

WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY | 6/03/21

SOCIAL RESILIENCE

A PRESENTATION BY TOM CONSIDINE

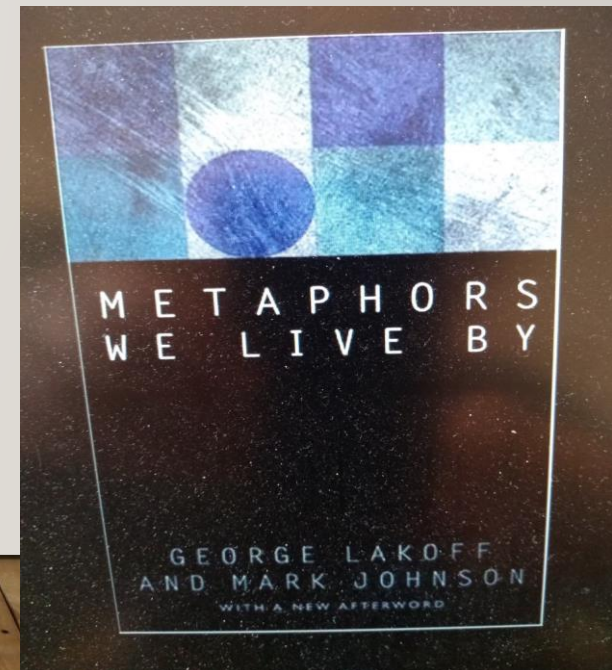
INTRODUCTION

- We meet a year into the COVID-19 Pandemic;
- It has been difficult for most of us;
- We have had to adapt to new challenges;
- Consider what has sustained us?
- What has helped us cope?
- Any examples?



SETTING THE SCENE: WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

- Resilience originates from the Latin, *resilens* the present participle of Latin *resilire*
- Prefix *re* means back, and *silire* means to recoil, or rebound;
- Commonly understood currently as perseverance in the face of difficulty or bouncing-back;
- There is no definitive answer as to what constitutes resilience; one survey identified at least seventeen characteristics (Grant and Kinman 2014);
- One common feature is adaptability – in our thinking, behaviours, outlook and beliefs;
- Drawing on the ideas of George Lakoff, that conceptual metaphors can be used to used to explain complex phenomena , suggest framing resilience in metaphorical terms, as follows

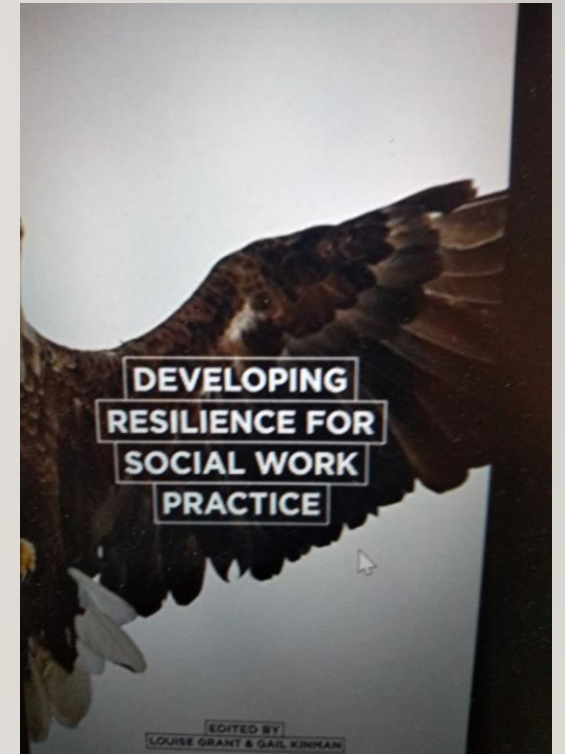


RESILIENCE AS A METAPHOR
**CAPTAIN SIR TOM MOORE'S REAL LEGACY IS A
LASTING MESSAGE OF HOPE AND CHEERY
RESILIENCE**



RESEARCH : HOW DO SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS PERCEIVE THE MEANING OF RESILIENCE IN THEIR PRACTICE?

- The study reflects the growing interest in promoting resilience for social work practitioners in the face of challenging work experiences e.g. Louise Grant and Gail Kinman *Developing Resilient Social Practice*;
- This is one of the few studies examining how research is understood in practice. Most research focus on identifying what characterises resilience and how to acquire these skills
- The research involved interviewing sixteen social work students and six Practice Educators;
- ‘This study questioned the limits of the dominant discourse of resilience and develop a social model of resilience which is centred around supportive relationships and collective responses to social challenges.



RESILIENCE AS PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT

- *'I think it is really important to have those resilient skills because... I have really enjoyed the course, and I really like the job I will be going into, so... when you have worked really hard[resilience] is really important'*
- *But* who has the power to promote resilience, and to what ends:
- *'I feel the promotion of it[resilience] is used for different ends...[it is]basically making sure the worker can and will do more work'*

RESILIENCE AS EXPLOITATION AND MANIPULATION

- *'You would feel that you would have to cope with workload you are given...that is extra to what you are already doing, and you might feel like...I might feel I have failed if I don't[take on the extra work]that puts[responsibility] all on you'*
- *'They [managers] were saying you have to cope, you have to cope, you have to be resilient...when you are thrown in at the deep-end and when you are crying for help, they will say, 'You have got to have resilience...you are expected to cope'*

RESILIENCE AS EMOTIONAL LABOUR

- a PE comments:
- *‘Because they want to pass this placement, and I think that if they want to pass they have to manage everything... and if they show emotions, or any vulnerability it would be deemed as weakness. I have to reassure them as their practice educator that it is not a weakness. It is part of their engagement with people, their empathy, their understanding and without it they are not showing their human side’.*
- A similar view was expressed by a student thus:
- *‘I think it[resilience as viewed by some colleagues] is an almost dirty word... it has implications that you cannot cope...’*

RESILIENCE AND WORK CULTURE

One Practice Educator summarised it as:

- *‘There is a real culture in social work that you do not have lunch, you don’t have a wee during the day because you are too busy, and all your colleagues are off on long-term sick, and everybody is at risk of being removed, and that is perceived as the only ‘real’ kind of social work’*
- A similar kind of masochistic view of practice was also made by a student who framed resilience as:
- *‘ not how hard you can hit, but how hard you can be hit’*

RESILIENCE AS PROFESSIONAL SOCIALISATION

- *'Just being able to deal with it[peoples' problems], move on, and you know, just get on with it[work].*
- A tension was identified as resilience could be a way of not caring;
- *'...where do you draw the line between.[being]resilient and being robotic?' You could say they [resilient workers] don't' really care... so to be fully resilient you would have to be robotic'.*
- An observation arose which suggests;
- *'Maybe there is such a thing as being too resilient'.*

RESILIENCE FOR AUSTERITY

- *‘I remember going into one meeting...they(social workers) were saying that funds had been cut for this and funds had been cut for that... and they were like ‘Where do we direct people to when we don’t have any services to direct them to?’*
- Another noted a warning from more experienced colleagues on the practical challenges facing social workers;
- *‘Every single social worker that we have talked to mentions you will[have to] put up with a lot of pressure... with the political climate... so much can change.’*
- Studies show how social work, along with other public services, have been shaped by external political forces, which includes the long-term effects of the 2008 global financial crisis (Ferguson et al 2018).

RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY:

- *The majority of students I work with now are in part-time employment and so there is very different financial pressure...[it has] changed in the last few years since when I have been a Practice Educator because when I started I actually worked with students who gave up their part-time jobs to complete placements, but now students have increased financial pressure.*
- *One of the consequences of this are a number of students;*
- *'not going home for a few days because they are going from placement to work and back to placement... working part-time during their placement has increased'*
- *'*

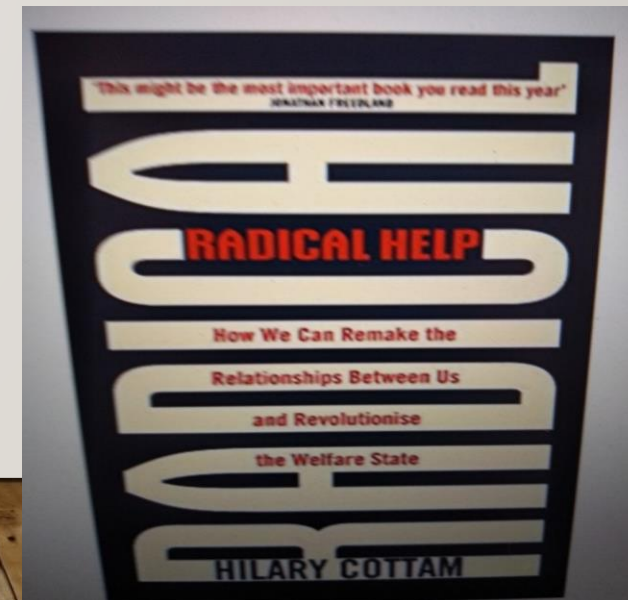


ANOTHER RESILIENT MODEL:

- *‘Social work is very procedural, bureaucratic... [which prohibits] relational social work...the role is about doing a thirty-minute assessment...there is a danger of focusing[only]on individual resilience [whereas we need to try to] think about it[resilience] in the context of how, where it [resilience] would be promoted and why’.*
- There emerged an interest in a notion of resilience which focused on co-operation;
- *‘I think resilience is about people working together...this is what worries me about the term[resilience] the definition of it is very individualised-it is important to address your emotions but it is something we do together. It it[resilience] is presented[as to]how other people are going to support you with it, then I can see how it can be useful’.*

SOCIAL RESILIENCE : BACKGROUND

- In developing a model of social resilience for Social Work practice I drew significantly on the work of
- Hilary Cottam and her pioneering study;
- Radical Help: How we can Remake the Relationships Between us and Revolutionise the Welfare State (2018);
- Seen as the offering a fourth paradigm in the history of social care; the other three been;
- 1) **Civic**- Sixteen Century to early Twentieth Century- local provision;
- 2) **State**- approx. 1940s to the 1980s- centrally –run system;
- 3) **Market**- from 1980s onwards-private provision
- 4) **Community** – defined as a ‘A network of individuals collaborating more or less formally to achieve a shared, socially beneficial goal. (Lent and Studdert 2019; 34)



SOCIAL RESILIENCE: FRAMEWORK

- Radical Help; Paradigm- Six Principles;
- Wellbeing and the Aristotelian principle of the 'Good Life;
- Capabilities;
- Relationships;
- Opportunities
- Share Experiences
- Inclusivity

WELLBEING AND THE ARISTOTELIAN IDEA OF THE 'GOOD LIFE'

- One way this could relate to resilience is to challenge the individualised notion of resilience and
- Promote a version based on '*what is central to humanity : our interdependence*' Featherstone et. al. (2018: 25);
- Rather than asking people to show their resilience in the face of difficulties, promote an environment where people seek the resources to be resilient;
- '*Resilience depends more on what we receive than what we have*' Ungar (2019:10).



RELATIONSHIPS

- Arguably the most important principle of all;
- Relating to others means being able to tell our story, who we are, where we have come from and where we hope to go; this denotes progress and resilience;
- Resilience is rooted in the meaning we give to our experiences which in turn,
- Rooted in our social context and the relationships we have made;
- Resilience arises from our connections and the opportunity to learn from each other;
- *'If we want to understand why some people succeed and others do not...we will need far fewer motivational gurus, and much more help from the people in our families, our workplaces, our communities, and our society'* (Ungar 2019: 25).

CAPABILITIES;

- This means opportunities that allow people to flourish, which, in turn, depends on agency;
- The opportunity to who decides and where is the correct application of resilience;
- This raises a question of practice based on ethics(Ife 2020) ; creating a distinction between;
- Deductive approach- a notion of resilience that applies to all cases and
- Inductive – is it appropriate to ask for resilience in this situation? Is it ethical?
- To what extent should adversity be tolerated, and, arguably, there such a thing as being too resilient?

OPPORTUNITIES, SHARED EXPERIENCES AND INCLUSIVITY

- These are grouped together as they raise questions as to:
- What opportunities can be created for student social workers and their supervisors to create supportive networks?
- What forums and outlets can exist to share resources, that is knowledge, insights, guidance and advice?
- What networks can be sustained to allow all voices to be heard, an outlet for all experiences- bad as well as good, and a chance to offer emotional support?
- Resilience is nurture, not nature and depends on two things; identifying what our needs are, and knowing how they can be met(Ungar 2019).



TOWARDS SOCIAL RESILIENCE

- **Curriculum**
- Teaching- alternate notions of resilience- reclaim meanings;
- -challenge, resist affects of dominant discourses- language matters;
- - group work –mutually supportive practice Considine et.al.2015);
- **Practice** – importance of relationships; not driven by metrics; human interests;
- -recognise affects of poverty and inequality;
- **Forums**- outlet for shared knowledge, expertise and experiences;
- - outlets for honesty- socially just school(Simmons and Smyth 2018).

HOW PRACTICE HAS CHANGED AS A RESULT OF COVID-19

- ‘It is reassuring to know that I am not alone in this [adapting to COVID-19]...it is reassuring to know that any questions or concerns that I have I can share with my colleagues, and to try and work together to work out what is best in this situation. There is a willingness among other social workers to share their experiences – both positive and less positive – less positive so we can learn from mistakes, and positive so there is something we can try and work really well.’
- ‘We have been really, really well supported...we have regular team meetings...staying in touch...really important to stay in touch as a team...give each other support...have team coffee meetings...talk about whatever we want...support each other emotionally’.



WHAT WE NEED TO DISCOVER

- Who, and what sustains us in our work?
- What do we need to help us be resilient?
- What are the barriers that affect team support?
- What enhances a supportive team?
- How do we share this knowledge?
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