
Bookworm's Corner

Book Review

Epstein, I. (2009). *Clinical data mining: Integrating practice and research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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Ever since the Flexner Report of 1915, social work has struggled to assert itself as a science-based profession, a struggle that underlies much of the debate between practice-based research and research-based practice (Cha, Kuo, & Marsh, 2006; Gambrill, 2002). It also informs much of the conversation around evidenced-based practice and random controlled trials (RCT) versus other social work practice and methodological approaches (Ginexi & Hilton, 2006; Green & Glasgow, 2006). Irwin Epstein's latest work, *Clinical Data Mining: Integrating Practice and Research*, not only continues this important discourse, it does so unapologetically, from the point of view of the social work practitioner.

Overview of the book

The opening chapter defines terminology, basic concepts and situates CDM as a practice-based research strategy. Chapter two, "On the 'Discovery' of Clinical Data-Mining, and Why Practitioners Should Do It," recounts how Epstein came to pursue CDM as a research strategy. While Epstein is not the first to discuss using available data in research (Shyne, 1960), he is the first to define a research methodology based on available data, coining the phrase "clinical data mining" in 1998. Not surprisingly, the research that led Epstein in the direction of CDM was a practice-based study, for which he was the research consultant. Practitioners in a hospital-based, medical social work program wanted to conduct research on patient outcomes post liver transplants. This inaugural CDM study illustrates several advantages of CDM – practitioner participation in the research process from the beginning, immediately applicable and usable results, an un-intrusive nature and a non-reactive information gathering process. Conceding the realities and challenges of CDM, chapter three, "The 'Science' of Clinical-Data Mining and the 'Art' of Strategic Compromise" discusses methodological challenges that inevitably present themselves in CDM research and their management. This chapter also presents an invaluable step-by-step outline of the entire process of conducting CDM research. Chapter four presents "Practitioner-Initiated CDM Studies: Principles and Exemplars." For those considering a CDM study, regardless of whether the intended approach is qualitative, quantitative or mixed method or targets varying levels of analysis (individual, group, program, organizational), masters and doctoral student researchers and practitioners will find themselves here, along with the methodological options and analytic concepts they need. Chapters five and six focus specifically on quantitative and qualitative CDM doctoral dissertations respectively. The concluding chapter explores the "Possible Futures of CDM and Evidence-Based Practice." Epstein sees CDM as continuing to evolve as "Evidence-Informed Practice" (McNeill, 2006), a less contentious and more inclusive model for integrating practice and research.

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A unique advantage of this work is its accessibility. This is a research text you can read without a dictionary of statistical terms constantly at your side. Epstein, a long-time professor and researcher, eschews jargon and terminology without sacrificing the ability to communicate rich and complex concepts. Contributing further to the book's accessibility is Epstein's candor and humor, which are as unusual as they are welcome in a research text.

Epstein's work targets several intended audiences - academics, research consultants, program evaluators, practitioners and students (masters level and doctoral). It is relevant to students in general and especially so to a subgroup of students - seasoned practitioner-doctoral researchers. Predictably, the more experienced practitioner is not only more likely to have extensive knowledge of *where* rich, available program data reside, but also the practice wisdom for generating researchable ideas for mining such data for knowledge beyond its intended purposes.

While acknowledging the essential and fundamental role of experimental research designs in furthering practice knowledge, Epstein simultaneously (and effectively) argues for a legitimate place for CDM as a social work research methodology. Those who see possibilities in thinking inductively will agree. Those who disagree would still likely acknowledge that by its very nature, much of social work practice precludes randomization and systematic controls. Consequently, practice-based, non-RCT social work studies cannot claim causal inference or the proof that pure science demands. This, of course, is not news, but what may be new to the reader is the central question of the book – Does the inability to randomize services, interventions or characteristics justify dismissing potentially valuable practice knowledge? Some might argue that if program-based research does not result in proof of causality, there is no point in researching program data. Epstein, rather than taking an all or nothing, adversarial stance, advocates for a continuum of knowledge generation, with a legitimate place for CDM.

Conclusion

In our quest for the research Holy Grail – experimental proof that social work practice is effective, social work researchers should not ignore potentially valuable practice-generated information. While CDM may not *prove* anything, Epstein shows incontrovertibly that it *improves* social work practice. In *Clinical Data Mining, Integrating Research and Practice*, there is ample proof for that. Certainly, improving practice is *a* purpose of social work research if not *the* purpose.

Regardless of whether one leans towards the epistemological left or right of the research-based practice - practice-based research debate, all practitioners, and especially doctoral students, will do well to read this work to learn more about CDM as one of several methodological approaches available to them. It provides, in one place, a detailed road map of the territory through which many student-researchers struggle to navigate.

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Book Review

Lehmann, P., & Simmons, C. (2009). *Strength-based batterer intervention: A new paradigm in ending family violence*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.

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Working with men who use violence against their partners is difficult and challenging work. As a field of practice, working with this population is growing and expanding on a continual basis. Historically, the mindset regarding working with men who abuse was quite narrow and there was little hope for change. The medical model would suggest that the prognosis for change was poor. For a long time, and some would suggest this pattern still continues, groups for men who abuse their partners were run along very narrow lines as well. For the past 20 years the primary model of 'batterer intervention program' (BIP) was the model developed in Duluth Minnesota. This model involved a mixture of the presentation of psycho-educational material in conjunction with a feminist analysis of violence against women. The Duluth model has remained the centerpiece of many programs throughout the United States and Canada.

However, as the field has expanded, there has been a growing interest in developing new and alternative methods for working with men who use violence in their relationships. Given the fact that the issue of violence against women is not dissipating, there has been a growing desire to engage men differently around their violence in the hopes of creating genuine change. While the Duluth model did not necessarily create the notion of confrontation, the model had become synonymous with a confrontational methodology. Many therapists began to experiment with new ways of engaging these men in the hopes of moving beyond the pervasive lack of change that were so often considered a part of these programs. Increasingly, methodologies such as cognitive behavioral therapy, narrative therapy and strength-based approaches have found their way into the discussion as treatment options for men who use violence in their intimate relationships.

Concurrently, there has been an increase in books designed to guide facilitators in adapting these new methodologies to work with violent men. The latest of these is entitled *Strength-Based Batterer Intervention: A New Paradigm in Ending Family Violence*, edited by Peter Lehmann, PhD and Catherine Simmons, PhD. Both of the editors bring substantive histories of working in the field of violence against women and are involved in projects at the University of Texas at Arlington and University of Tennessee, respectively. This book brings together some of the current innovators of practice with men who use violence. This book, according to the editors, is part of a shift in the paradigm of working with men who use violence in intimate relationships.

This book is a welcome addition to the growing body of literature on working with men who abuse. Comprised of ten chapters, the editors have attracted a cornucopia of practitioners