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**Review of *The Handbook of Social Work Research Methods*.**

**Bruce A. Thyer (Ed.). Review by John G. Orme.**

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is such a vital element of community capacity building. On a more banal note, the excessive use of acronyms when referring to community organizations becomes monotonous and is sometimes confusing. Neither of these minor points, however, prevents me from recommending that every academic, practitioner and student interested in community practice read this book.

Michelle Livermore  
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Bruce A. Thyer (Ed.), *The Handbook of Social Work Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001. \$ 84.95 hardcover, \$ 65.00 papercover.

The *Handbook of Social Work Research Methods* is a research text written by social work researchers, most with social work practice experience, for a social work audience. The focus is on applied social work research, and most of the contributors to this edited book are well-known social work scholars. This book illustrates the breadth of research methods used by social workers.

The *Handbook* will be most useful as a primary text for MSW foundation research courses, although there also are things here for more advanced students and experienced researchers (e.g., Corcoran's chapter on locating existing measurement instruments). The *Handbook* is organized into four major parts, it provides comprehensive coverage of topics typically covered in such courses, and in general the chapters are well organized and written at an appropriate level for the intended audience.

The first six chapters in Part I cover fundamentals of quantitative research such as sampling, principles of measurement, and statistics. It is surprising that this section does not include a chapter on the computer analysis of data, and that the chapter on statistics barely mentions this important topic. Also, somewhat surprisingly, there is not a chapter on basic principles of research design. However, following the six chapters on fundamentals of quantitative approaches there are seven chapters on particular types of quantitative research designs such as surveys, randomized controlled trials, and single-system designs, among others. Basic principles of research design are covered throughout many of these chapters (e.g., external validity is discussed in the chapter

on sampling, internal and external validity are discussed in the chapter on randomized controlled trials).

Part II of the *Handbook* covers qualitative approaches to research. Like Part I, this part first provides chapters detailing the basic fundamentals of this approach, followed by chapters discussing particular types of studies associated with this approach such as narrative case studies and ethnographic methods.

Part III covers "Conceptual Research," and includes chapters on theory development, historical research, literature reviews, and critical analysis. I'm not sure that "conceptual research" is the best way to characterize the material covered in this part, but the topics covered in these chapters are all very useful and germane to teaching and understanding social work research, and are topics that oftentimes have been ignored in research texts.

Part IV contains chapters that cover a range of general issues in research. These include chapters on ethical issues, gender, ethnicity, and race, comparative international research, integrating qualitative and quantitative research methods, applying for research grants, and disseminating research findings.

No single research text can possibly cover or do justice to every area of importance. Indeed, as I argue below, we try to cover too much in the traditional MSW foundation research course. Nevertheless, in addition to a chapter on the computer analysis of data (quantitative and qualitative) the *Handbook* might benefit from a chapter on the critical use of the Internet. However, several chapters do provide discussion of relevant Internet sources.

This book does an admirable job covering the material typically required in MSW foundation research courses. Unfortunately, such courses, and consequently books designed for such courses, suffer from some common problems. First, we try to do too much in MSW foundation research courses, and in many other MSW courses, and depth of understanding gives way to breadth. Second, there is a lack of clarity or perhaps agreement about educational goals, and thus the focus of our educational efforts. Do we want to train MSW students to be entry-level researchers? Critical consumers of research? Empirically-based practitioners? All of the above, and perhaps more? Third, although most would agree that one goal of the MSW foundation research course is to train students to be critical consumers of research, too often, we

try to do this indirectly. Teaching students how to do research will not necessarily teach them how to be critical consumers of research. Finally, teaching students how researchers do research will not necessarily teach students how to use research methods to evaluate their practice or, more generally, how to conduct empirically-based practice. Again, we need to be more direct in our efforts to achieve these goals. However, the above are not so much limitations of this book as they are criticisms of how we teach foundation research in social work.

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Haya Steir and Marta Tienda. *The Color of Opportunity: Pathways to Family, Welfare, and Work*. University of Chicago Press, 2001. \$32.50 hardcover.

In addressing Chicago's poverty, the *Color of Opportunity* opens with an articulate elaboration of its theoretical models. In providing readable interplay of "life-course," "human capital" and "structural" perspectives, the authors clearly hit most of the mainstream theories on poverty (the lit review relies heavily on the works of William Julius Wilson, David Ellwood, Charles Murray and Sarah McLanahan). Sensibly, this lit review included many concise definitions and later chapters provides 40 pages of meticulous methodological notes (in being pretty candid, the authors acknowledge some of the limitations in their "Urban Poverty and Family Life Study" samples). Most impressively, the rest of the manuscript is inundated with data. In triangulating three samples, the analysis generated some 65 tables, 37 charts and 10 maps.

This abundance of data yielded some interesting insights. As a whole, the "culture of poverty thesis" garnered little empirical support. That is, the data did not identify any "ghetto-specific" subcultures since all social classes stigmatized welfare and poor racial minorities were more willing to take low paying jobs. Likewise, poor parents wanted their children to be educated and the determinants of welfare consumption were identical in the inner-city and suburbs.