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Book Review

Using psychology to make a difference

Applied Psychology: New Frontiers and Rewarding Careers. S. I. Donaldson, D. E. Berger, & K. Pezdek (Eds.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2006. No. of pages 345. ISBN 0-80585349-9. Price \$32.50 (paperback).

This is a book whose time has come. It collects papers presented at a symposium on applied psychology held at Claremont Graduate University, and that is fitting, as Claremont has one of the leading programs in applied psychology. Most of the chapter authors (8 of 15) are themselves Claremont faculty, and the editors have also gathered a number of impressive outside contributors, such as Philip Zimbardo, Albert Bandura, Robert Rosenthal, Diane Halpern, Stanley Sue, and Elizabeth Loftus. What all these individuals have in common is an interest in using psychology to better the human condition and, in the words of Tan and Halpern, to “make a difference.” In that sense, then, the tenor of the book echoes the positive psychology movement, a connection addressed explicitly in Donaldson and Bligh’s chapter on applying positive psychological science in industrial-organisational settings. In the book’s “Preface,” the editors acknowledge that psychology has at times been misused by those with a certain political agenda (*e.g.*, in providing empirical support for eugenic and discriminatory policies), but those darker episodes in our discipline’s past receive scant mention here. Rather, the individual chapters are decidedly upbeat; and in this day and age, what is wrong with a little optimism? The book’s positive outlook on what psychology, as a field, and psychologists, as individuals, can accomplish is rather refreshing. Many of the research examples presented here made me proud to be a psychologist.

So what is “applied psychology”? As Tan and Halpern note, it “needs a predicate, or at least an answer to the question—what aspect of psychology is being applied to what real-world problem? Applied psychology is not a content area or academic discipline like developmental psychology or social psychology” (p. 153). Rather, it applies theories from these content areas to practical problems in various real-world domains, such as education (Rosenthal and Greenfield), the environment (Oskamp and Schultz), mental and physical health (Sue and Friedman), the legal system (Davis and Loftus), and the workplace (Donaldson and Bligh). Although the book is called “Applied Psychology,” the best chapters (especially those by Bandura, Oskamp and Schultz, Pezdek *et al.*, and Crano) go beyond that and illustrate how the very best applied psychology draws on fundamental psychological theories and principles. In this sense, then, the volume serves the valuable function of helping to bridge the basic-applied divide, which serious practitioners on both sides of the fence know to be a false dichotomy.

Following an introductory chapter (by Donaldson and Berger) that documents the rapid recent expansion of applied psychology, the book has two sections: "Foundations and Frontiers in Applied Psychological Science" (chapters by Zimbardo, Bandura, Os-kamp and Schultz, Rosenthal, Sue, Greenfield, and Tan and Halpern) and "Rewarding Careers Applying Psychological Science" (chapters by Davis and Loftus, Friedman, Pezdek *et al.*, Donaldson and Christie, Crano, Donaldson and Bligh, and Berger). Several of these chapters offer examples of the best that psychology has to offer. For example, the chapter by Bandura "addresses the applications of social cognitive theory to some of the most urgent global problems" (p. 53), such as population growth, gender and ethnic inequality, illiteracy, and AIDS. Bandura describes several empirical studies that demonstrate how the media, through TV serial dramas, can be used as a teaching vehicle to address these problems. It is reassuring to see that TV can have value and serve a useful purpose; sadly, but not surprisingly, none of the examples comes from American TV.

The book's intended audience is quite broad. According to the "Preface," the book could be used as a supplemental text for introductory courses, in a range of advanced undergraduate and graduate classes, and by researchers themselves. My only real criticism of the book is that in making such a broad appeal, it is trying to be too many things to too many people. Part II of the book ("Foundations and Frontiers") contains some excellent review chapters of bodies of work that would work well in an advanced undergraduate class on relevant topics, such as applied social psychology, environmental psychology or educational psychology. However, these chapters would likely be too sophisticated for introductory psychology students, while simultaneously too cursory for a graduate seminar. On the other hand, Part III of the book ("Rewarding Careers") provides a wealth of information on career options, sure to be of interest to new students just embarking on an exploration of psychology. This same information might still be useful for advanced undergraduates as they contemplate whether and where to attend graduate school, but it is largely moot for students already in graduate school. Thus, I have a hard time envisioning a course in which I would require students to read the entire book, but I can readily envision a course in which I would want them to read large chunks of it. Of course, few books—edited volumes especially—offer everything an instructor might want, so this is probably not a very significant shortcoming, and it is outweighed by the book's many pluses. *Applied Psychology* combines brief surveys of substantive research with some very practical advice for students interested in the field, and each of these components is likely to find a receptive audience.

The present volume makes abundantly clear that the field of applied psychology, at least as measured by training and career opportunities, is booming. This growth has not gone unnoticed in other quarters. For example, the American Psychological Association's Science Directorate recently created the Office for Applied Psychological Science to "provide a home for scientists who work in the many applied areas of psychology" (http://www.apa.org/science/psa/sept06oap_prnt.html). Donaldson *et al.*'s *Applied Psychology* is a welcome addition to this new and rapidly expanding field.

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