



Exposing Lifestyle Television: The Big Reveal

Gareth Palmer (Ed.). 2008. Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing. 195pp. AUS\$136.41. Hardcover.

Gardening, cooking, getting dressed and training our pets are the domestic occupations of everyday life. While occupational scientists have paid such occupations some attention, only a few have addressed how broader socio-political influences affect the meanings ascribed to choosing garments, cleaning up the back yard, or watching a cooking show on TV. In this edited text, Palmer and his 15 chapter authors bring a critical eye to the ways these activities are depicted in lifestyle television shows. While not conceived as an occupational science text, much of the discussion is pertinent. Of course, watching television is an occupation in itself, but the emphasis in this text is on what people watch.

Two occupational perspectives are apparent in the text; what people do and what their occupations mean. In relation to the things people do, this text draws attention to the development, over the last 20 years, of lifestyle makeover programmes that focus on teaching viewers “how to live” (de Solier, p. 65). One chapter of particular interest noted “an ecological turn” (Thomas, p. 177) in some contemporary programmes, which promote the adoption of more sustainable practices, greater self-sufficiency or spending time together working on a common project. The occupational implications are wide ranging, as participants strive to reduce electricity use, take up walking or cycling to work, building a water wheel, and making things from scrap materials. Another chapter considered the rise of programmes about women’s domestic duties, such as *Wife Swap* and *How Clean is Your House?*, posing the question of “why housework has become so prominent on our television screens at the start of the new century” (Forster, p. 101).

In relation to the meanings occupations hold, Palmer’s text explores how the focus of many of the programmes is on changing individual’s appearance, sense of self, home environment, and competence in cooking, housework, shopping, raising children and managing pets. Individual change might mean becoming more informed or developing skills, in terms of exercising, eating, socialising or disciplining

one’s children. It might also be transformational. For example, learning to dress differently might mean being seen as a professional or attracting “the right kind of man” (Sherman, p. 61). Key concepts discussed across the chapters are notions of developing the capacity to shape one’s own identity, with the occupations of shopping, cooking, gardening and so on as the sites of self-production.

At a more contextual level, various chapter authors note and attempt to explain differences in format and content across UK, US and Australian programmes. Their ideas span different levels of home ownership, in relation to Do-It-Yourself home improvement shows, and differences in the everyday concerns of people in different countries: consuming organic food in the UK versus establishing a ‘waterwise’ garden in Australia. Across these regional differences are bigger questions of whether lifestyle programmes, on the whole, promote consumerism, which is “rendered [as] central to personhood and citizenship” (Sherman, p. 50), and advance a neoliberal agenda of regulating the choices of individual citizens by promoting a view of them as rational consumers. Equally, lifestyle programmes are critiqued as reinforcing gender stereotypes and, for the most part, middleclass values.

For readers unfamiliar with discussions of this nature, Palmer’s text is a dense read. However, while many of the chapters reinforce ideas discussed in others, each stands alone. That means readers can elect to consult only those chapters that address an occupation of interest. Tackled in that manner, most of the discussions usefully inform understandings of occupation. There are two exceptions. One chapter offered an explanation of the popularity of lifestyle programmes, which I had difficulty interpreting from an occupational perspective. Likewise, although offering an interesting feminist viewpoint, the chapter debating whether personal makeovers involving plastic surgery represent self-liberation or are symptomatic of women’s oppression was difficult to interpret occupationally.

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Theorising Social Exclusion

Taket, A., Crisp, B. R., Nevill, A., Lamaro, G., Graham, M. & Barter-Godfrey, S. (Eds.). 2009. Abingdon, UK; Routledge, 248 pp. AUS\$55.00. Paperback. (Also available in Hardback).

This landmark book focuses on how social exclusion and social connectedness are constructed in the context of the lived experiences of people and groups, and in particular those who view themselves as marginalised and oppressed. This book attempts to link theory, research and practice to provide a multidisciplinary and dynamic approach towards understanding these phenomena. Australian scholars from social science and health backgrounds including occupational therapy, share their local and international perspectives on the inequities that people with social inclusion barriers experience and provide practical ways of addressing such barriers. Some of the strategies for inclusion suggested include health promotion campaigns, empowerment-based approaches, awareness raising, advocacy, policies and education. The book was written to initiate a discussion on social exclusion, inclusion and social connectedness, which brings together the theory-experience-practice relationship. It specifically allows us to understand the discourses shaping exclusionary and inclusionary processes that exist in healthcare, other systems and communities. Currently we lack literature that helps apply concepts of social exclusion to practical daily life experiences. It also uniquely adds to social science literature that has traditionally focused on social exclusion through discipline-specific areas such as sociology, politics and economics. This text widens this to a multidisciplinary approach which highlights social exclusion from different perspectives.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first introduces the underlying philosophy of social exclusion, inclusion and social connectedness emphasizing how they relate at the individual, community and societal levels. This discussion provides the basis for understanding personal narratives and insights into social exclusion and social connectedness that forms the second part of the book.

The 15 chapters in the second part cover timely topics which include a number of provocative discussions, the best of which include stories of

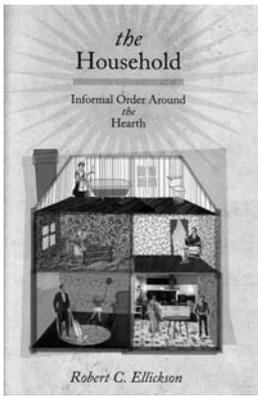
women with low income and their experiences with welfare systems, high-rise living, access issues experienced by people with disabilities, people living with HIV and AIDS, as well as 'othering' and the processes of silencing.

Finally, the book concludes by summarizing the key themes, reiterating the power of language and discourse in building and shaping connectedness and inclusion as well as providing an agenda for change. This agenda includes future research directions such as employing the inclusionary research methods of participation action research and performing meta-analyses of qualitative studies to explore how social connectedness is fostered as well as ways to reduce exclusionary practices and experiences.

Social exclusion, and in particular social inclusion has direct implications for occupational science and practice focused on enabling occupation. One critique of the book is that it considers 'inclusion and participation' as paternalistic, and problematic in theory, policy-making and implementation. The editors view social connectedness as the preferred conceptualisation of the opposite of social exclusion.

However, both the extensive and continually developing literature that exists in occupational science as well as the profession of occupational therapy related to the conceptual understanding of occupation, participation in its broadest sense and the emerging literature of social inclusion through an occupational lens could significantly challenge this premise. This book would suit both occupational science and therapy students across undergraduate and postgraduate levels as well as practitioners who want to learn about social and occupational justice issues across personal, community and societal levels from multidisciplinary perspectives. Interestingly, such perspectives of social exclusion, inclusion and participation presented in this book have distinct similarities to the discourses framed by occupational justice (including the related topics of occupational injustice, deprivation, apartheid, alienation and rights) in exploring personal, community and societal issues.

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The Household: Informal Order Around the Hearth

Robert C. Ellickson. 2008. Princeton, New Jersey, USA: Princeton University Press. 251pp. US \$24.95/ AU \$28-\$29. Hard cover.

The author of *The Household: Informal Order Around the Hearth* (referred to as “The Household” from here onwards) is a law professor from the United States who specializes in property law. Several diverse areas of literature and research were drawn from, including sociology, social science, family relations and marriage dynamics, economics, real estate research, family business research, corporate organization and governance, anthropology, USA population statistics, intentional communities, marriage related contracts and property law. Not surprisingly, a possible challenge is to grasp the wide range of unfamiliar terms used. Once this is hurdled, absorbing the text becomes fairly straightforward. This is made easier by the structure and introduction contained in the preface and the first chapter.

The contents of *The Household* is organized sequentially, and to use a pictorial representation – the whole “tree” is introduced first, followed by the foundation / soil that the tree grows from, with an analysis of “branches” in subsequent chapters. Each chapter is organized logically into topics, and the index is user friendly. Another useful feature is the extensive reference to “Notes” throughout the contents. While the “Notes” adds context, depth and breadth to the contents, one can choose to read the main text without distraction from the main topics.

The Household describes and analyses in detail a familiar daily experience for almost everyone: Where we live, and who we live with. There are broad similarities with describing and analyzing occupation – what is familiar, thought to be simple and assumed to be fairly static, once unpacked and analysed, and became strangely unfamiliar, layered in its complexity and dynamic in its fluidity. What may be thought as a local phenomenon existing in current times is revealed in *The Household* as being a global phenomenon which has resisted major changes through the different eras of recorded human history.

This book is unique in its perspective when compared with the available literature on the laws and economics of families and property / residences. It is not just about contracts, tenancies, properties, marriages, or the economics of intentional communities. It draws from the afore mentioned fields of knowledge and research to answer the following questions:

- 1) What defines a household? How does that definition apply in different nations throughout different eras?
- 2) How and why are households different from families and marriage? Why are those distinctions important?
- 3) How is a household formed? What are the forces or influences behind the formation of households? How are these universal? What other factors come into play?
- 4) Why do the dominant patterns of household continue to exist?
- 5) What establishes and maintains order in the household? How can that equilibrium be disrupted?

If one accepts that being a member of a household is an important role in the process of occupational mastery, then from the viewpoint of the study of occupational beings, the *Household* adds the following perspectives:

1. What and how legal, social, cultural and political structures affect the formation and organisation of a worldwide occupational role – household member.
2. How this in turn influences the formation and organisation of the system – home life or, the household.
3. A common factor that was highlighted in *The Household* is “transaction costs”, i.e. the costs of decision making. According to the author, transaction-cost economics is a significant factor in the answers to questions 3, 4 and 5 in the previous paragraph. Might this be another element to be considered and added to the current understanding and analysis of humans as occupational beings? It is a logical concept that once described can be understood as part of lived experience, but is difficult to quantify and be measured with current known measures.
4. The last chapter provides some direction and suggestions for future study and research, and for policy makers, especially in the areas of marriage, welfare and taxation systems, the author reinforces forethought on how proposed changes in these systems would positively or negatively impact home life.

The Household provides both quantitative and descriptive information on people’s participation in home life in current times, as well as in history. The book makes reference to multiple sources, but of most use is the author’s analysis and insight into the available literature during his investigation of a micro-society that exists literally at our door steps.

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