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Patricia A. Brown

*University of Illinois at Chicago Circle*

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## RACIAL IDENTIFICATION VERSUS PROFESSIONAL IDENTIFICATION:

### CAN THEY BE RECONCILED

Patricia A. Brown, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

University of Illinois at Chicago Circle

For close to a decade, members of the social work profession, who also were members of a minority race, have been confronting the profession with their perception that social work has not addressed adequately the needs of their racial groups. The fact that members of one group (a minority race) confronted another group (the social work profession) in which they also held membership signaled the strong and serious conflict between a person's identification with two major groups. Whether the two group identifications could find a common ground, became a concern for not only the individual belonging to the two groups, but also for the profession.

Members of minority races, specifically the Black race, brought the conflict to the attention of the profession by firstly presenting 'demands' to national conferences and then organizing formally into all Black professional organizations. The profession has moved quickly to attest to its openness with respect to the minority races. Professional members, who were also members of racial minorities, were seated on many deliberating bodies of the social work profession. Agencies and schools began recruitment of social workers, students, and teachers from minority races. Social work journals began to find room for articles on issues and problems related to the minority races.

This flurry of 'reactivity', however, obscured the need for systematic analysis of how the potential conflict between the two major group identifications suddenly became a reality and what the conflict meant to the professional and to the profession.

The purpose of this article is to cast some light on the emergence of the overt struggle between the two identifications and how the conflict has been mitigated by social workers of minority races. Specifically, the subject will be pursued by scrutinizing the concern as it has related to Black social workers.

#### The Rise of Stress on Black Group Identification

During the latter part of the 1960's, a majority of both Black and non-Black Americans seemed shocked and perplexed by the 'new' demand-- "Freedom Now." Ironically, the substance of the new demand was quite old.

In 1903, W.E.B. DuBois and members of the "Talented Tenth" had proclaimed:

We want full mankind suffrage, and we want it now, Henceforth and forever . . . We want discrimination in public accommodations to cease . . . We claim the right of free men to walk, talk, and be with them that wish to be with us . . . We want the Constitution of the Country enforced . . . We want our children educated . . . We mean real education.<sup>1</sup>

The first members of a 1960 version of DuBois's "Talented Tenth" were Black social workers. They revitalized, organized and joined formal, as well as informal, professional associations of Black social workers. The goal of these organizations was to concentrate the education and skills of their members in helping their own people gain Freedom Now.

The first formal organization of Black social workers grew out of Black faculty and student momentum at the Columbia University School of Social Work in 1967. By 1968, the impetus was felt by Black social workers in other northern cities to gravitate toward one another and form associations of Black social workers. The month and the year that they formed these first associations coincided with the month and year of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death--April, 1968.

Although Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death signaled the rise of all but one of the early associations of Black social workers, his death was not an immediate factor associated with the first association or with those organized later. In order to gain an adequate explanation for the emergence of formal professional organizations of Black social workers, despite the existence of the racially integrated National Association of Social Workers, it is necessary to examine the phenomena as the creation of two interacting factors--historical and professional experiences affecting the Black race, and therefore affecting the expression arena for Black Group Identification.

## Historical

Isaacs observed:

The samenesses are ceasing to be the same. Like everyone else, Negroes are having to rearrange the truths and falsities of how they see others and how they see themselves. New images are flashing back at them off the surfaces of today's new experiences. Habits of a lifetime of a whole group past have to be broken. All of it rudely, or exhilaratingly, comes up for disposal, renovation, and replacement.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Eric F. Goldman, Rendezvous With Destiny (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), pp. 139-140.

<sup>2</sup>Harold R. Isaacs, "The Changing Identity of the Negro American," The Urban Condition: People and Policy in the Metropolis, ed. Leonard J. Duhl (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1963), p. 280.

The greatest historical fact influencing the changing self-image of America's Black person was the successful rise of African Nationalism. Prior to that time, the search for racial pride in ancestry was diverted by the stereotype of the African as a subservient, cowardly, moronic savage. The credibility of this portrait began to crumble when the African people showed that they could not only govern their own countries, but also be significant players in the game of world politics.

Within the United States, Martin Luther King, Jr. demonstrated that a Black man could fight and, more importantly, lead successfully in the Black man's struggle for equity in this country. King's leadership in the non-violent fight for racial freedom took on momentum in 1955. He and E.D. Nixon organized and led the year long Montgomery bus boycott, the success of which ". . . emboldened other Negroes in the South to take direct action against segregation."<sup>3</sup> In 1960, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College's students initiated "sit-ins" at a Greensboro Woolworth store. Within two months, 68 cities were unwilling hosts to sit-ins whose participants now were organized and trained in non-violent maneuvers by C.O.R.E. field workers from the North. A year later, "sit-ins" were followed by "freedom rides" and two years later (1963) Blacks organized marches to protest their exclusion from the polls.

Although these struggles finally culminated in a 1964 comprehensive Civil Rights Bill, the cost in human lives was horrendous: Medger Evers, James Chaney, Andy Goodman, Mickey Schwerner, and Mrs. Violet Liuzzo.

Finally, the slogan, "Black Power," lifted Stokely Carmichael and Floyd McKissick into the spotlight in 1966. New leaders of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, (SNCC) they and others outlined a new position paper for SNCC which called on white members to leave the organization because they were handicaps in the South and their ". . . participation in policy-making meetings in the North was, at best, unnecessary . . ." <sup>4</sup> Yet, contrary to the belief that "Black Power" meant total eradication of whites' efforts in civil rights; the heart of the phrase, is that ". . . Negroes must develop a base of political and economic power from which to identify and define their own needs in their own terms. Black Americans must be able to demand justice and bargain from a position of strength when dealing with the dominant white majority."<sup>5</sup>

#### Professional

The changing self-image of America's Black person is pertinent to the reason for a rise of Black movements within this country. Yet, particularly relevant to an understanding of Black assertion within professional

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<sup>3</sup>Robert Goldston, The Negro Revolution (New York: Signet Books, 1969), p. 184.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>5</sup>Albert P. Blaustein and Robert L. Zangrando (eds.), Civil Rights and the American Negro (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), p. 598.

ranks is the recognition of problems peculiar to the Black professional. On the one hand, there are the unfulfilled promises of equality.

Bach and Simpson have observed:

Negro's feel that the official standards of the [profession] promise them equal rewards, depending only on effort and ability, while at the same time, they are forced to adapt to the realities of being a disfavored minority.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, professionalism complicates the attempt to identify with one's racial group. Bowman reports on this problem:

The Negro leaders articulate a real concern about race relations but they are strongly professionally oriented, and this often seems to take precedence in their goals and activities.<sup>7</sup>

Although the professional values and norms have influence on the nature of the individual who has, at this stage of life, committed himself irrevocably to the profession, "The realities of professional segregation in the south and discrimination in the north may interfere at all points with true professional identification."<sup>8</sup>

The interaction of historical and professional experiences as an influence for the increased racial awareness of Black professionals is captured by Isaacs in the following statement:

They also need a new scheme of [their professional lives] to cope with the new conditions created by all the big facts of life and history [that] are at last working for them and not as always before, against them.<sup>9</sup>

The influence of historical and professional experiences on the emergence of associations of Black social workers must be assumed as basic to the attempt to reconcile the two fundamental identifications--one with the race and one with the profession.

#### Group Identification

Group identification can be defined as the acceptance of a shared sameness with a circumscribed body. The 'sameness' of a human group can

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<sup>6</sup>Kurt W. Bach and Ida Harper Simpson, "The Dilemma of the Negro Professional," Journal of Social Issues, (April, 1964), p. 60.

<sup>7</sup>Lewis Bowman, "Racial Discrimination and Negro Leadership Problems: The Case of 'Northern Community'," Journal of Social Forces, XLIV (December, 1965), p. 186.

<sup>8</sup>Bach and Simpson, loc. cit., p. 69.

<sup>9</sup>Isaacs, loc. cit.

be viewed as the shared values and usually, but not necessarily, the specific norms for achieving those values.

Black Group Identification, as found in the United States, coincides with the above definition of any group's identification. That which can make the definition more specific to the Black race is the explication of the agreed upon values and then to look at the norms or means for realizing those values. For instance, all Black people share in the acceptance of the goal of achieving freedom in this country. Yet, all do not share an acceptance of the particular norms or means for achieving this valued end. Thus, it is within this area of means to the end that differences in the observed expressions of Black Group Identification have occurred over time and within any specific time. Consequently, it is within this area of means to the end, rather than the end per se, that the bases for different expressions of Black Group Identification and, therefore, for different substantive definitions of the concept can be found.

As the social work profession can bear witness, Black Group Identification can be expressed in attitudes and behavior in not only the Black person's general life but also the person's professional life. Yet, when racial identification is expressed in the professional arena, conflict may ensue.

Professional Group Identification also requires the adherence not only to the values of the profession, but also to the norms for achieving the values. Although there are several social work norms about which there is agreement, the one norm that potentially can come into conflict with the norms of racial identification is that which requires the burial of personal considerations.

Weber's sine ire et studio, a mark of the "ideal" type of bureaucracy has been applied also to the "ideal" type of professionalism. Greenwood,<sup>10</sup> Wilensky and Lebeaux,<sup>11</sup> and also Etzioni<sup>12</sup> have agreed that important professional norms are objectivity and impersonality.

The freedom value of the Black race is certainly a 'personal' concern for the Black social worker. Even if the Black social worker wishes to forget the struggle of the Black race to achieve freedom, memory is stimulated constantly by the fact that the person too, because of race, is denied freedom within the profession . . . a profession that then admonishes, "Don't take it personally." If the Black professional is to remain identified with both the race and the profession, the person must choose means to achieving racial freedom that does not necessitate the abandonment of a profession to which the person has committed a major part of his/her life.

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<sup>10</sup>Ernst Greenwood, Lectures in Research Methodology for Social Welfare Students (Berkeley: University of California, 1963), p. 112.

<sup>11</sup>Harold L. Wilensky and Charles N. Lebeaux, Industrial Society and Social Welfare (New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 285.

<sup>12</sup>Amitai Etzioni, Modern Organizations (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 75-93.

The dilemma, racial identification or professional identification, can be lessened by choosing one and discarding the other, treating one as having priority over the other, or finding a way of treating each as equally important. Black social workers have responded to this dilemma according to these three general frameworks. The first framework has been adopted by few, probably because of the previously mentioned difficulties in wresting one's self from either group.<sup>13</sup> The remaining two frameworks, which do not require the abandonment of identification with at least one of the major groups have attracted Black social workers.<sup>14</sup>

#### One Group as a Priority

Those who work within a framework of choosing one group as having priority over the other, without rejecting that other group, may opt to practice with race or the profession as the prime referant.

When race is treated as having priority, the Black social worker may elect to practice For Blacks Only or For Blacks Mainly. Practicing for Blacks Only requires that the Black social worker not only serve just members of the Black race, but also deny service to members of other races. This approach employs a general strategy for promoting freedom for the Black race. That strategy is to concentrate all of the talents of its racial members on the freedom task. Thus, Black social workers who have an affinity with the strategy would focus all of their professional knowledge and skills on helping members only of their race.

The second approach, For Blacks Mainly, while oriented to the For Blacks Only practice, does not necessitate a denial of service to non-Blacks but does dictate that the major effort expended be for racial members. Within this track, unlike that of For Blacks Only, is a foundation for reconciling the conflict between racial identification and professional identification. The position is that professionals do choose specialities according to their personal interests and abilities; e.g., corrections, child welfare, etc. Thus, choosing to specialize and work with one race on the basis of interest and particular abilities to communicate, does not violate professional norms. Furthermore, if a person of a different race requests needed help, the Black social worker will provide service.

Whereas some Black social workers have treated racial identification as more important than professional identification, others have done the reverse by treating professional identification as a primary consideration. The practice of these social workers is characterized by acting as an Intermediary or as an Egalitarian.

The Black professional, who functions as an Intermediary, recognizes that both Black and non-Black professionals can impede the Black client

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<sup>13</sup>Patricia A. Brown, "Racial and Professional Identities: A Study of Black Social Workers' Attitudes and Behavior" (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 1971),

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 36-39.

from achieving racial freedom. Since the Intermediary is aware that the one possessing an attitude or performing an act detrimental to Black racial members may be doing so out of lack of information about the Black race, the Intermediary often fulfills the role of an information giver.

The Egalitarian Black social worker closely follows the professional norms of objectivity and impersonality by behaving as if 'Blackness' was incidental to professionalism. As far as the freedom value of the Black race is concerned, the Egalitarian holds that true freedom is to be treated as a member of the human race, rather than a sub-group of the species. His/her professional practice reflects the belief that to realize freedom, one practices freedom; to realize racial equality, one practices racial equality. This Black social worker will serve all regardless of race.

### Merging The Two Identifications

The third attempt at mitigating the conflict has been to embrace equally both groups-- the race and the profession. This approach does not demand that the professional's knowledge and skills be applied to the Black race only or mainly nor does it dictate that the Black social worker behave as though 'Blackness' was incidental to 'humanness.' The Cosmopolitan<sup>15</sup> believes that the racial identities of all are important factors in the tailoring of practice to fit the client. Thus, this professional attempts to become knowledgeable and appreciative of the history and culture of all races, particularly minority races. Furthermore, the Cosmopolitan attempts to become sensitive to the ways in which the dominant majority race has used racial differences as reasons for denying freedom to minority races. Consequently, while helping Blacks to gain freedom, the Cosmopolitan also is helping members of other races to win freedom.

The Cosmopolitan Black social worker, while helping the Black race and other races, does not violate professional norms to any degree. Instead, this social worker calls attention to another professional norm-- adding to the body of professional knowledge.

### Summary

In the foregoing pages, a phenomenon that has emerged as a dilemma for the social worker of a minority race and a problem for the profession has been analyzed. The dilemma was etched as the need to reconcile the conflict between two major groups competing for allegiance-- one's race and one's profession. By using the Black professional as the example, three structures that house ways of ameliorating the potential conflict for professionals of minority races were outlined.

Also, it was noted that some of the ways in which professional members of minority races attempted to alleviate the dilemma became a

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<sup>15</sup>It must be noted that the term, Cosmopolitan, is descriptively defined in a context different from that used when speaking of the "Cosmopolitan vs. Local" orientations. The usage here derives from the generic definition of Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary; "having world-wide rather than limited or provincial scope or bearing . . . composed of persons, constituents, or elements from all or many parts of the world."

problem for the profession. The problem was heralded by charges of 'irrelevancy' and 'inadequacy' in dealing with the concerns of clients of minority races. Yet, only the dilemma for social workers of minority races and not the problem for the profession was analyzed. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon, a scrutiny of the profession's response would have to be made. Some of the questions that might be posed are--What were the past and immediate historical factors influencing the profession's solutions to the problem? Can the profession's attempts to solve the problem be placed into categories that would approximate the frameworks into which efforts of Black social workers to lessen the dilemma have been placed?

Whether the above questions or others are used, the analysis of the profession's response still awaits consideration.

**ETHNICITY, POLITICAL COALITION AND THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF A MEGAPOLICY PERSPECTIVE IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION\***

**Howard A. Palley, Associate Professor,  
School of Social Work and Community Planning  
University of Maryland**

and

**Marian L. Palley, Associate Professor,  
Department of Political Science  
University of Delaware**

**INTRODUCTION**

Social Work Education should have two major tasks with regard to teaching about ethnicity, particularly working-class ethnics. The fostering of sensitivity to diverse cultures, and the members of such cultural groups is clearly one thrust; the architectural task of participating in the building of a society which fulfills the needs and builds the security of its people should be the second function.<sup>1</sup> In the past, social work education has taught about ethnicity and often about politics with a narrow perspective limited "to single dimensions of policy".<sup>2</sup> A broader gauge "megapolicy perspective" would enable practitioners to refrain from dividing ethnic

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<sup>1</sup>The arguments which are being made in regard to social work education and social work professionals can be made too in reference to many other educational programs.

<sup>2</sup>Yehezkel Dror, *Ventures in Policy Sciences* (New York: American Elsevier, Inc., 1971), p. 18.