unemployment’ refers to active action strategies developed by unemployed people to prevent (further) marginalisation, exclusion and isolation and to improve their situation in terms of inclusion. In Torild Hammer’s project, ‘coping’ was given a much narrower meaning, and operationalised in terms of agreement or disagreement with items such as having more time for family and friends, and having more time for hobbies. Nevertheless, these critical remarks do not take away that this book is recommended reading for everyone who is interested in the situation of young unemployed people in Europe.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0047279403347713

When one of Europe’s leading authorities on retirement pensions publishes a book of this quality one has to sit up and take notice. Jay Ginn has produced another tour de force and I support Kirk Mann’s glowing endorsement on the back cover, calling the book, ‘the definitive text on gender and pensions’. As the publishers’ description on the back cover says, this book is a ‘provocative’ read. It needs to be because, despite the research evidence, since (if not before) the abolition of 1978 State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) in the early 1980s, women have had a bad deal in pensions. The book’s central focus is given away by the subtitle and each chapter builds a mass of carefully researched evidence in support of such a policy strategy and focus.

The book most definitely should become essential reading for all who study and research within the disciplines of social policy, sociology, women’s studies and social work and within the field of social gerontology. I would urge all those who teach in these areas to ensure that their reading lists have the book in a very prominent position and give every encouragement to their students to read it. Yet I would suggest that the real audience for this book are the policy makers in Whitehall and Brussels who should take time to read what Dr Ginn has to say, but more importantly, to act upon its sensible and pragmatic conclusions. She and her colleague Sara Arber, and a number of others, have been putting forward their carefully researched argument in this area for over a decade. Yet there is, as she writes, still a neglect of gender issues in pension policy debates. I agree with her position that a women-centred perspective is essential when formulating policy on pensions. Presently and continuing with the trend since 1908 (in the UK at least), pensions have always been designed by men for men. A much more reflexive social policy is required in this area that accounts for the central role in caring and the very different employment and earnings cycle that most women have. Such a policy, adopting her central thesis, should accommodate the changing demographic and the new family forms that are arising as a result.

The majority of the evidence contained within the 111 pages of text has been stated elsewhere in her extensive body of work in this area. Yet such repetition is required, since it is clear that the research evidence has been read and ignored or at least sidelined. Yet this text is
not simply a repetition, since she further refines it, introducing new evidence based upon her more recent research.

The chapters collectively build and develop her argument through an analysis of first, an overview of the trends in the employment and the closely linked pension outcomes of women. This is followed by a detailed analysis, using very recent research evidence from the (UK) General Household Survey (GHS) on women’s pension choices and inequalities. Chapter 3 continues this analysis, but utilises the (UK) Family Resources Survey dataset and specifically focuses upon gender and ethnicity. The next two chapters consider the links with first, educational achievement and pensions and then employment and pensions and the impact of motherhood. Here she confronts and argues against the recent though very important work of Rake et al. (2000) and Davies et al. (2000). She concludes (p. 80) that contrary to their conclusions, ‘there is no support for the expectation that graduate mothers will maintain almost continuous full-time employment throughout the lifecourse’ with the consequential ‘knock-on’ effects upon pension building. These are important findings, if not for policy, for the increasing numbers of female graduates themselves. The analysis is then widened in the next chapter to consider the adequacy of pensions policy in the European Union. The final chapter summarises the argument of the book and sets out an alternative strategy for British pensions policy, which incorporates a women-centred focus and accommodates the changing nature of family formation. This, in brief, argues for the replacement of the basic state pension with a citizen’s pension, set at a sufficiently high level to prevent poverty and indexed to national standards of living (something I support). She also offers a less radical solution, namely a substantial rise in the basic pension linking it with earnings alongside a revitalised State Earnings Related Pension. Throughout, her engaging and authoritative, yet accessible, writing style urges you to read further and I read the whole book at a single sitting. As I have already stated, I found this a fascinating and illuminating read and would urge readers of this journal to purchase a copy, if not for their students and libraries for themselves.

References

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DOI: 10.1017/S004727940335771X

The period this book addresses saw major changes both in British society and in conventional ideas of what British poverty was. Just as the nature of poverty changed, so the perception of what was intolerable also changed. This leads to the paradox which some still find incomprehensible, that even at higher material levels of living it was possible for poverty to persist in both extent and intensity, and for the same structural reasons (inadequate wages and benefits) at the end of that period as at the start. Statistical ‘facts’ alone cannot explain this: only epistemological analysis of changing paradigms and experiences can do so. But this book is written from the perspective
of economic history. It offers a mass of contemporary statistics on social conditions – such as employment and wages in the labour market, demography, consumer prices and nutrition, drawn from many sources – and reworks the primary material when relevant, to illuminate the issues around material deprivations. The seven chapters open with the Victorian legacy, then consider evidence of the nature and causes (meaning structural correlates) of poverty during the first and second 20 years of the century, the relationship between unemployment and poverty between the wars, the 1940s, and the final 15 years.

The book’s treatment of poverty is in terms of whatever contemporary social researchers said it was. It reviews the many statistical surveys of poverty which followed Rowntree for four decades, all of which used as their defining measure some amended version of his original minimum subsistence budget. It distinguishes them in detail, drawing close attention to the comparisons of each constituent of the priced elements, in particular the scientifically developing ideas of proper nutrition and its costs, as well as to the problems of equivalence scales. It emphasises the differences which changes in the composition and cash value of these aspects made to the poverty counts based on the aggregated measures.

The book is useful as an economic history account of social conditions and a summary of contemporary poverty counts, but it is not a history of ideas about poverty. It treats disparate approaches to conceptualising poverty as if they were comparable variants on a single dimensional scale. What and how much poverty there was is a problematic question of differential perspectives, and cannot be answered by the use of minimum subsistence budgets, however sophisticated. They measured only what middle-class elites thought poor people ought to be able to live on to achieve nothing more than physical subsistence, and ignored what ordinary people needed in order to take a minimally decent part in society according to its own standards at that time. Rowntree’s own explanation that his primary poverty measure was deliberately asocial for heuristic reasons is curiously ascribed to me (whereas I merely reported it), yet it is crucial to distinguishing conflicting perspectives on poverty. The influential statistician Bowley, too, recognised that larger incomes might be needed to avoid poverty than were embodied in his widely used ‘poverty’ measures. The nearest anyone got to counting the numbers in socially defined poverty in this period was when Booth and then Rowntree counted the numbers visibly living in want and squalor in the 1890s; it did not reappear until the publication of Townsend’s Poverty in the United Kingdom in 1979.

There are similar unanswered epistemological problems in the book’s comparisons between the asocial minimum subsistence budgets and Rowntree’s attempts at a living wage budget, his Human Needs of Labour prescriptions (1918 and 1937), as well as with the Beveridge constructs in 1942. It is doubtful if the variety of incompatible measures, none of which were based on evidence of the income boundary between poverty and adequacy, still less the details of Beveridge’s proposed scales which at the time were admitted to be no more than rationalisations of less-eligibility, justify the book’s extensive and highly detailed quantitative calculations.

What the quoted surveys show is that during this period millions of people lived on incomes insufficient even for physical subsistence. Millions more were living socially and physically stunted lives, but we cannot know exactly how many because the methodological tools were blunted by the elite’s limited perception of poverty at that time, and its confusion between conceptualising and measuring poverty on the one hand and of financing residual income maintenance on the other. Some contemporary experts did comment on this confusion, and the book could have made more of their insights. There are also some unfortunate typos, including repeatedly naming the redoubtable Dr M’Gonigle as M’Gongile, and the Whitley as Whitely Councils.

Readers who are not as critical as I am about what definition or measure of poverty is being used may find this a useful book. Sociologists of poverty may wonder if the book’s
conclusions about changes in poverty rates would have been different if empirical methods had been available instead of the asocial normative methods so fully and statistically reported here. As John Clare’s biographer recently wrote, commenting on the effect of the Enclosures, ‘What matters to individual lives is personal experience, not economic statistics.’ Perhaps that is the key distinction between the approaches of economic history and of sociology to reporting on poverty.

**Notes**

that we are dealing with genderless units or by distorting women’s experiences. Because these issues are so important it is a pity that the force of her argument is occasionally lost amidst rather clumsy syntax and what could be labeled ‘soundbite sociology’.

Nazroo’s essay is impressive in that he combines a sophisticated quantitative analysis with an understanding of the methodological bases of competing forms of explanation. He reminds us, importantly, of the danger of arguments which seek to account for differential health outcomes by resorting to discredited notions of ‘race’ and a crude essentialist interpretation of culture and ethnicity.

Mason and Harrison, as befits those with many years of research experience in the areas about which they are writing, provide highly readable and cogent analyses of the employment and housing market experiences of Britain’s minorities. Both conclude that whilst much progress has been made by minorities (taken as a whole) over the past few decades, the ‘ethnic penalty’ still blights the lives of many, especially those from sections of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations.

Modood’s paper once again stresses the major gains made by the descendents of post-war migrants from the New Commonwealth, in this case by accessing higher education in ever-increasing numbers. Once again multivariate analysis is deployed so as to compare and contrast degrees of access to the higher education sector. As with Nazroo’s piece, he also provides a useful rebuttal of crude culturalist explanations of differences in outcomes. It is much stronger on the tertiary sector than it is on the roots of inequality (located in part in schooling). There is a slightly curious claim (p. 58) that research has not fully addressed the gulf ‘in progress in British schools’ between ‘Caribbean’ and ‘some Asian’ groups. Although he remains unconvinced of its ultimate worth, there is a substantial body of literature going as far back as the 1980s, e.g. Troyna (1988) and Smith and Tomlinson (1989).

Virinder Kalra’s piece on policing and urban disorder provides a timely reminder of the social consequences of material inequality, and not simply amongst minority communities. Rather than ending at this point, I feel the volume would have benefited from a summary pulling together the various threads of the core argument (about explaining differences). This could have drawn out key linkages between the positions of particular minority ethnic groups (and sub-groups thereof) and substantive differentials in outcomes and experiences across the various institutional areas.

But these are minor quibbles. This is an excellent text which (in terms of the student market) will prove an invaluable complement to others, not least that written by the volume editor (Mason, 2000).

References

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