

Bookworm's Corner

Book Review

Maguire, Lambert. (2002). *Clinical Social Work: Beyond Generalist Practice with Individuals, Groups, and Families*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
Reviewed by Carol Grace Hurst, PhD (ABD)

In *Clinical Social Work: Beyond Generalist Practice with Individuals, Groups, and Families*, Lambert Maguire (2002) takes the pulse of the clinical social work profession as a whole. He finds a field changing rapidly in order to try to keep pace with a culture that is “more result oriented and impatient” (p. 279). He argues that contemporary people expect change to happen quickly. People accustomed to accessing desires with the quick click of the computer mouse on the internet don't need clinical social workers who take a long time to help them. Managed care has also impacted the way clinical social workers must practice. It is no longer enough to state that the effective clinician is part scientist, part artist. The effective clinician must now also be part business person.

The need for evidence of outcomes drives clinical social work to a new place. Research, rather than ideology, gives the measure of the most efficient and effective interventions. And briefer treatment is better if it still works. Maguire conceptualizes clinical social work practice as an advanced form of social work practice. A broad generalist orientation, including a variety of systems and ecologically based intervention frameworks for individuals, families and groups forms a basic social work knowledge base. But this is not enough. Maguire contends that advanced practitioners are now required to apply very advanced techniques and therefore need an eclectic skill box. Knowing that research has validated cognitive approaches for treatment of depression and behavioral approaches for treatment of phobias, tics, and bedwetting, allows the advanced practitioner to pull out the right tool for the right client problem.

Lambert Maguire states in the preface that he set out to write an advanced social work practice text grounded in empirical research, pertinent to different client groups, and clear in its description of advanced practice techniques. He largely succeeds. He says his clinical social work practice text covers “the empirically validated, widely practiced major methods currently used in advanced social work” (Maguire, 2002, p. xvii). Theoretically, the “major” perspectives chosen include systems, psychodynamic, behavioral, and cognitive approaches. Four chapters are devoted to systems' approaches for use with individuals, groups, and families, as well as in case management. Separate chapters delineate methods for social work practice with individuals from psychodynamic, behavioral, and cognitive frames. Innovatively, Maguire adds a separate chapter on brief interventions from eclectic theoretical standpoints. He ends with a practical chapter summarizing documentation of clinical intervention from assessment to treatment planning in systems, psychodynamic, behavioral, and cognitive frames.

Maguire writes in a strong, clear voice. While many practice texts include a bewildering array of practice theory choices, Maguire has narrowed the theoretical playing field to a starting line-up. This strategy allows him to give his chosen theories more comprehensive treatment. Students using the text thereby receive a resource offering both depth of perspective and more than one way of approaching clinical decision-making. Maguire, himself an advanced practitioner and researcher, brings social work practice to life with inclusion of some accounts of

his own personal professional experiences. The text is interspersed with case examples, historical anecdotes, and lists of therapy techniques. This makes the text readable, accessible, and useful.

There are aspects of advanced social work practice that are left out of this book. Maguire's theoretical starting line-up keeps some major players on the bench. Postmodernism gets only a page and a half description. Constructivism is subsumed as a variant cognitive theory in the cognitive approaches chapter. Feminism wins a paragraph mention within the two and a half page discussion of constructivism. While the importance of inclusive assessment is noted, only bio-psycho-social assessment is recommended. The word spiritual doesn't even make the index. While Maguire's major player choices inevitably leave some things out completely, he does find bit roles for some other theories. Empowerment, the Strengths perspective, and social work's attention to special populations are treated as systems' interventions. The task-centered approach is presented in the brief intervention chapter.

While I appreciated the author's clear writing style, one thing began to rankle me as I made my way through the text. He is *too* sure. As he himself identifies in his one paragraph on feminism, feminist practice social workers are concerned "that empirical objectivists, who are typically male, put themselves into the position of defining reality in their own authoritative way" (Maguire, 2002, p. 254). While, I believe Maguire definitely holds the credentials to be an authoritative expert on both practice and research, what is missing for me in his presentation of clinical practice is an articulation of the experience of tentativeness in clinical thinking.

Advanced social work practitioners need an understanding of their own processes of reflexivity. Social workers need to know answers. But we also need to know when we don't know. Social Workers need to be experts. But we also need to be tentative enough to allow clients to be the experts on their own experience. In the intimacy of professional helping moments practitioners need awareness of their inner processing. How does a practitioner bridge from their intuitive hunches to a working hypothesis confirmed with the client and back to the research knowledge base? Maguire's work could be enhanced with content on professional reflexivity processes discussed in the work of Schon (1991) and furthered in social work by Klein and Bloom (1995), Parton (2000), and Sheppard, Newstead, Di Caccavo, and Ryan (2000). Instructors who choose this text may wish to add supplemental reading on the processes of reflexive practice.

All in all, I would recommend this text as a very useful resource for social work practice courses. The advanced practitioner looking for a book to read as a primer for polishing technique vocabulary and updating knowledge of empirically substantiated theory will also find Maguire's book a practical choice.

References

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