

Book Reviews

Women's Health in Canada: Critical Theory and Policy

**Edited by Marina Morrow,
Olena Hankivsky, and Colleen Varcoe
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006**

Reviewed by Joan Bassett-Smith

This book, soon to be published, makes an extremely important and valuable contribution to Canadian and international literature in the domain of women's health. The feminist and postcolonial perspectives are refreshing and timely, and they move the conversations about women's health forward in a way that provides important direction to research, theory, policy, and practice. Edited by Canadian academics and practitioners, the book is impressive in the breadth and depth of Canadian and international literature that it cites.

Women's Health in Canada is organized into four sections. The first section sets the background for the book, explores the Canadian health-care system, and sets a historical context for the theoretical approaches used throughout the volume. The second section offers an essential and in-depth discussion of theory and methods underpinning the remainder of the collection. The third section addresses the social determinants of health; it includes chapters on topics such as poverty, international migration, disability, negotiating sexualities, and mothering. The fourth section addresses key issues in women's health, such as drug use, mental health policy, HIV/AIDS, breast cancer, cardiovascular care, access to maternity services, hormone replacement therapy, and violence. Each chapter in the third and fourth sections sets out goals for the chapter, discusses the state of inquiry in the field, and moves discussion of the topic forward in a way that provides direction for research and practice. The text boxes and questions for discussion are useful features of the book.

The editors situate themselves theoretically, in the opening chapter, but I would have found it useful to have a short biography of the editors and the contributors included in the collection. That said, I found the book thought-provoking, stimulating, informative, and grounded in research and practice.

Chapter 1, written jointly by the three editors, clearly sets out the purpose and goals of *Women's Health in Canada* and provides a useful link between topics discussed in the book and relevant chapters. It then dis-

cusses the stated goals of the book. For the most part there is a sense of coherency among the chapters.

The collection is organized in such a way that it is possible for the reader to either choose a single chapter pertinent to a particular topic or read the book from cover to cover. By reading only a single chapter, however, one would miss some key theoretical background material. I would suggest that the reader peruse chapters 1, 3, and 4 before proceeding with any other single chapter.

Chapter 2, "Theory and Methods," is essential reading for anyone wishing to pursue feminist and postcolonial scholarship. It reviews theoretical foundations of postcolonial and feminist theories, and in so doing illuminates and extends the critical analysis of various topics in women's health. The reader will gain a deeper understanding of how critical perspectives can inform research, expand and deepen analysis, and provide direction for political and social action with the aim of promoting social justice. This chapter will be useful for feminist and postcolonial scholars whether or not their primary research interest is women's health. The examples provided illustrate the ways in which critical perspectives can inform research and practice and provide direction for both novice and experienced researchers. Current debates and points of tension are clearly discussed. The section on intersecting influences on women's health, such as history, sociocultural positioning, racialization, culture, and gender, adds clarity to our understanding of the multiplicity of factors affecting our research and practice with women and highlights the need to analyze differences among women as well as similarities.

This book will be useful for a wide variety of professionals interested in women's health. It is a necessary and thought-provoking addition to the literature and moves the debate on theorizing and research into new territory, not only in women's health but in a general sense as well. It could be useful for academics and undergraduate and graduate students in a variety of disciplines, such as nursing, psychology, women's studies, sociology, medicine, and midwifery, as well as for practitioners and policy-makers in the field of women's health.

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***Introduction to Evidence-Based Practice
in Nursing and Health Care***

Edited by Kathy Malloch and Tim Porter-O'Grady
Sudbury, MA: Jones & Bartlett, 2006. 278 pp.
ISBN 0-7637-2913-2

Reviewed by Judith A. Ritchie

The editors of this book have taken an unusual and diversified perspective on evidence-based practice. Readers seeking an introduction to the topic of using evidence in clinical nursing practice will not find it here. Malloch and Porter-O'Grady state that the premise of the collection is that health-care workers, and nurses in particular, must move quickly to "fully identify and articulate the value consumers receive for the time and energy that nurses expend, the fiscal support provided by the marketplace for those services, and the specific relationships between those resources expended and value received." They argue that creating evidence will serve this agenda and that they have set out to provide "an overview of the world of evidence for nursing practice." To do the latter they have invited authors with very different perspectives to discuss the "application of the EBP principles" in their frame of reference. It is not clear what "the EBP principles" are and which ones are to be applied.

The 10 chapters in *Introduction to Evidence-Based Practice in Nursing and Health Care* are independent and diverse essays that address a very broad array of topics. They vary widely in their depth and in their view of evidence and evidence-based practice. Very little attempt has been made to create linkage between the chapters. The definition of evidence-based practice varies from one chapter to the next. Often the "evidence" that is presented is not strong research-based evidence. The dual intent of the book comes through clearly but is confusing — for example, the subtitle of chapter 1 is "Creating the Framework for Evidence," but it is not clear in the subtitle or in the text whether the intention here is a framework for evidence-based practice or a framework for creating the evidence.

Clinical practice is a relatively minor focus of the various chapters. In this book, the term "evidence-based practice" refers mainly to managers or educators using evidence to create systems that support nurses and nursing practice — education, architectural design, information systems, managing variance in high-risk systems, workload management systems, and policy and workplaces that exhibit the Forces of Magnetism.

Chapter 4, "Linking Structure and Healing: Building Architecture for Evidence Based Practice," is concerned with the practice of the architect or design engineer.

Some chapters are clearly written, present strong arguments, and make a contribution to the topic. They address the available research evidence regarding some personal and contextual issues that are relevant to evidence-based clinical practice. Other chapters are almost incomprehensible because of a complex and dense writing style and the use of obtuse language, such as "tenure of life" instead of "lifespan." Some chapters consist largely of idealistic rhetoric about the need for change, presenting very little evidence. The overall conclusion seems to be that evidence-based practice is not possible without a revolution in the structure and culture of nursing.

A distraction for the reader throughout the book are numerous spelling and grammatical errors, typesetting errors such as repetition of phrases, inconsistency in citations, citations without matching references, citing of resources or programs that no longer exist, and, particularly in the early chapters, tables and graphs that are either referred to incorrectly in the text or not referred to at all.

Some chapters are difficult to follow and lack direction and purpose. The lack of organization and clarity and the rhetorical nature of the ideas presented pose many challenges for the reader. One is left with a wealth of ideas but no clear framework and no sense of how any of this rhetorical vision might be realized. Chapter 9, "Evidence-Based Practice and Health Policy: A Match or a Mismatch?," is particularly disappointing. The authors shamefully conclude that, because it is difficult to do, policy-makers should not attempt to reach decisions about policy based on research evidence. This is a surprising conclusion as well as a shameful one, given the wealth of information now available about the roles of various types of information in creating policy and the advocacy for "evidence-informed policy." On the other hand, chapter 7, "Managing Variance through an Evidence-Based Framework for Safe and Reliable Health Care," is cogent and crisply written and provides a wealth of interesting and well-documented information. This chapter includes comments acknowledging the reality of the nursing context and introduces much evidence and opinion from other disciplines, the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, and the author's own research.

The issues presented in this book could be highly relevant for those interested in evidence-based practice from a research, educational, or management perspective. The topics could be appropriate for those readers who are beyond the introductory level. The strength of the collection is that it discusses contextual factors not usually addressed in

the discourse on evidence-based practice. However, the book's intended audience is not clear, and it is a disappointing attempt to broaden the discussion of evidence and evidence-based practice.

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