

Professional power vs. patient need

This well-written book traces the tensions between mental health and public protection needs and legislation in the management of 'mentally disordered offenders'. It provides a useful example of how a PhD can be turned into a book for a wider audience. Hopefully, the selling of the independent

publisher Willan to Taylor and Francis will not compromise such opportunities for future prospective authors keen to get their PhD results more widely disseminated.

Prisoners or detained patients are rarely viewed as members of the public, and thus they are routinely not deemed worthy of public protection, rather they are construed chiefly as harmful to the public. Perpetrators and victims are treated as if they are entirely independent groups, which they are not. Such issues and tensions are pervasive themes in the research outlined in this book.

The research chapters are

particularly revealing, sometimes starkly so. The research is chiefly qualitative, examining relevant documentary evidence, including the Ministry of Justice Mental Health Unit's patient files. Fourteen interviews were conducted and a non-participant observational approach was taken to the work of the Mental Health Unit. There appear to have been some concerns reported that the, 'research should not undermine public confidence in the restricted patient system'. However, readers may well not be left with feelings of confidence in the system in view of this research.

The approach taken to undertaking risk assessments at the unit was reported by staff as either not 'actuarial' but rather a matter of 'personal consideration' or, at best, 'fairly actuarial'. Yet the actuarial basis of such decision making seems unclear, with no obvious transparency to such processes. The routine tension between caseworkers and clinicians is palpable.

Of course, risk-assessment work, although commonly thought to be associated with assessing the risk of offending of an identified individual, is never really a risk considered in isolation. There is the risk to ministers if an individual is allowed out and commits crime. Of course there are also some significant risks in such cases to civil servants working as case

worker staff. Clinical teams can claim that they don't make the key decisions associated with, for example, release or escorted visits and therefore cannot be held truly accountable if, and when, such activities go wrong. Such an environment can beget defensive professional practices. If the patient offends within the hospital that seems to be perceived as far less troublesome than if they do so whilst exposed to 'the general public'. The general bias in such decision making appears to be to err on the side of significant caution on behalf of the wider public, but not necessarily the patient.

Refreshingly, the author is quick to spot that the commercialisation of risk-assessment tools has clouded some of the claims of their effectiveness. The private sector has been responsible for the development of a number of risk assessment tools, complete with the anticipated array of product lines, including glossy brochures, training to administer, training to interpret the results and of course a charge each time each tool is used. Hopefully, psychologists will have the sense to focus on substance over commercial gloss.

It may well not be commonly understood that much of the work of the Mental Health Unit involves the monitoring of the work of hospital-based clinical care teams. Of course, the main risks to the wider 'general public' will be amongst those who are supervised in the community, and a compelling case could be made for more resources being allocated in that area of work. However, there appear to be some significant resources focused upon the monitoring of professional staff involved with the clinical management of those in such custody.

One could be forgiven for viewing much of the tension and mutual distrust described between the various bodies (e.g. the Mental Health Unit and the Mental Health Review Tribunal) as somewhat indulgent, with little to do with public protection. The chapter on the operation of executive discretion is particularly revealing on this score. There are signs in the book that some staff recognise the strains and tensions within the 'system', or at least, set of processes. Sometimes this is reflected cynically, with one member of staff asserting that reasons had to be given to the unit if a patient wanted to go on leave, 'even if the purpose is made up'. But much of this is not new news: Dell and Grounds (1995) expressed concerns about the unfair treatment of detained patients, but perhaps not so starkly. And that is a real strength of this book, there is a sense of a researcher who has skilfully undertaken her observational studies to go beyond the received descriptions and 'outputs' of the 'system' to the level of the human decision making and inter- and intra-professional rivalry behind the decision making in this important area of public health policy.

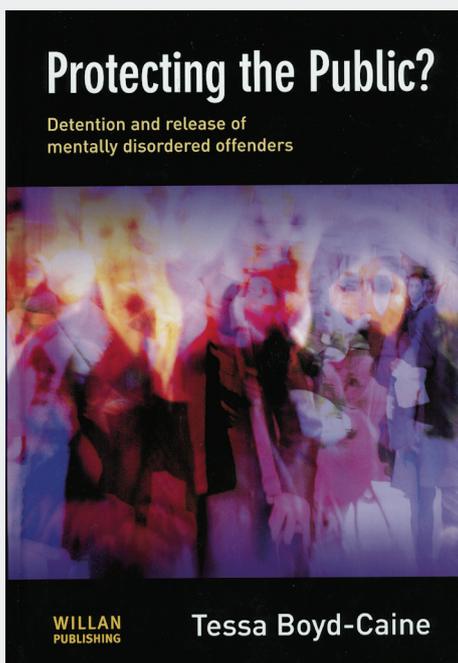
So, in sum, the author provides a fascinating insight into the highly political and professional world of decision making in relation to this vulnerable group of patients known as 'mentally disordered offenders'. Put in on the ethics reading list.

Reference

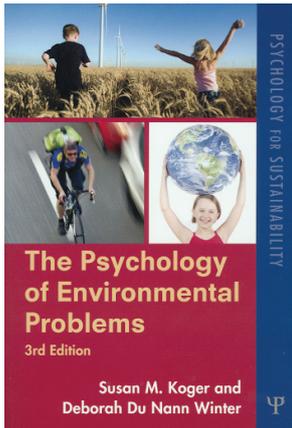
Dell, S. & Grounds, A. (1995). *The discharge and supervision of restricted patients*. Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge.

Willan; 2010; Hb £39.50

Reviewed by Graham Towl who is in the Psychology Department, Durham University



Protecting the Public? Detention and Release of Mentally Disordered Offenders
Tessa Boyd-Caine



Saving the planet

The Psychology of Environmental Problems (3rd edn)
Susan M. Koger & Deborah Du Nann Winter

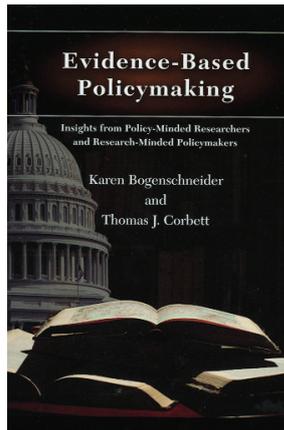
Starting from the position that environmental degradation is caused by human behaviour, the authors propose that psychology is central to finding solutions.

They summarise looming environmental crises and set out how the development of Western thought has led to this situation. They posit that, in contrast to traditional cultures, there is an imbalance caused by our industrialised culture, which views the natural world as merely a collection of raw materials. They consider the contribution of eight major approaches to the area (Psychoanalytic, Social, Behavioural, Neuro, Cognitive, Health, Developmental and Holistic), concluding by putting these together and providing six operating principles on how to approach solutions.

The authors wear their own ecological beliefs on their sleeves and urge readers to consider how their own behaviours might be changed. An appendix entitled 'How to do it' lists actions to mobilise more environmentally responsible behaviours.

A commendable and useful textbook, and as long as you are comfortable with the occasional migration into a 'how to' manual, one I can recommend.

Psychology Press; 2010; Pb £29.95
Reviewed by Harvey Jones who is Director of Smartly Green Ltd



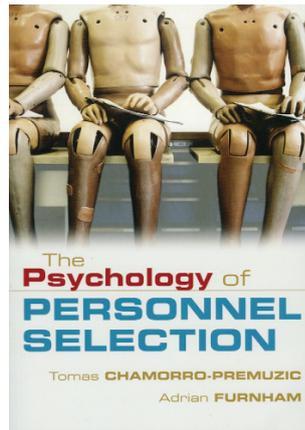
How to influence policy

Evidence-Based Policymaking
Karen Bogenschneider & Thomas J. Corbett

This book is an engaging, fieldwork-based how-to guide appropriate for all contemporary psychologists finding themselves involved with policy, consultations, restructuring and service development. The authors use theory and extensive interview data from policymakers and researchers to bridge the gap between the former, who want specific answers to woolly problems, and the latter, who typically generate broad answers to clear hypotheses. Psychologists should perhaps note the consistent message from policymakers that discussions and seminars would have greater impact on actual policy than journal publications. The authors give equal weight to views from both sides, although by separating policymaker and academic perspectives, they perhaps emphasise conflicts and miss opportunities to advise on building on consensus.

The structure allows easy 'dipping-in' to a dense and sometimes repetitious text. British readers may find the US-based research does not map neatly onto UK policy and research systems; but people are people, and the authors make significant efforts to reflect on the barriers to communication that stereotyping and assumptions can pose.

Routledge; 2010; Pb £24.95
Reviewed by Sarah McDonald who is with Nottinghamshire NHS Adult Mental Health



A good selection

The Psychology of Personnel Selection
Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic & Adrian Furnham

When I first flicked through this book I was rather worried to see it began by discussing graphology, which many of us understand to have low validity. However, I was reassured when I settled down to read it fully as the chapter title was 'Early unscientific methods'. Although you may question why a chapter is dedicated to methods we should not be using in selection, I felt that this was worthwhile, as there are many organisations still using such methods and the arguments against are very clearly made.

After a full discussion of the use of different forms of interview, chapters analysing the use of letters of recommendation, biodata, situational judgement tests and GPA (academic performance) very clearly explain best practice and issues of reliability and validity.

Part 2 considers the constructs used in the area, including general mental ability and the uses and abuses of personality traits. Chapters on creativity, leadership, and talent enable understanding of the application of selection practices in organisations, where HR staff are often asked to ensure that employees have 'leadership qualities' or that the organisation should have 'talent management', yet frequently there is little understanding of what these mean.

The book includes a number of very useful tables and figures, along with a comprehensive index. The research discussed includes US, UK and other European studies, and a strongly critical evaluation of the concepts discussed. I was so impressed that I have made it a core text for our own selection and assessment module.

Cambridge University Press; 2010; Pb £25.99
Reviewed by Stephanie J. Morgan who is at Kingston Business School

just in

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