

5. Maintain a strong, integrated focus on value (social outcomes)
6. Understand evidence and integrate various types of knowledge
7. Have a relentless focus on 'relative value'
8. Know where and how prioritisation and decision-making occurs
9. Have an efficient mechanism to give effect to investment decisions
10. Use a commonly agreed framing, nomenclature and terminology
11. Maintain public support
12. Develop the right organisational culture

Some results to date

 **\$13.7 billion** ... future lifetime cost of welfare system

 **24%** ... sole parent support benefit recipients

 **17%** ... children in benefit-dependent homes

 **3 years** ... benefit for youth clients (17 down to 14)

Thank you

David Kenkel: Social Work and Social Investment

Social Investment - cutting the connection between cause and consequence

As a profession, social work has always been concerned with both the features of society that cause social deprivation and the consequences of that deprivation; particularly in light of what is known about the impact of poverty and iniquity on measures of well-being that include the capacity to easily do right by one's children.

The art of effective social work is relational; combining skilled intervention at an individual level with acute awareness of, and willingness to challenge, inequitable social forces that can push families to the kinds of dangerous margins that threaten children's well-being. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), 2016, has this to say about what social work is:

Structural barriers contribute to the perpetuation of inequalities, discrimination, exploitation and oppression. The development of critical consciousness through reflecting on structural sources of oppression and/or privilege, on the basis of criteria such as race, class, language, religion, gender, disability, culture and sexual orientation, and developing action strategies towards addressing structural and personal barriers are central to emancipatory practice where the goals are the empowerment and liberation of people. In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty, liberate the vulnerable and oppressed, and promote social inclusion and social cohesion.

As can be seen – an awareness of the impacts of structural inequity and willingness to act on both the impacts and the causes of structural inequity are central to the social work identity.

Loci of control - the individual

Social Investment as it is proposed in New Zealand reflects a neoliberal ideology that has no room for the sort of nuanced and critical balance of analysis and approach shown in the IFSW statement. Instead,

the social investment approach sites the loci of control of individual destiny within individual hands irrespective of circumstance, context, and history. This hyper-responsibilising of the individual aligns with neoliberal thinking more generally. Within a neoliberal worldview social positioning and social inequities role in determining the parameters of the possible are obscured by a fervent belief in the capacity of the individual to take charge of its own future irrespective of the insults of history. Life outcomes for adults, and their children, are understood to be a consequence of choice not circumstance (Kenkel, 2005).

Revealed truths – not contestable logics

Neo-liberalism has been described as operating like a revealed truth rather than a contestable logic (Myers 2004). The implication is that neoliberal policies are determined not by the logics of evidence but rather a set of universal truths of human function to be adhered to despite local evidence to the contrary.

A central neo-liberal trope is that individuals are, or should be, in charge of their own lives, and the failure to live a successful life reflects not social context, but a failure of individual will or determination (Kenkel, 2005; Rose, 1998). Following this notion that neoliberalism privileges its own 'truths' even if evidence contests that 'truth', then social policy promoted by neo-liberally informed policy makers will tend to elevate evidence supporting approaches promoting individual responsibility for life outcomes. And - just as consistently, silence or simply ignore evidence that life outcomes are more a factor of social forces than individual choice. This seems very much the case in New Zealand's approach to social investment and the evidence base upon which it is built.

Science in service to ideology

I would argue that social investment New Zealand approach is an outre example of the scientific method being used in the service of ideological ends. In terms of parenting capacity, detailed scientific attention is paid to the consequences of poverty and deprivation without ever naming them as consequences. Both data mining and psychological research are used to paint a veneer of respectability over the narrow targeting of the sorts of parenting deficits that are so often created by policies causing poverty, marginalisation, and deprivation. What is not paid attention to with equivalent fervour is the equally well researched scientific evidence that makes it clear that poverty and marginalisation impact hugely on the capacity of adults to parent their children (Duva, Metzger, 2010; Wynd, 2013; Sedlak, Mettenburg, Basena, Petta, McPherson, Greene, & Li, 2010).

I believe that to ignore the data that supports the link between social positioning and social outcome is an act of deliberate ideological 'see-no-evil behaviour' that is both audacious and must require determination to maintain.

Where the audacity lives

At a practical level this means New Zealand's management of social ills through social investment systematically ignores social cause in favour of treating individual consequences while consistently denying the causal link. This skewing of approach is hinted at in in the 2016 Modernising CYFS expert panel report using the word poverty once, trauma 50 times, love 36 times, and investment an extraordinary 240 times (Kenkel, 2016).

Social work threatened and a threat

A neoliberal understanding of the self valorises the role of individual responsibility in determining life outcome (Kenkel, 2005, Rose, 1999). The narratives that are consistently subjugated by this hyper-responsibilisation of the individual self are those of the power of social context, and, the understanding that the genesis of individual outcomes is usually social rather than a matter of individual choice and responsibility.

The values of social work, with their recognition of the linkage between social conditions and life outcomes for individuals and children, are a threat to the neoliberal individualising and responsabilising values that underpin New Zealand's social investment approach.

Equally social work is threatened by the introduction of social investment as the primary mechanism for diagnosis of problems and delivery of services as the wholesale adoption of this approach would mean to lose the social lens through which social work make sense of individual ills.

From Social Security to assemblages of damage

How people in New Zealand are made sense of and acted upon has changed greatly in the last 100 years. Going back some 8 decades to the NZ 1938 Social Security Act one can see clearly articulated the notion of a decent society as one that cares for those whom circumstance has disadvantaged. Amongst the policy balance of equality of opportunity versus equality of outcome in 1938 equality of outcome was evidently ascendant as a policy driver.

I have argued (2017) we could perhaps be described as a society that over 70 years moved from the 1938 vision of society as a network of care, to Papadoulos's 2004 vision of citizens being understood as assemblages of capacity flexibly forming (and reforming) themselves to fit the neo-liberal market.

Papadoulos argued that unlike the Keynesian state, people under neoliberalism are understood not primarily as separate individuals that society has a responsibility for but rather as assemblages of capacity. One important capacity (and responsibility) being the ability and willingness to reform the self so as to best survive in the marketplace.

Under such a vision of the self the role of social work was perhaps not to deliver good outcomes directly but rather to encourage the capacity of nonperformers in the market to become more flexible, and better able to accommodate to the changing needs of the market place. Care for the other became not direct care but rather a disciplining procedure to encourage greater capacity for the self to care for itself within a market regime.

Divided societies and logics of action

Things have moved on since 2004, and with authors such as Waquant (2009), I argue that Western societies are moving beyond 'disciplining to reform' as a way of managing the supposedly aberrant to more brutal policies designed to simply exclude and control. In considering this ugly notion alongside recent changes to child welfare, the image that forms for me is of a New Zealand social space divided between effective market players offering loving homes - and proven individual assemblages of damage who are perhaps no longer worthy of efforts to reconstitute them as flexible players in the marketplace.

Dangerous damage control

This putative shift to a New Zealand divided between the loving middle classes and those so damaged as to perhaps be irredeemable dictates logics of action that are, speculatively, no longer so focused on rehabilitation but more on the safe exclusion of the damaged and dangerous other. For Child Welfare practice this would mean excluding the risk of damage being passed from dangerous adult to innocent child. Under this sort of conceptual regime an almost Victorian approach of child rescue from evil moral influences becomes simply common-sense.

These Quasi-Victorian logics might (speculatively) in part explain the new eagerness evident in government policy and legislative change to remove at risk children early. I have wondered if this new eagerness is driven as much by an - 'assess parents with a view to discard because they are too damaged' - policy approach as it is new understandings of the impact on children of harmful home circumstances.

A new brutality with a New Zealand twist and a policy fantasy

Waquant (2009) argues that neoliberally informed social policy and practice is no longer so interested in disciplining to reform, but instead newly interested in simple removal from the social equation those citizens self-demonstrating a persistent inability to perform well in the market. A New Zealand twist on this social deletion (clothed in words of loving homes and child-centric practice) might be to make possible the swift removal of children from damaged and harmful homes and their insertion into the purportedly loving homes of the middle classes. Perhaps the driving policy fantasy being that the damaged and inadequate parents would quietly fade away allowing their children to thrive in their new

loving homes and within a generation a society would arise solely populated by successful entrepreneurs all raised within loving families and guaranteed trauma free.

A challenge for social workers

One of the challenges for the social work profession when faced with these sorts of potential shifts in policy and their accompanying demands of practice is that without extreme care at this juncture, we risk becoming the arm of the state that uncritically performs these brutal tasks of population dividing, othering, and removal.

Dangerous conceptual shifts

For the social work industry to enthusiastically support and perform these kinds of brutal functions would require a conceptual shift in how social work understands itself. The social work concern with causes of social ills would need to be replaced with a more narrow focus on treating consequences without ever naming them as consequences. The popularity of trauma based practice seen in recent policy documents might arguably be a step along the way to a re-conceptualisation of social work. Trauma-based practice while undoubtedly useful for working with traumatised individuals and families is not concerned with the broader social conditions that traumatise whole communities. In a sense, the adoption of approaches that accentuate the skills of working with individuals over the skills of perceiving the social drivers of individual problems can potentially operate to abrade the causal link between social ills and individual outcomes. Understanding and articulating these causal links is vital if social work as a profession is to maintain its integrity.

Data mining and evidence

Data collection producing apparent evidence of vulnerability and dependence to determine targets for investment is central to the proposed social investment approaches. However as Shamubeel Equb, (2016) argues; the complexity of people's lived experience does not translate easily into data. He is concerned that narrowly focused quantitative data mining can all too easily lead to a situation where the symptoms of vulnerability become the target rather than the target being social factors that cause vulnerability.

Evidence based practice

The recent tranche of proposed changes in policy and practice approaches advocate the social work adoption of a more evidence-based approach to service delivery. This fits with Parton's (2008) argument that social work as a profession is in general moving away from a relational and narratively informed practice approach toward one informed by the logics of the algorithm.

Risking decontextualized practice

Evidence-based practice is concerned with the effectiveness of intervention. Such a concern can be very much to clients' benefit as social work clients deserve to have workers whose practice is based on what's best known to work well.

If social work is considered to have two arms: one being skills of effective intervention at an individual and family level the other being the capacity to perceive social injustice and act on it; then clearly evidence-based practice is a good thing in that it strengthens one arm of social work. However, a potential problem exists - evidence-based social work practice tends, in my experience to be de-contextualised practice that is not so much concerned with the broader social picture but instead focused on tasks to be performed upon and with individuals and families. Evidence-based practice is also vulnerable to capture by professions that do not share social works central commitment to social justice.

Risk of capture by the Psy-discourses

Often the so-called evidence for what makes effective practice is drawn from the knowledge forms and perspectives of other professions, such as psychology, this is particularly the case with the new focus on trauma. Some authors criticise psychology as being a profession rather prone to seeing the pathology of individuals without noticing the pathologies of societies (Parker 1999). In terms of this insidious slide of

prioritising 'consequences not causes' it is perhaps telling that recent legislative changes make it possible for non-social workers, (such as psychologists) to make critical decisions about children at risk.

Reading between the lines

Reading between the lines, one could speculate that, intended or not, this new empowerment of the psychological in child protection decision-making can operate as an ideologically useful device to de-emphasise the 'social' voice of social work and allow more space for the 'individualising' voice of psychology. Parker (1999) links the rising social authority of the psy-discourses to neo-liberalism's 30 year dominance of western political and social life, with other authors writing to psychology's role in disseminating and validating the norms of neoliberalism in western societies over the last 30 years. (Cushman, 1995; Parker, 1999; Rose, 1998 & 1999).

Loving Homes

Following the trend of attention to consequences not causes there is currently also much policy call for purportedly insufficiently loved children identified as 'at major risk' to be placed into loving families. As described at length in the 'Investing in New Zealand's Children and their Families - Expert Panel Final Report (2015)', this follows a great deal of unsurprising evidence that children do better in loving homes. However, such reports that have driven the recent changes are almost completely silent on what creates an absence of love in a home.

Data that is conspicuously absent in driving recent New Zealand child welfare policy is the equally large amount of evidence that despair, poverty, hopelessness and marginalisation significantly erode the capacity to parent lovingly (Duva, Metzger, 2010; Wynd, 2013; Sedlak, Mettenburg, Basena, Petta, McPherson, Greene, & Li, 2010). To belabour the point - such findings on the correlation between social conditions and the parental capacity to easily express love to one's children do not appear to be part of the suite of evidence our government is currently paying attention to in planning where and how to invest.

There is also somewhat of a policy call for social workers to be better trained in psychological techniques for diagnosing and treating trauma (Ballantyne, 2016). The inference perhaps being that if social workers could cure individual trauma (perhaps under the guidance of psychologists), then child abuse would melt away. The rather obvious unconsidered fact is that a society that places a large proportion of its parents and children in poverty, and then blames them for their situation, reproduces trauma on a grand scale that is not in the least amenable to individual trauma-fixing therapy.

Depoliticising Social Work - social work as a threat and social work threatened

The nature of social work is to engage with the lived experience of people in struggle. It is a rare social worker whose daily practice with overwhelmingly poor clients does not operate as somewhat a process of conscientization. As Hyslop (2013) explores each new generation of practitioners tends to rediscover the truth that individual problems only make sense when viewed through the prism of society.

Niggling contradictions

Social workers then tend to express a niggling voice of contradiction to the neoliberal vision of society as so hyper individualised and responsabilised that social explanations for individual problems become incomprehensible because they are outside of the common sense. As a voice that keeps rediscovering the truth that individual ills have social origins, social work is a threat to a neoliberal worldview. The common sense that social workers continually rediscover is not one that any neoliberal government would like to have popularised.

Threatening the rationale for the reforms

In addition - one of the primary drivers of the reforms to child protection social work of the last few years has been the claim that current social work approaches do not work to stop or slow rates of child abuse in New Zealand. The rather obvious answer that neoliberal government policies have created a social climate sufficiently hostile to good parenting that new clients are produced in abundance every year is not an answer easily able to be heard by the neoliberal ear. It is an answer that threatens the individualising narrative of neoliberalism. It is an answer that neo-liberal policy makers do not wish to

hear, and that the politicians responsible for current policies would not wish to see become common public discourse.

Silencing responses

Responses to the potential critical voice of social work have been predictable and perhaps we need to look no further than the recent comments of MP Alfred Ngaro to understand that a tamed and de-voiced social work profession solely focused on service delivery is the preferred gold standard. The work of Grey and Sedgwick (2013) also reveals the chilling and silencing effect of gag clauses.

Two Kinds of risk

Clearly as it is currently constituted, social work offers somewhat of a threat to a neoliberal vision of society and as a threat is in constant risk of being silenced. The risks in my opinion come in two forms. Firstly: a simple increase in the power and type of gag clauses. Secondly: and, in my opinion a much greater risk, are attempts to reconfigure the beating heart of social work so that it becomes primarily orientated on service delivery and loses its focus on social justice.

What to do? Being loud and having friends

It is the second risk that social work desperately needs to manage as a profession. We need to continually reclaim and articulate our identity as an active and loud 'on the ground situated social conscience for society'. The question of how to do this amongst the stress and business of practice comes up in almost any discussion with social workers. The answers are of course complex and deserving of detailed attention in other forums. That said, I believe the first part of the answer are the first basic lessons of social activists and change agents everywhere: find and name solidarity, never work alone, seek allies always.

References and other reading:

- Ballantyne, N. (2016, July 31.) *Reforming social work education: the question of curriculum inputs*. [Blog post] Retrieved from: <http://www.reimagining-social-work-nz.org/2016/07/reforming-social-work-education-the-question-of-curriculum-inputs/>
- Brown, J. Cohen, P. Johnson, J. & Salzinger, S. (1998). *A longitudinal analysis of risk factors for child maltreatment: findings of a 17-year prospective study of officially recorded and self-reported child abuse and neglect*. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 22(11) 1065–1078
- Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty (2012). *Solutions to child poverty in New Zealand: Evidence for action*. Wellington, New Zealand: Office of the Children's Commissioner.
- Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty (2013). *Child poverty in New Zealand: Building on the progress to date*. Wellington, New Zealand: Office of the Children's Commissioner.
- Cushman, P. (1995). *Constructing the self, constructing America*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Duva, J. Metzger, S. (2010). *Addressing poverty as a major risk factor in child neglect: Promising policy and practice*. Casey Family Services. *Protecting Children* 25(1), 63-74
- Grey, S. Sedgwick, C. (2013). *The contract state and constrained democracy - the community and voluntary sector under threat*. Policy quarterly - volume 9, Issue three - August 2013 – Pgs 3-10
- Hyslop, I. (2013a). *Social work practice knowledge – An enquiry into the nature of the knowledge generated and applied in the practice of social work*. PhD thesis: Retrieved from Massey University website: mro.massey.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/0179/5139/01_...
- Kenkel, D. (2017, June 4). *Prospects for Social Work in Aotearoa New Zealand: Segmentation or Solidarity?* [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.reimagining-social-work-nz.org/2017/06/prospects-for-social-work-in-new-zealand-segmentation-or-solidarity/#more-1324>
- Kenkel, D. (2016, April 23). *The absent elephant in the 2016 'Modernising Child, Youth and Family Expert Panel Report'* [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.reimagining-social-work-nz.org/2016/04/the-absent-elephant-in-the-2016-modernising-child-youth-and-family-expert-panel-report/>
- Kenkel, D. (2005). *Futurity: Narratives of the future*, 100 point thesis submitted for Master of Arts in Social Policy, Massey University New Zealand.
- Morton, K. Gray, C. Heins, A. Carswell, S. (2014). *Access to Justice for Beneficiaries a Community Law Response. A Community Law Canterbury Access To Justice Research Project*. New Zealand.
- Murali, V & Oyebode, F. (2004). *Poverty, social inequality and mental health*. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* (2004), 10, 216–224
- Myers, C. (2004). *Human service as hegemony* Retrieved August, 24, 2004 from <http://www.well.com/user/clmeyers/therapeutics.htm>
- Myers, C. (2004). *Dilemmas of children's welfare policies and practices a critical and discursive perspective* Retrieved August 24, 2004 from <http://www.well.com/users/clmeyers/children>
- Papadopoulos, D. (2004). *Editorial: psychology and the political*. *Critical Psychology* 12. 5-13. United Kingdom. Lawrence & Wishart.
- Parton, N. (2008). *Changes in the form of knowledge in social work: From the 'social' to the 'informational'?* *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(2), 253–269.

Parker, I. (1999). *Deconstructing psychotherapy*. London, Sage.

Rashbrooke, M. (2013). *Inequality: a New Zealand Crisis*. Bridget Williams Books: Wellington, New Zealand.

Rashbrooke, M. (2015). *Wealth in New Zealand*, Bridget Williams Books: Wellington, New Zealand

Reeves, A, Mckee, M, Mackenbach, J, Whiteboard, M & Stuckler, D. (2016). *Introduction of a National Minimum Wage reduced depressive symptoms in low-wage workers: A quasi-natural experiment In The UK*. *Health Economics*. 1–17

Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of freedom*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Rose, N. (1998). *Inventing our selves: Psychology, power, and personhood*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Sedlak, A.J., Mettenburg, J., Basena, M., Petta, I., McPherson, K., Greene, A., and Li, S. (2010). *Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4): Report to Congress*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

Sugarman, J. (2015) *Neoliberalism and Psychological Ethics*. *Journal of theoretical and philosophical Psychology*, 2015 Vol.35, No.2 113-116. American Psychological Association. USA.

Szalavitz, M. (2011). *Yes, addiction does discriminate. The fix: addiction and recovery straight up*. Home Features. USA.

Wacquant, L (2009) *Punishing the Poor - The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* Durham Duke University Press

Wynd, D. (2013). *Child abuse: what role does poverty play?* Child Poverty Action Group: Auckland, New Zealand.

Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2009). *The spirit level: Why equality is better for everyone*. London: Penguin.

Thank you

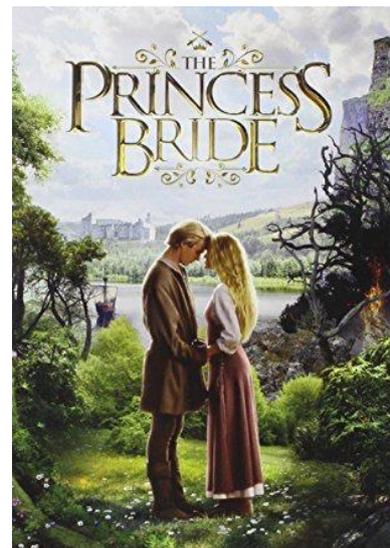
Jess Berentson-Shaw: Bringing back trust into social policy (also a bit of the fairy tale)

"All the world is made of faith, and trust, and pixie dust." J.M. Barrie



Jess Berentson-Shaw
@DrJessBerentson

I might be taking this Princess Bride/Social Investment Allegory too seriously, but come on



What Is Social Investment In Aotearoa New Zealand?

"You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means." Inigo Montoya, *The Princess Bride*



Scandinavian Style Social Investment:

"Involves increasing human capital, income redistribution and addressing chronic unemployment."
Destrmau & Wilson, 2016