



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 24
Issue 2 June

Article 12

June 1997

Review of *Clinical Social Work: Definition, Practice and Vision*.

Rachelle A. Dorfman. Reviewed by Cynthia Franklin, University of Texas, Austin.

Cynthia Franklin
University of Texas, Austin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Franklin, Cynthia (1997) "Review of *Clinical Social Work: Definition, Practice and Vision*. Rachelle A. Dorfman. Reviewed by Cynthia Franklin, University of Texas, Austin.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 24 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol24/iss2/12>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

Book Reviews

Rachelle A. Dorfman, *Clinical Social Work: Definition, Practice and Vision*. New York: Brunner/Mazel Publishers, 1996. \$24.95 paper cover.

Rachelle Dorfman's new book on clinical social work practice lives up to its name. It is an easy-to-read, descriptively-oriented practice book highlighting several aspects of clinical social work practice from its history and common methods to current day practice challenges and activities. Clearly a beginning practice methods text, it also has the flavor of an introductory text which some instructors may find useful as a supplement in introduction to social work classes. It is most impressive as a book that maintains the vision, values, and uniqueness of clinical social work practice but brings time-honored ideas into the present, using vivid descriptions and case examples to communicate to a new generation of social work students the humanitarian values and philosophy behind the methods discussed. The book is successful in capturing the eclectic vision and humanistic philosophy of the early pioneers such as Perlman and combines this philosophy with up-to-date practice wisdom and methods. Current topics covered include timely additions such as working in managed care, brief therapy, practice evaluation, and "things that they did not teach you in social work school." This last topic is especially practical and helpful, covering issues commonly encountered in practice such as suicidal and homicidal clients, sexually seductive clients, what to do when a clinical social worker is sexually attracted to a client, and managing complaints against unethical colleagues.

The book is written with the beginning social work student in mind and is a useful teaching text for undergraduate and first-year graduate students. All social workers, however, involved in direct services may find its contents interesting—especially the chapter on the tradition of social work practice, which provides interesting biographies on historical giants in the field such as Mary Richmond, Gordon Hamilton, Jessie Taft and Helen Harris Perlman, among others. In addition, contemporary contributors

such as Ann Hartman, Bill Reid, Carol Germain, Helen Northen and Francis J. Turner are also discussed.

As a beginning practice text the book covers the array of usual topics encountered in practice methods books such as roles and practice settings, assessment, intervention, and termination issues. It reads like a cook book or an outline of useful practice information but is sprinkled with lively case examples and nuances of practice wisdom which make it interesting reading. I imagine that students will find it useful when they enter their field experience in that it presents, for example, practical descriptions such as 1) covering confidential information with clients; 2) how to write a psychosocial assessment; 3) client information statement forms; 4) word-for-word descriptions on what to say to clients in the beginning of the session; and 5) sensitive topics such as avoiding dual relationships with clients.

Some sections in the book are fairly sparse in detail about the topics covered. For example, some topical sections may only be a few sentences or a paragraph in length. Thus, the book sacrifices depth and conceptual material in favor of breadth and abbreviated descriptions on how to proceed in practice settings. The book is also devoid of in-depth theoretical material. Using instead the descriptive framework of technical and theoretical eclecticism, although these terms are not defined very well nor elaborated on in the book. Information presented in the book, however, is extremely practical and provides students and beginning social workers with useful guidelines to follow. Despite the brevity of some of the topics covered and lack of theoretical emphasis, I suspect that students will find the "step like" advice the book provides about how to practice clinical social work very readable and useful.

One particular strength of the book is that Dorfman uses a broader understanding of clinical social work than is used by some authors, and includes in this understanding practice activities encompassing direct services to individuals, families and groups. By conveying a broader understanding concerning the meaning of clinical social work, Dorfman has accurately portrayed the essence of what clinical social work has become in its contemporary forms. This portrayal matches the current realities of clinical social work practice better than more restrictive under-

standings that limit clinical social work to long-term psychotherapeutic activities. For this reason, Dorfman's book covers clinical social work practice from a broad array of practice settings such as schools, medical settings, child protective services and courts. The book also highlights the many roles that clinical social workers function in, such as broker, advocate, enabler, case manager. Clinical social work and the roles of clinical social workers have grown and expanded. Dorfman's portrayal of clinical social work encompassing several direct practice fields is likely to ring true in the experience of current day practitioners and students. The book provides a useful framework for preparing for the day-to-day practice activities of clinical social workers. Dorfman's approach further adds a broader appeal to the book's contents for those who teach more generalist practice.

To summarize, Rachelle Dorfman has written a useful and "hands on" beginning practice text for social workers who provide direct services. Its brevity and practicality will likely appeal to the student reader. The book is traditional in its approach but current. Dorfman has captured the best of the past traditions in clinical social work practice and integrated them with the current day practice contexts and concerns. The definition, practice, and current vision of clinical social work practice are apparent in its pages. I would not hesitate to use this book as a supplementary text in practice classes.

Cynthia Franklin
University of Texas, Austin

Lela B. Costin, Howard Jacob Karger and David Stoesz, *The Politics of Child Abuse in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. \$29.95 hardcover.

Lela Costin, Howard Karger, and David Stoesz have written a lively and persuasive book that condemns the current child welfare system for failing the children it is charged to protect; sheltering adults who assault and batter youngsters; and losing its soul to the shifting styles of public consciousness. In *The Politics of Child Abuse in America*, the authors join the ranks of other scholars who have recently exposed the multiple shortcomings of