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Book review

Review of Spotswood, F.. (Ed.), Beyond Behaviour Change: Key Issues, Interdisciplinary Approaches and Future Directions, Policy Press, Bristol (2016). (£26.99 (paperback, epub) £56. 00 (hardback))

This book is a timely contribution to the literature concerning theneed to achieve change in the human way of life or "societal improvement" in the face of daunting wicked problems that implicate multiple policy domains (Spotswood 2017, p2). The over-archingpremise is that behaviour change is a cross-disciplinary field, and is contested due to the variety of disciplinary backgrounds that are involved and the political sensitivity of normative expectations of behaviour. In order to achieve breadth of relevance across fields, Spotswood has been careful to focus on "the behaviour change technique, theory, ideology (and so on) rather than the problem or domain of behaviour change (such as health or reduction of harm)". In total there are twenty-four, mostly academic, contributors across fourteen chapters plus an introduction by the editor of the volume and a preface by Professor Michael Kelly, who also authors chapter one.

In the introduction, Spotswood notes three main approaches to understanding and subsequently addressing human-made problems such as obesity, pollution, traffic congestion, and diseases with a number of causes originating with human habits. As Spotswood points out, there isn't even agreement over the use of the term 'behaviour change' as this can be criticised for 'individualising' responsibility for problems which have socio-cultural structures that constrain individuals; however, those who focus on social change (for example social practice theorists) can come in for criticism that they are oriented towards authoritarian approaches to control. The middle view identified by Spotswood is an emphasis on retaining choice which has seen the spread of 'nudge' approaches derived from behavioural economics. This is frequently criticised for being popular with neoliberal ideologues. Ultimately, however, whether the focus is termed 'behaviour change' or not, it is rapidly becoming a significant field for knowledge generation and utilisation. I found many Masters courses available (in psychology, business and social sciences for example) that focus on this area in some way, which supports Spotswood's view.

Whilst only parts of the book deal directly with transport issues, it is a strength of the book that it takes a wider perspective. An argument can be made that 'travel behaviour change' literature is tired, having been overly dependent on rational actor theory. Thus those concerned with changing travel behaviours need to look at other domains, theories and perspectives, particularly as we increasingly recognise that our observable travel behaviours are produced by wider social practices. This book is thus highly useful. For example, Tim Chatterton's early chapter introduces theories of behaviour, Steve Melia has a chapter on the relationship between the built environment and travel behaviour, and other contributors in Part One (on the history, theory and politics of behaviour change) discuss legislation and restricting personal freedoms (Alan Maryon-Davis), the nudge phenomenon (Michael Hallsworth and Michael Sanders), social marketing approaches (Alan Tapp and Sharyn Rundle-Thiele) and the impact of technology on behaviours (Adam Joinson and Lukasz Piwek).

Part Two engages with critique and innovation, concerned with moving the field onward. Thus we have a critique of 'stakeholder marketing' and the subversion of public health (Hastings and de Andrade), a critique of behaviour change as potentially tyrannous (Collins), an examination of public concern and values (Crompton), the social practice critique of behaviour change (Welch), and the introduction of systemsthinking in the public health domain for behaviour change (Trenchard-Mabere). ChapterFourteen, as the conclusion, focuses on the future of the broad field that is 'behaviour change' (Spotswood and Marsh).

In the conclusion, Spotswood and Marsh call for interdisciplinarity in the behaviour change field and acknowledge the difficulties for researchers caused by the preference of policymakers for positivist evidence generated (preferably) by randomised control trials (RCT). RCT is the gold standard in health research, and has been used to evaluate the effectiveness of health-related behaviour change interventions. However, whilst RCT is an effective research design for drug trials, it has proven hard to translate to health behaviour research, and is much much harder to achieve in other fields, including transport, and imposes a particular perspective that obscures much of the socio-cultural aspect to human behaviours. Nevertheless, whilst calling on both academics and policy-makers to work to overcome the barriers to better knowledge flow between them, Spotswood and Marsh are ultimately optimistic about the future of 'behaviour change', precisely because of the richness of approaches available.

This book will be very useful for the increasing numbers of academics involved in teaching 'behaviour change', as it covers the evolution of the field, carries a critique and identifies innovation, with a concluding chapter that develops insight from the diverse and often conflicting chapters. The text is helpfully supplemented with tables, figures and boxes. However, the one thing I didn't like is the large number of 'Stop and Think' boxes, which I found less useful than the Case Study boxes. 'Stop and think' boxes direct the reader to reflect on specific questions, which were not always aligned with my own interest in the text. However, this device is undoubtedly useful for students who might need more coaching in critical thinking skills. As the boxes are greyed out, any reader who does not need to read the book as a tutorial can easily omit them.

Alphabetical list of contributors/chapters

Chatterton, T. An introduction to theories of behaviour pp. 27–48.

Collins, K. Participation in behaviour change: technique or tyranny? pp. 199–216.

Crompton, T. Values and public expressions of concern. pp. 217–236.

Denford, S., Abraham, C., Smith, J. R., Morgan-Trimmer, S., Lloyd, J. and Wyatt, K. Intervention design and evaluation: behaviour change imperatives pp. 49–70.

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Hallsworth, M. and Sanders, M. Nudge: recent developments in behavioural science and public policy. pp. 113–134.

Hastings, G. and de Andrade, M. Stakeholder marketing and the subversion of public health. Pp 181–198.

Joinson, A. and Piwek, L. Technology and the formation of socially positive behaviours. pp. 157–178.

Kelly, M. P. Preface p xi.

Kelly, M. P. The politics of behaviour change pp. 11–26.

Maryon-Davis, A. Government legislation and the restriction of personal freedoms. pp. 71–88.

Melia, S. Evaluating the impact of policy: the built environment and travel behaviour. pp. 89–112.

Spotswood, F. and Marsh, A. Conclusion: what is the future of "behaviour change"? pp. 283–298.

Spotswood, F. Introduction. pp. 1–8.

Tapp, A., and Rundle-Thiele, S. Social marketing and multi-disciplinary behaviour change. pp. 135–156.

Trenchard-Mabere, E. The emergence of systems thinking in behaviour change: a public health focus. pp. 257–282.

Welch, D. Social practices and behaviour change. pp. 237–256.

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