

The Wounds of Exclusion: Poverty, Women's Health and Social Justice. Colleen Reid. Edmonton, AB: Qual Institute Press, 2004, 277 pages.

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In this insightful and informative book based on her doctoral dissertation, *The Wounds of Exclusion: Poverty, Women's Health, and Social Justice*, Colleen Reid explores how a group of women living in poverty understand and define health and how they participate in forms of social justice in relation to women's health. Winner of the 2002/2003 International Institute for Qualitative Methodology Dissertation Award, Reid also engages in an ongoing critique of the feminist action research model she adopted as a methodological framework for her study.

Reid presents a solid interdisciplinary theoretical foundation for her research, drawing on health equity studies and feminist and social justice theories. Using a social determinants-of-health perspective (one that claims that health is influenced by social factors such as race, sex, income, and class), she argues that dominant discourses of health exclude people who live on the margins of society. She contends that people who live in poverty are less healthy than wealthier people, yet current health inequities research does not adequately investigate what causes the disparities. Moreover, it fails to address women's health and issues of poverty. Hence Reid asked the following questions for her research.

- 1) How did a group of women on low income understand and negotiate their experiences of poverty, exclusion, and health, both individually and collectively?
- 2) From the perspectives of a group of women on low income, what was the connection between poverty and health?
- 3) How did a group of women on low income collaboratively identify, organize, and enact action towards social change to address their shared concerns? (pp. 61-62).

Reid's choice of methodology for her study is well justified in her book. Whereas much of the current literature on poverty and health is based on quantitative studies, Reid notes that qualitative research provides a useful model for exploring socio-environmental issues. Similarly, qualitative research creates spaces where women can discuss their experiences and views about what they need to improve their health. Subsequently, Reid chose a feminist action research (FAR) approach to her work. She defines FAR as: "a conceptual

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and methodological framework that enables a critical understanding of women's multiple perspectives and works towards inclusion, participation, action, and social change while confronting the underlying assumptions the researcher brings into the research process" (p. 35).

Reid conducted her research in an existing feminist action research project in British Columbia known as Women Organizing Activities for Women (WOAW). The program developed out of a workshop for women living in poverty that aimed to expose barriers that prevented their participation in community recreation. A doctoral student, Reid became involved in WOAW as project manager. She helped to organize a subgroup (the Research Team) created as a place for women to discuss their experiences of health and poverty and to consider forms of collective action. All the participants in Reid's project were WOAW members. Data were gathered from Research Team meetings' transcripts and field notes, one-on-one interviews, and participant observation. Throughout the book, Reid addresses the challenges of ensuring that the data collection and analysis processes were collaborative with the women on the Research Team, one of the goals of FAR.

The women involved in the study are introduced through stories using their own words to articulate their experiences. Some pieces are noticeably shorter than others due to the amount of data collected and what the women were comfortable disclosing and having presented. Although these stories may appear incomplete, their inclusion is important. To discount them would have silenced voices and perspectives that are a significant part of the research.

Reid clearly articulates an analysis of the women's experiences of exclusion. On a cultural level, the women experience exclusion in the form of stereotypes and labels. On an institutional level, exclusion takes the shape of degradation and disrespect as people, policies, and systems fail to understand and address their issues and concern. On a material level, the women are excluded from access to basic needs such as safe and affordable housing, transport, and resources for food and child care.

As well as levels of exclusion, Reid presents the dynamic and sometimes contradictory discourses co-created by the women as they explored their experiences of health and living in poverty. Yet she emphasizes: "The following discourses capture only partial moments of the women's identities; they are not meant to be seen as static or fixed representations" (p. 168). They include the powerless victim discourse ("there is nothing that can be done to change my situation"), the legitimacy and entitlement discourse ("my hardship is more legitimate than someone else's so I am more entitled to assistance and acceptance"), and the individual work ethic discourse ("I am in control of my life and will rise above this situation"). Reid argues that each discourse unwittingly reinforces the dominant health discourse that creates the exclusion: in part by not holding society accountable for the injustice of health inequities among citizens. However, she notes that in the discourses were examples of individual empowerment and action. Further, she also identifies a critical and collectivist discourse through which the women recognize how social conditions work to disadvantage and disempower them and how they may challenge the dominant stereotypes of women living in poverty.

In her conclusion, Reid makes policy recommendations that include support for programs such as WOAW, advocacy for more collaboration in policy-making, and politicizing social determinants of health. In the end, she argues, "We can only be healthy in a healthy society" (p. 244). Thus we need to understand health as a social justice issue with a goal to initiate individual and collective change that aims for inclusion of all sectors of the population.

Reid also offers reflective analyses of her role as a feminist action researcher. She points to challenges of FAR that include dealing with issues of power and privilege between herself and the women, recognizing the limitations that prevent the full participation of all involved, and challenging and accepting perceptions of her roles and the roles of the women. She discusses her emotional response to the challenges faced and calls for more feminist action researchers to do the same. Finally, she struggles to determine whether the group achieved social change, a struggle she does not resolve. Instead she questions what constitutes social change, recommending future work toward a theory of action and social change. Overall, Reid's reflections support her claim that although feminist action research is a valuable tool, the methodology needs further critique, analysis, and development to narrow the gap between the ideal and what really happens once researchers are engaged in the practice.

Reid's book is theoretical, practical, and reflective. I recommend it to those concerned with issues of health and inclusion, those interested in engaging in FAR and other forms of participatory research, and graduate students who wish to read an award-winning dissertation. Furthermore, this book provides valuable insights for educators and researchers committed to the development of socially just, healthy community education programs. Particularly, it emphasizes the importance of listening to the voices of the community members whose experiences and opinions are often unsolicited and unheard to ensure that education programs address their needs and concerns. Although her writing is steeped in theory, her voice and the voices of the women are clear in each chapter in the form of direct quotations and examples, and her writing is rich, descriptive, and critically reflective. Colleen Reid has succeeded in writing a work that contributes to community health studies, social justice theories, and feminist action research. Equally important, she has done so while honoring herself and the women with whom she worked.