This book comes garlanded with praise from experts in, and advocates of, restorative justice (RJ). Not least amongst those exponents is the most renowned and honoured academic in the RJ field, John Braithwaite (1985). It is potentially an important book, since it represents an advance in terms of the rigour of its arguments and the clarity of its purposes over much writing on children’s rights and child victimisation. That said, it is not an easy read. In many ways, this is a challenging book, not least in the paradigmatic change surrounding children we are invited to explore by the author. This is also a dense text in terms of both its physicality (i.e. the font size is small and the pages closely packed) and its theoretical weight. It is certainly the most intellectually systematic and wide-ranging account of childhood victimisation and the responses to childhood victimisation, particularly with regard to the weakness of the current criminal justice system, that I have read. This powerful and thoughtful inter-disciplinary review is combined with an exploration of the tenets of RJ and uses a needs/rights model to demonstrate the challenges to RJ involving child victims (including cases of child sexual abuse that the author describes as a ‘special case warranting special consideration’) and its potential benefits for them.

No other justice practice has attracted as much attention as RJ has in such a short period of time since John Braithwaite (1985) introduced the concept to a wider audience than had previously been aware of the idea. However, Tali Gal does make some assumptions about the level of knowledge regarding RJ and it usage (certainly within the UK) within social work. Those readers unfamiliar with RJ, underpinned as it is with the principles of repairing harm, stakeholder participation and transformation in community and government roles and relationships, might want to first familiarise themselves by exploring another recent Oxford University Press text (Beck et al., 2011) in which readers are introduced to the idea of how RJ can be utilised within social work. Alternatively, do what we tell our students to do and follow the trail of references that the author provides.
In terms of structure, the book is organised in a logical, simple manner, with five substantive chapters and an introductory and concluding chapter. There is a very useful index and the author provides occasional diagrammatical explanations of the concepts, principles, frameworks and models she utilises in expanding her propositions and argument.

Throughout, the author is clear about her goal to bring academics and social workers together in an effort to address the difficulties faced by victimised children. This is evident from the opening chapter, which presents the objectives and outline of the book, introducing the reader to the idea of RJ as an alternative response to crimes against children and its potential in addressing the human rights and needs of victimised children to the final chapter, which succinctly summarises the findings and arguments of the previous chapters. Gal identifies specific ways in which current criminal justice practices fail to secure decent outcomes for child victims and subsequently demonstrates how RJ practices are more likely to provide opportunities to participate in a safe process. The acknowledgment of harm, the validation of behaviour and reparation are clustered with the human rights principles of best interests, equality, rehabilitation, development and protection.

Careful attention to the messages of Tali Gal’s research—and to her intellectual urging—would help to improve the way we respond to child victimisation and could actually make it less likely to occur. This book deserves readers who are prepared to devote time and effort to its arguments.

References


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