

## BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTE RENDUS

### **In Recovery: The Making of Mental Health Policy**

*By N. Jacobson*

Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004

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This book chronicles the experiences of the author, Nora Jacobson, during her involvement in a project to reevaluate mental health policy in Wisconsin.

The book's major goal is to call into question the concept of *recovery* as it pertains to mental health policy and delivery. "What is recovery? Who can recover? Recovery from (of?) what? Who has the authority to define recovery?" (p. 33). Jacobson describes the role that this concept has played in policy-making over the last century or so. She begins by providing a fairly detailed description of the shifts in Wisconsin's ideology and policy regarding mental health during the 19th and 20th centuries.

The state of Wisconsin embarked on a project to reform/transform its mental health system, publishing The Blue Ribbon Commission's Final Report in 1997. The goals of the commission were to increase economic efficiency within the mental health system, and to "recommend a service system targeted at prevention, early intervention, treatment, recovery and positive consumer outcomes" (Blue Ribbon Report, <http://www.bu.edu/cpr/recovery/documents/BlueRibbonComm.pdf>). The report included statements regarding the importance of recovery as a goal of the mental health system. The report referred to recovery in an abstract sense, and a workgroup was formed to create a more concrete definition, including specific recommendations for policy change based on the report's theoretical description of recovery.

The second half of the book is a detailed account of how this taskforce of diverse stakeholders handled this task. As a member of this group, Jacobson participated in the discussions, struggles, and decisions in recommending concrete changes to the mental health system. As in many groups charged with implementing change to an institutionalized system, she describes the familiar divide between those who aimed for reform vs. those who desired fundamental transformation.

Early in the book, Jacobson outlines her theoretical influences: symbolic interaction, grounded theory, and dimensional analysis (p. xii). Her treatment of the research questions using these three lenses translates into a thorough, multitextured discussion of recovery and institutional mental health service delivery.

Jacobson thoroughly describes the type of research methodology employed within the project. Along with an in-depth analysis of the concept of recovery and its role in mental health, she provides a rich explanation of her research process. She discusses dilemmas that many researchers will recognize.

For example, as both a participant and observer when doing participatory research, she notes the struggles over making her own assertions as opposed to letting the data speak for itself. She includes some of her reflexive thinking about the project through chapter interstices that provide insight into how she sees her own subject location as contributing to her analysis of recovery.

Throughout the book the author continually questions the concept of recovery and explores its varied facets. Is recovery the lessening of pathological symptoms or the rebuilding of individual strengths? Such questions are not resolved within the text; rather, Jacobson analyzes the people, ideologies, and institutions that have influenced the responses to these questions over the past 100 years as mental health service delivery has become more formalized, medicalized and, recently, influenced by consumer and survivor experience.

Although her analysis focuses more on political and corporate influences on conceptualizing recovery, the book reminded me of the need to question how this concept is used in popular culture—the individualistic “behave your way to success” perspective espoused by Dr. Phil and other pop psychologists. Who is responsible for recovery when it implies not only lessening of pathologies but also achieving higher levels of self-actualization?

The book ends with a critique of the role that the concept of recovery will play in the future given two aspects of current mental health policy. First, there is the power struggle as mental health consumers and advocates push for more influence over their treatment and less blind deference to medical professionals in defining what is needed to assist their recoveries. Second, the welfare reform that continues to occur throughout the United States sees decreased public spending on health services and increased corporate influence in areas of social services. Mental health policy that aims to assist an individual’s recovery will receive pressure from these ongoing changes and challenges.

Throughout her analysis, Jacobson maintains an awareness of the power of social, political, and economic forces on mental health policy. This book would be of interest to researchers and policymakers within the mental health field. It provides a thorough analysis of the concept of recovery, tracking this concept over time within mental health policy in Wisconsin. Those not familiar with jargon relating to mental health are provided with sufficient details and information in order to follow her analysis.