

Book Review

Bodenheimer, D. R. (2016). *Real world clinical social work: Find your voice and find your way*. Harrisburg, PA: The New Social Worker Press.

Reviewed by Peggy Proudfoot Harman, MSW, Ph.D.
Marshall University

The Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, Volume 13, Number 2 (2016)
Copyright 2016, ASWB

This text may be freely shared among individuals, but it may not be republished in any medium without express written consent from the authors and advance notification of ASWB.

Danna Bodenheimer introduces herself by discussing her professional, pre-doctorate MSW life, and the process of her decision to enroll in a doctoral program. The author explains that she was very unsure about how to practice clinical social work as a new professional graduating from a master social work academic program. Bodenheimer explores this topic in depth and makes the reader aware of her confusion regarding the “actual ways” theory informs social work practice and the tasks and manifestation of identified tasks within the helping relationship.

Bodenheimer indicates that she has created this text for a variety of professionals from the newly graduated MSW to the seasoned professional. In fact, the author provides many reasons why this book was written, from resource manual, to road map for clinical social workers to find their own style. It appears that the ultimate motivation for the book appears to be a reference guide on “how to” practice clinical social work, based on Dr. Bodenheimer’s experiences.

Bodenheimer presents and incorporates the case of Rita, a client whom the author meets as a newly graduated MSW working in an inner city clinic setting. Bodenheimer explains that she initially assessed Rita based on Rita’s presenting issue using the skills she had attained in her master of social work program. After treating Rita for a number of years for various issues, Bodenheimer realizes that she and other professionals had overlooked key issues in Rita’s life. Bodenheimer takes the

reader on a journey from her initial sessions with Rita, to later professional encounters, where she once again assumes various social work roles in Rita’s life. Bodenheimer candidly discusses her difficulty with terminating the client/social worker relationship and shares how, as a new clinical social worker, she was confused about the importance she played in Rita’s life. The reader is given insight into various issues that Rita experienced throughout her relationship with Bodenheimer, who discusses various professional roles and types of services she provided for Rita throughout the years. Bodenheimer also notes her “lack of clarity” with regard to Rita’s engagement with the “shared treatment goals” (p. 23), explaining her absence of understanding of why Rita was not achieving the goals that the mental health treatment teams set out for her.

Rita’s case is a clever vehicle to highlight issues faced by new social workers attempting to simultaneously utilize the social worker’s fund of knowledge, practice skills, and critical thinking. All in all, the “Introduction to the Story of Rita” raises good questions with regard to the author’s confusion about exactly what clinical social work is. Bodenheimer eventually creates a list of questions designed to prompt a dialogue to engage the clinical social worker’s understanding of “what achieves wellness” (p. 41). Bodenheimer eventually looks at a key question regarding how self-awareness links with wellness in the helping relationship, but she missed an opportunity to discuss boundary issues

with regard to her idea that “Rita could not live without her [sic]” (p. 25).

Once Rita is introduced, Bodenheimer provides approximately 20 pages of elements that comprise “The Lens of Clinical Social Work,” such as the strengths perspective and the influence of trauma on interpersonal issues. Bodenheimer covers aspects of human development and the processes of “individuation” (p. 36) and cultural competence as requirements to understand behaviors. Bodenheimer discusses specific pieces of knowledge that are needed for new social workers which would make them feel less anxious during the transition from the classroom to the field, and includes in those pieces of knowledge definitions of the term clinical social worker from various sources including the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), whose definition maintains that clinical social work is a “mindset” that is characterized by content and process, to include ethics, behaviors, and thoughts (p. 29).

After Bodenheimer orients the reader to the Lens of Clinical Social Work, she dives into theoretical aspects of social work practice focusing on how to clinically apply object relations theory, ego psychology; self psychology; and cognitive behavioral therapy, describing how to clinically apply these theories to clinical social work practice.

Bodenheimer offers some excellent personal advice to young clinical social workers coming out of college with regard to their professional choices throughout the years to include supervision, how to choose the right setting for clinical practice, how to think about the monetary aspects of social work practice, and the choice to pursue higher education in the social work field.

The book contains an abundance of good information for clinical social work practice, and I recommend it to practitioners and all MSW students and graduates.