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**Review of *Social Work Practice: A Critical Thinkers Guide*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Eileen Gambrill. Reviewed by Bruce Thyer, University of Georgia.**

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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

to a broadly-based empirical orientation. You would *not* wish yet another text which merely provides a superficial and uncritical review of an increasingly large number of practice theories and methods, most of which have never been shown through credible outcome studies that they actually are capable of meaningfully helping social work clients.

If the above considerations are some of the issues which are important to you, then I mostly highly recommend Eileen Gambrill's *Social Work Practice: A Critical Thinker's Guide*, which in my opinion is quite simply the most comprehensive and well presented practice textbook currently available. Written with considerable clinical acumen, Gambrill covers a vast array of pertinent literature in an extremely readable style. No mind-numbing recitation of dry facts, nor reliance on seductive anecdote, this book represents the best mixture of practice skills interwoven with the principles of empirically-based treatments which I am aware of.

All the topics usually addressed in a foundation practice class are covered—relationship skills, assessment, engagement, selecting intervention plans, overcoming obstacles, evaluating treatment, termination, and avoiding professional burnout. Plus this is a handsomely constructed volume, laden with easy to understand and insightful diagrams, tables, and lists. The publisher deserves some credit for a top-quality job in typesetting and binding. A bit unusual is a chapter devoted to clearly explaining some elementary principles of human behavior derived from the long-venerated person-in-environment perspective which has always characterized social work, but supported through a compelling linkage with contemporary learning theories. If the book presents a consistent conceptual framework it is this attractive integration which operationalizes the ethereal generalizations of the person-in-environment perspective through the specific principles of respondent, operant, and observational learning.

Interwoven throughout the text are guidelines for developing critical thinking skills, the hallmarks of responsible critical thinking, of scientific reasoning, of the characteristics of fallacious reasoning, and how to separate the facts from the fantasies of social work 'knowledge'. Gambrill capably reviews the features of 'antiscientific' practices, of straw-man arguments against basing

practice on empirical evidence, where such knowledge has been developed. 'Evaluation' is another consistent theme—evaluating practice theories, evaluating our assessment methods, our practice alternatives, and the actual outcomes of social work interventions, threatening though this may be. As she accurately notes ". . . the sincerity of our interest in helping clients is reflected in the efforts we make to find out whether we do help them. Compassion for the troubles of others requires finding out if we did help" (p. 15).

As I enter my third decade of teaching social work practice, I came away from reading Gambrill's text considerably humbled by how much of value I learned from her scholarship. This is a refreshing read for the most jaded practitioner, and an inspiring presentation of the best which social work practice has to offer for the foundation student. *Social Work Practice: A Critical Thinker's Guide* is well positioned to take the profession into the third millennium. Thank you, Professor Gambrill!

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