

Book Review

Dixon, J. C., and Singleton, R. A. (Eds.). *Reading Social Research: Studies in Inequalities and Deviance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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Dixon and Singleton, sociologists associated with the College of the Holy Cross, bring a combined 36 years of teaching experience to bear on this edited collection of 20 articles. The editors have selected articles accessible for undergraduates and grouped them into ten pairings to illustrate significant aspects of research methodology: the role of theory, ethics, measurement, sampling, experimentation, surveys, qualitative research, secondary data analysis, mixed methods, and data analysis. Each pairing begins with a two- or three-page explanation of the methodological issue emphasized in the articles and provides a brief reference list and useful online resources related to that research topic. Each article is briefly introduced so that the reader understands why this article is included and what to look for while reading it. Each article also concludes with five thoughtful questions for student consideration. Dixon and Singleton intend this book as a supplemental text for sociology research courses, and I believe it would be quite useful in that context.

The collection of articles is well balanced between quantitative and qualitative methodologies, with six selections in the latter category; eight if the mixed method studies are included. Five of the articles, perhaps emphasizing the deviance theme in the subtitle, are from criminological research and are used by the editors to illustrate the role of theory, experimentation, secondary data

analysis, and mixed methods. Articles on race and ethnicity address measurement and sampling issues, with a third showing a creative use of existing data; but readers looking for meaningful content of racial inequalities will need to look elsewhere. The collection covers gender inequality more adequately in three selections illustrating measurement (housework), sampling (singles bars), and secondary data analysis (intimate partner abuse). No other subject receives as much attention in the collection, but there are two articles providing international comparisons on traditional values and imprisonment rates, two addressing gay and lesbian issues (social acceptance and parenting), and two investigating drinking on college campuses. I did find the neglect of social class outside of criminology a bit strange in a book purporting to address inequalities with only one study on poor, single mothers and another on the homeless.

As one might anticipate in a book written by sociologists for sociology courses, there is no explicit discussion of social work values and ethics in this book; however, there was considerable emphasis on socially marginalized segments of the U.S. population. Social work students and practitioners might gain rich insights from reading the neighborhood effects of mass incarceration, the formation of racist groups, the challenges of ex-offender employment, the economic survival strategies of the poor, and identity development

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among the homeless. The two selections illustrating “Ethics and Politics of Research” are a bit more problematic. The first selection, Stanley Milgram’s defense of his obedience experiments, might be appropriate for graduate classes, but I would veer away from its use with undergraduates because Milgram’s argument can be easily interpreted as inconsistent with the social work value of human dignity. The second selection, Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz’ systematic review of gay parenting and child outcomes, might also be somewhat problematic. This selection emphasizes the manner in which pro-gay ideology has muted the evidence that there are some measureable differences in child outcomes due to gay parenting. I cannot help but wonder if this excellent work by Stacey and Biblarz might be misconstrued by some undergraduate social work students and/or religiously affiliated social work

programs to reinforce a reluctance to embrace gay social inclusion and advocacy of gay civil rights.

I do not hesitate to recommend this book for consideration by sociologists. The selections on measurement and sampling feel awkward because they omit some of the results, and the article on quantitative data analysis is a bit complex for undergraduates. Otherwise, the selections do an excellent job of accomplishing the editors’ intent of illustrating specific aspects of social science research. I do not believe that this collection of articles is equally compatible with social work. Not one of the selections is from a social work journal, and the sampling issues paramount in social work research (marginalization, hidden populations, and cultural competence) are underemphasized. Social work educators are advised to look elsewhere for a reader.