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**BOOK REVIEW****Decentring Work: Critical Perspectives on Leisure,  
Social Policy, and Human Development**

edited by

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In the study, practice, management, and delivery of recreation and leisure services, we often focus on recreation and leisure behavior and factors that constrain, facilitate, or produce desired or undesired outcomes of these experiences. However, the chapters in this book, *Decentring Work: Critical Perspectives on Leisure, Social Policy, and Human Development* (2010) highlight important social issues and policies that marginalize large segments of the population and negatively affect citizens' opportunities to experience recreation and leisure. This book is comprised of three related sections. In the first section, social policy is defined; types of policies are discussed and related to leisure services; and leisure social policies are examined. The second section focuses on leisure and alternative policy frameworks for health and social development. In this section authors address social solidarity, improving the lives of people with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia (ADRD), and poverty and social determinants of health. Section three provides an analysis of social policy among people who are marginalized. They address leisure and social policy of immigrant and minority Canadians, women who are incarcerated, people who are homeless, and urban aboriginal youth. Authors examine issues faced by people in these groups, complex systems (e.g., social, economic, cultural, political, health) that affect their experiences, and offer suggestions and solutions for facilitating inclusion and social change that citizens deserve to lead safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives.

Chapter 1 focuses on complexities of social policy and its implementation at individual and community levels. The author, Don Dawson, defines social policy and explains that it facilitates conditions that enable people an equal chance to freely pursue opportunities and fully participate in community life. He explains three types of welfare: residual (i.e., safety net), solidarity (i.e., based on mutual responsibility to take care of people in society) and institutional (i.e., recognizing it as a normal part of life). Dawson asserts that low income individuals and families face numerous constraints to engage in leisure such as lack of time, transportation, awareness of opportunities, availability and safety of facilities, etc. He also states that federal, state, and local governments do not effectively coordinate either policy or programs to mitigate these constraints. Dawson suggests local communities

continue to dialogue on the issues of social policy, social inclusion, and recreation/leisure services and encourages governments to shift market-based revenues toward social policy to build a new “social architecture.” This shift can allow people to participate and compete on equal footing, reduce dependency, and increase personal knowledge, financial assets, and self-reliance.

In Chapter 2, Janna Taylor and Wendy Frisby examine the issue of leisure access policies in Canada based on a study of leisure policies. They assert that neo-liberalism is the dominant approach used in policy development and management. Neo-liberalism exists when low income citizens are viewed as inadequate market players and therefore, have no market value, which then increases the gap between the wealthy and the poor. Taylor and Frisby examined mission statements and leisure access policies of 33 agencies in Canada. They noted it was challenging to find leisure access policies within the agencies’ print materials and websites and most policies only addressed assistance with program fees. They also mentioned the application procedures for a fee waiver or subsidy were onerous and “dehumanizing” (p. 46). Three types of leisure access policies were presented: (a) free programs policy, (b) invisible or hard to find policy, and (c) prove poverty policy. To begin a paradigm shift away from this practice, they recommend facilitating conscientization. According to Taylor and Frisby, this is where “people connect their personal situations to larger structures surrounding them, and social learning is integral to dismantling existing power relations where distant policy-makers have direct exposure to situations of poverty and when citizens learn more about how policy-making is conducted” (p. 50). They recommend eight steps important for this shift to happen.

In part two of the book, authors identify new policy frameworks that support health and social development. In Chapter 3, Reid, Golden, and Katerberg expand our view of poverty beyond the issue of inadequate income. They acknowledge the spiraling effect it can have on individuals and families as they struggle to access affordable housing, education, health, and recreation services. The authors emphasize that many people who are poor live at the edge and are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty. The authors’ ideas echo insights stated by Barbara Ehrenreich (2001) in her book, *Nickel and Dimed: On (not) Getting by in America*. Ehrenreich, a journalist, described how she went undercover and lived in three U.S. regions to understand how it felt to try to live on entry-level, minimum wage jobs. Her work (which sometimes included holding two or more jobs simultaneously) put her on the brink of homelessness. She also discovered the hard way that health systems do not work for people with lower incomes. The authors also encourage us to acknowledge the value of a “social contract,” where all people can expect a baseline level of existence beyond survival and recognize people can play diverse roles in the social and economic system to be viewed as equally successful in social and community life. The authors encourage a shift in values from consumption and accumulation to accomplishment and equitable distribution of resources.

In Chapter 4, Sherry Dupuis offers recommendations for a more integrative approach to health care for people with Alzheimer’s disease or related dementia (ADRD). Rather than focusing on a person’s deficits, Dupuis encourages us to emphasize their assets and things that make them resilient in the face of their health

challenges. As such, she recommends viewing the life of a person with ADRD through multiple lenses that consider the person, his/her family, friends, caregivers, health providers, and the community in which they live together. She also suggests a relationship or partnership approach to care. One model this approach relates to is the Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH) movement. PCMHs provide a coordinated and integrated multidisciplinary approach to treatment and care, with the patient's needs at the center of the care plan (Rittenhouse & Shortell, 2009)

Chapter 5 addresses the politics of oppression and transformations in social policy. Similar to Chapter 4, authors Susan Arai and Rishia Burke encourage us to consider people in context as their situations are complicated by social, economic, cultural, political, and health-related factors. They describe how poverty leads to people having no power or voice, excludes them from society, and exacerbates already stressful situations for families. Authors also suggest that people living in poverty would benefit from leisure as a form of respite or a break from the everyday stressors of life. Similar to Reid et al. in Chapter 3, they encourage people to volunteer or get involved in community organizing. Reid et al. also suggest that community service and serious leisure may have potential for increasing peoples' feelings of self-efficacy and self-worth, facilitate learning, and provide a sense of belonging and contribution to community and society. Moreover, Arai and Burke posit that inclusion of youth in community recreation programs and activities may help build resilience and foster positive youth development.

Part three of the book examines social policy among people who are on the margins of society. They focus on vulnerable populations such as immigrants, incarcerated women, people who are homeless, and aboriginal youth. Susan Tirone (Chapter 6) discusses multiculturalism and leisure policy among immigrants. She asserts that Canada has some policies that exclude and constrain newcomers. A historical example is used to illustrate this point. After Canada joined WWI in 1914, many European immigrants were placed in camps as a part of the internment program, and they helped construct many of Canada's National Parks. While the internment program was intended to provide work, housing, and other basics, it wasn't necessarily viewed as a social program. Also, Tirone explains that Muslim girls in Quebec are prohibited from playing soccer and martial arts due to their head scarves. Although these policies are disturbing, Tirone points out that immigrants preserve many recreation and leisure activities unique to their cultures after transitioning to Canadian life.

Besides immigrants, another group marginalized by society is incarcerated women (Chapter 7). As suggested in Chapter 4 by Dupuis, social service professionals and society should view incarcerated women's' situations as "glass half-full" rather than "glass half-empty." This is illustrated by Fortune, Pedlar, and Yuen through the Creating Choices program they discuss. Collectively, they recommend coordinated and integrated systems that reduce powerlessness, marginalization, exploitation, cultural imperialism and violence or abuse. They believe the person should be placed at the center of care and support to facilitate empowerment, meaningful choices and personal responsibility. While immigrants and incarcerated women have different situations, they share some common experi-

ences feeling powerless, marginalized, and exploited. To change the paradigm, it is important to acknowledge their plights are community issues and the community must be committed to helping them help themselves.

Heather Mair and Dawn Trussell tackle the complex topic of homelessness and social housing in Chapter 8. As mentioned in Chapter 3, homelessness is complex and affected by several factors (e.g., education, income, physical and mental health, social support). These authors encourage us to advocate for “housing systems” in the same spirit we support the health care system and welfare system. They also state there has been a criminalization of homelessness in Canada and the U.S. For example, it is illegal to sleep on trains in Seattle, and large tent cities exist (often illegally) in many cities in North America. Mair and Trussell also assert that leisure can provide an important bridge back to what is considered normal daily life and help people cope with living in shelters or tent camps. They also give examples of how residents of public housing improved their living situations, and they recommend strategies for developing a public housing system.

In Chapter 9 Karen Fox and Brett Lashua acknowledge how discrimination negatively affects aboriginal youth and excludes them from participating in community recreation programs and using parks and facilities. The authors emphasize the important role of hip-hop music and dance to the coping, identity development, and overall well-being of aboriginal urban youth. Through these experiences they celebrate their unique cultures and identities, struggle with and resolve issues of marginality, powerlessness, and social control.

This book is relevant for practitioners and researchers in community recreation and leisure services. Also, people who work in public policy and social service organizations will find the topics and content of this book useful in their work. I enjoyed reading and thinking about the important issues and many strategies for improving the well-being of many segments of the population that might be considered vulnerable or marginalized. I particularly appreciated the critical examination of multiple systems and policies that influence peoples' lives and livelihoods and the “glass half-full” lens through which these issues are discussed. I hope the authors will write a second edition of the text in a few years and perhaps also expand it to include (even as a compare/contrast) the U.S. in the mix of these issues, as topics are relevant to many societies, whether in North America or other continents.

## References

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