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Review of *Confidentiality and Privacy in Social Work: A Guide to the Law for Practitioners and Students*. New York: The Free Press, 1998. Donald T. Dickinson. Reviewed by Margaret Severson, University of Kansas.

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and outcomes. One unresolved nagging concern, for example, revolves around the attractiveness of PEP in an era of fiscal strangulation. Environmentally-situated practice is both time intensive and time consuming, and although a worker's immersion in the community makes good practice sense, the legitimization and validation of PEP strategies will ultimately stem from a radical reconstruction of current reimbursement strategies that capitalize on individual pathology. The claim that PEP requires workers to "practice with an attitude" (p. 18), appropriately foretells of the challenges ahead for transformers who recognize that the boundaries separating workers from clients are merely illusory, albeit comforting demarcations. A person-environment practice orientation can infuse hope, creativity, and energy into tired service-delivery systems that appear distracted by the need to justify their own existence. To extend a popular metaphor, the distillations in this book promise a means by which social workers may earn back their wings, not because we repent our unfaithfulness, but because we at last have a blueprint for an environmentally-responsive practice orientation.

Catherine M. Lemieux
Louisiana State University

Donald T. Dickson, *Confidentiality and Privacy in Social Work: A Guide to the Law for Practitioners and Students*. New York: The Free Press, 1998. \$ 34.95 hardcover.

The fascination, perhaps even obsession, among mental health professionals of all disciplines with what the law is and says about a particular subject seems unending. Many good albeit general law and mental health texts have appeared on the market and have been useful to students to the extent that an overview of legal thinking and reasoning can be garnered from them. Some of these texts provide broad general sweeps of information interesting from a socio-legal and procedural standpoint as opposed to a substantive policy-practice decision-making framework. Now, in a succinct, focused, and fascinating exception to the norm, Professor Donald Dickson provides a bounty of substantive information in his latest text: *Confidentiality and Privacy in Social Work: A Guide to the Law for Practitioners and Students*.

Without doubt, confidentiality is a hot topic in today's society—and not just for presidents and special prosecutors! With computerization of medical records, mega-systems of health care delivery networks, a populace fearful of exposure to everything from AIDS to Ebola, and social workers concerned about ending up as defendants in malpractice litigation, what one can reasonably expect to be kept private and/or confidential is the question of the day. Author Dickson attempts to give us a few answers while building a case for why we should all be asking more questions before providing information about others or ourselves to a third party. By the end of this text, the one certain conclusion readers reach is that the principles of privacy and confidentiality can only be truly understood when studied in the contexts in which they arise. Even then, how the practitioner responds when concerns about privacy and confidentiality are raised depends on her ability to think through the dynamic features of these very elusive principles.

Confidentiality and Privacy in Social Work: A Guide to the Law for Practitioners and Students is divided into two major sections. Part one presents what Dickson calls *Basic Principles for the Professional*. Here, confidentiality, privacy, and ethical responsibilities of social workers are described and defined. In the second major section, *Law and Practice*, Dickson explores specific practice-related legal issues and illustrates how the principles of confidentiality and privacy apply to each.

In chapter one, Dickson opens with a good, general overview of the law re confidentiality and privacy in social work. He is careful to frame this overview in the context of change, warning the reader that law is dynamic and evolutionary and that it varies from state to state, professional code to professional code. This first chapter sets the tone for the complexity of the rest of the text, and in the following chapter, Dickson delves right into the difficult issues of confidentiality and privileged communications. Here the reader is confronted with the reality that there is no rulebook on which s/he can rely when a decision must be made about disclosing client information.

Chapter three introduces and explores certain individual rights of privacy that have been found by the courts to be constitutionally protected. This overview of privacy rights presents a

contextual view of privacy as it applies to right-to-die disputes, sexual matters, searches of person and property, and eavesdropping and methods of electronic surveillance. A few of these topics receive expanded coverage in later chapters of the text.

Professor Dickson sums up the section on professional principles by comparing, in chapter four, the number of content of the provisions related to privacy and confidentiality contained in the NASW's Code of Ethics in 1960, 1979, and 1996. The dramatic increase in relevant ethical standards promulgated over this 36-year period is a reflection of the profession's corresponding awareness and concern about client and worker privacy rights.

Part two of the text, *Law and Practice*, gets down to the nitty gritty of privacy and confidentiality and its six chapters should both pique and satisfy the interests of practitioners and students alike. After all, the privacy interests implicated in the topics Dickson covers are not simply events that affect clients; they affect everyone, readers included. Who hasn't wondered whether their email is being read and what recourse there might be to address this intrusion? What does constitute sexual harassment and what is a hostile environment? Is there such a thing as having a reasonable expectation of privacy in one's health/mental health records? What instructor hasn't been faced with a class of students demanding to know if a certain alleged child abuse scenario constitutes a legally reportable event? Professor Dickson wisely details a series of special privacy issues that are of universal concern.

This text is a critical thinker's dream in that it is challenging, disconcerting, and fascinating all at the same time. Admirably, rather than writing a rulebook for decision making, Dickson instead addresses, within the dynamic confluence of case law, statutory law, and professional ethics, timely and often misunderstood substantive topics such as the social worker's duty to warn and protect, the rights of minors, and privacy of health care records. There are chapters, such as chapter five which focuses on workplace privacy, that leave the reader appropriately frustrated, not knowing for sure what is private and what is not, mirroring the real ambiguity of the still evolving law in this area. It becomes clear in various discussions in this text, for example, that regarding privacy in health care records and files, that clients

and consumers and ordinary citizens cannot have both advanced technology and complete personal privacy; that one will yield to the other at least to some extent and for some uncomfortable period of time.

In this text, Professor Dickson succeeds not only in illustrating how dynamic the concepts of confidentiality and privacy are, but also in explaining why they are dynamic. In an odd way, this dynamism is comforting; serving as a reminder that good, responsible, and responsive social work is in the details—details practitioners and policymakers must continually explore. Students and practitioners alike will benefit from a thorough reading of this text and from continued exploration of these issues. The only complaint that can be made of this book is that Professor Dickson didn't write on and on. Then again, from an academic point of view, isn't that just what is hoped for—a text so compelling it leaves the reader with a yearning for more. Make room on your bookshelf for D.T. Dickson's *Confidentiality and Privacy in Social Work: A Guide to the Law for Practitioners and Students*.

Margaret Severson
University of Kansas

Eileen Gambrill, *Social Work Practice: A Critical Thinker's Guide*.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1957. \$ 59.95 hardcover.

Imagine that you were asked to select the criteria which would characterize the 'perfect' foundation social work textbook dealing with interpersonal practice. What would you look for? Perhaps high on your list would be that the book present a 'generalist' perspective, begin with an overview of the humanistic underpinnings of our field, examine our profession's value base, the ethics of practice, and something of the history of direct social work services. You would also like to see a book which deals skillfully with the complexities of multicultural practice, and covers family and group work as well as individually provided services. Including thought-provoking study questions and issues for discussion at the end of each chapter would be decided plus, if you were an instructor, as would a glossary of professional terminology. I imagine that you would particularly appreciate a book which covers critical thinking skills in some depth, and which is committed