SOCIAL WORK TREATMENT

INTERLOCKING THEORETICAL APPROACHES

EDITED BY FRANCIS J. TURNER

FIFTH EDITION

OXFORD
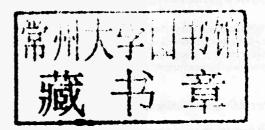
Social Work Treatment

Interlocking Theoretical Approaches

Fifth Edition

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Francis J. Turner

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To Florence Hollis and Helen Harris Perlman,
two mentors who moved us forward down
the path of inquiry.

Preface

I am pleased that another edition of this book has come to fruition. At the time of the last edition in 1996 it appeared that the process of the development of further theories for our profession had probably come to an end. I anticipated that rather than developing new theories the thrust would be towards a further development of existing theories, marked by a melding of theories, as common ground between the various approaches was found.

But this is not what has happened; rather, the contrary has occurred! The emergence of new theories has continued. In this edition, 36 theories are addressed, an addition of 9 from the last edition. In the first edition 14 theories were addressed, in the second 19, in the third 22, and in the fourth 27. At this point there is no indication that this process is slowing down.

Does this trend speak to a growing understanding of the multifaceted expansion of our knowledge of the complexity of the reality we attempt to understand in assisting a diverse spectrum of clients in their bio-psycho-social realities? This in a highly complex world of economic, political and environmental change—often in situations of great oppression. I think it does! We are becoming increasingly aware of the complexity of our clients and of the labyrinthine quality of their lives and of the diverse ways in which problems are addressed and solved.

The foreword to the first edition was written by Dame Eileen Younghusband the then honorary President of International Schools of Social Work. I mention this because much of what she wrote then is still relevant to today's theoretical challenges. Her admonitions to us are still timely. The range of challenges that she set out for us some 35 years ago are the same ones we face today. At that time she urged us to rigorously test our theories and our practice.

She foresaw our contemporary rallying cry to "evidence based" practice of today. She warned of the risks that a lack of discipline might bring by recalling the 19th century "social observer" who noted that men who wore top hats did not die of starvation and a society to distribute top hats was almost launched until wiser heads prevailed.

The need for rigor in testing new theories remains a critical challenge for us. As we move to the second decade of this new century we are expanding not only the range of theories but what was often missed in the past: the competences and tools to test our theories and modify or discard them if they do not stand being challenged. Testing of what we offer as explanations and conclusions of how we help is essential.

Students at all levels have found the book useful, for their overall professional education and practice, as well as in preparation for licensing or certification exams. Researchers have also used it to compare and contrast concepts between and among theories. From a sociopolitical perspective the book has helped to inform others of the differential theoretical bases from which we teach and practice. Finally professors have drawn on the book as a resource in various theory and practice courses.

Over the past few years I have received strong encouragement that the time has come for a new edition, this both to update material to reflect development in theories and to add theories that were not included in the last edition. To all of these colleagues, I am appreciative.

It is my earnest wish that this, the fifth edition of *Social Work Treatment*, will continue to assist our profession wherever it is practiced, in our ongoing commitment to understanding and finding ways to assist individuals, groups, and systems in an effective, ethical, culturally responsive manner.

Using the Theory Chart

This textbook covers the principal theoretical approaches most commonly used by social work practitioners. In this new edition we are pleased to introduce a feature to help students digest this information: an illustrated chart that graphically depicts all 36 theories. In the legend below, readers will find five important variables that we use to describe each theory.

Principal Time Orientation

All theories have to help clients look at past, present, and future issues depending on their life situation, but does the theory have a primary orientation? For example, in Psychoanalysis, clients are asked to reflect upon their life stories principally from the past.

Human Nature

Does the theory view people as being inherently good, flawed, or as some combination of both? A differential view of human nature can affect how clients view the world, and that informs the practitioner on what kind of approach would most suit their value sets. A positive impression of human nature is a critical aspect of Strengths Perspective; Chaos Theory's examination of complexity takes this predictability away.

Importance of Diversity

This variable looks at the level of attention that needs to be given to various aspects of diversity such as race, ethnicity, gender, culture, etc. Another way of looking at this is whether diversity is considered essential in every situation— which is inherent in the General Systems approach—or in only specified cases, as with Crisis Theory. It is understood, of course, that we always have to be sensitive to diversity issues.

Risk

When improperly used, theories can do harm to clients. Indeed, at times an improperly used theory could have life and death implications, when a practitioner fails to understand who the client is, what the client needs and wants, and what the client is capable of doing. Some theories can be effectively learned, understood, and used much more easily than others; some require highly skilled assessment and diagnostic skills, as well as special training and supervision. We want to be sure that students using this book will not oversimplify how to make use of the conceptual bases of these 36 theories in a manner that could be highly inappropriate. Hypnosis is a good example of an approach that requires great caution.

Empirical Strength

The amount of contemporary research-based data that are available for an approach helps to indicate the degree of confidence a trained practitioner would have in employing an established theory such as Cognitive Behavior. "Emerging" is included as a variable value to describe theories that, while they might not have the weight of publications yet, are very much theories that are undergoing active assessment. While historically rooted, Self Efficacy is a topical example of an emerging approach.

Using the chart located on the back of the dust jacket, readers will be able to quickly take in the most important qualities of each approach, and even begin to compare and contrast between them. Each of these approaches should be taken as a potential tool to use in your kit. Please note that each approach is labeled with both the chapter number and theory name for quick reference. For a more complete treatment, refer to the associated chapter. A slightly expanded version of each "theory bubble" is also featured on the first page of each chapter.

Principal Time Orientation

Present   Past   Future

Human Nature

Good   Flawed   Neutral

Importance of Diversity

Minimal   Moderate   Essential

Risk

Minimal   Low   Moderate

Empirical Strength

Emerging   Minimal   Strong   Extensive

Acknowledgments

On each occasion that I engage in the process of writing the traditional paragraph of acknowledgments I am humbled by an awareness of the many persons who have assisted in the multiple tasks of bringing the book to fruition. I suspect that this network is much broader than one is aware of. Over the years the family has been consistently supportive of my publishing activities, albeit from the distances that their lives have taken them. Joanne has played a much more direct role in recent projects.

I am most pleased that Oxford University Press has recognized the need for a fifth edition, and they have been most helpful throughout the editing process. The support of Maura Roessner at the Press has been especially helpful.

Finding and assembling the group of contributors was a challenging process, and the collegial help of the group as it developed served to make the process manageable and functional. Throughout, my research assistant Carlos Pereira played a major role in planning and implementing the required and constantly changing strategy that eventually brought the book to fruition. To him and to all, I am grateful.

Toronto, February 2010

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Social Work Treatment

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Theory and Social Work Treatment

Francis J. Turner

*"Everybody has won and all must have prizes."
I am certain that Lewis B. Carroll was not think-
ing of social work and social work theories when
he penned these words from "Alice in Wonderland"
in Oxford many years ago. However, their theme
reflects accurately my viewpoint as I continue to
wrestle with the ever-expanding reality of our pro-
fession's rich theory base. For me each of our sev-
eral theories stands as an important contribution
to the field if it gives us a better way of helping
even one client. And whether or not one or another
of these theories fits our individual view of the
world and how we believe our practice is to be
conducted each deserves a prize and each needs to
be a part of our practice treasury.*

The above paragraph is the same one that
began Chapter 1 in the previous edition of this
book. Instead of casting it differently. I decided
to use it just as it was written some 12 years ago.
This is because it reflects for me where we are as
a profession and where I find myself after some
50 years of watching and pondering the highly
diversified development of theories for social
work practice.

In the previous edition I had presumed that
the process of our highly diversified theory base
development would be slowing down and moving
to a greater integration, perhaps even to the pros-
pect of a general theory of social work. Rather,
the reverse is happening. Instead of fewer, better
integrated theories, we have more with less inte-
gration. Whether this is an aid to our practice or
not is a moot question and undoubtedly will be
the basis of many academic debates.

The Goals

As in earlier editions, the aim of this book is to provide colleagues with a readily available overview of the principal theories currently extant in social work practice around the world. It seeks to serve a broad spectrum of audiences, including at least the inquiring student, the conscientious practitioner, the searching professor, and the harried administrator.

It aspires to achieve this goal based on the assumption that to fully appreciate and make effective and ethical use of these theories, they must be understood both as individual conceptual constructs and also as bodies of thought that are inter-influencing, interconnecting, and interlocking.

Underlying these objectives is a strongly held assumption that theory and practice, to be effective, must be inexorably interconnected. Even though we argue strongly that theory is critical to practice, it is often difficult to demonstrate that these two factors are closely intertwined in our practice. The challenge now is how to gather and evaluate evidence to demonstrate that we are doing so.

In addressing this challenge we can certainly no longer decry a paucity of theory. We know we have a well-established richness of old and new theories, as well as theories in the making and theories in development. Accompanying this reality is a growing acceptance of interest in, and indeed excitement about, the implications and challenges of this diversity for practice.

This diversity has been and is an exciting step forward. It is a position that strengthens our understanding of the importance of tested ethical theory. Further, it helps us add precision to the growing complexities of our practice by providing us with tools to better understand its scope, dimensions, and effects.

However, to tap the potential of the differential use of specific theories, each of us must be familiar with all of them, whether we subscribe to them or not. This is a strong statement but an important one. Many theories exist in contemporary social work. Others continue to emerge. All have an impact on some components of practice.

We begin from the assumption that what we do in practice is closely connected to what we know. As yet, though, we still have difficulty in demonstrating the validity of this concept. This does not mean that practitioners function irresponsibly or ineffectively. Our challenge is to build a rigorous conceptual base to make practice even more effective and accountable (Howard, Perron, & Vaughan, 2009).

To take a further step in this direction, an overview of each of the major theories currently affecting practice will be presented by a colleague knowledgeable about it.

What is Theory?

One of the difficulties in clarifying the meaning of the word *theory* in a social-work-practitioner–oriented text stems from the various ways in which this term is used in our day-to-day exchanges. Most of us can recall from our research courses that the more precise meaning of this term describes a model of reality appropriate to a particular discipline and includes terms such as *concepts*, *facts*, *hypotheses*, and *principles*. Such a model helps to understand what is, what is possible, and how to achieve the possible for the discipline (Hearn, 1958; Siporin, 1989; Unrau, Gabor, & Grinnell, 2006).

Clearly this is a highly summarized and stylized description of the involved and ongoing efforts of all disciplines, including our own, to develop bodies of tested facts in a manner that helps us understand and predict some aspect of the reality with which we deal and so provide us with guidelines for effective action. Hence, the development of any theory, especially in all of the helping professions, is an ongoing process. We can never say that a theory is fully developed.

What Constitutes a New Theory?

This, then, raises the complex and oft-debated question of when an evolving body of concepts can be designated as a theory, and who should say that this has occurred. When are we talking about some interesting new ideas from which a theory may or may not develop? When are we talking about a developing theory? When are we talking about a body of thought that is sufficiently well developed to be called a theory? Debates about these questions go on in all professions.

However, since in this volume decisions have been made about which theories to include or to