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Introduction

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Introduction

ELFRIEDE G. SCHLESINGER, GUEST EDITOR

This special issue with its focus on the theory and practice of social work with minority and ethnic groups was first conceived at a time when the profession had begun to pay explicit attention to these matters in the literature and in the requirements posed by its accrediting body, the Council on Social Work Education. It seemed that past neglect had been supplanted by attention to the life styles and needs of minority and ethnic groups, with accompanying theoretical developments. The time was at hand for a review of some of the major theoretical and practice thrusts. The *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, long in the forefront of analysis and critique of major developments in the social sciences and social work, seemed an ideal place for such a review and synthesis. The articles that follow represent such an effort.

The first article by Ramakrishnan and Balgopal on the "Role of Social Institutions in a Multicultural Society" calls our attention to a number of issues not often attended to in the social work literature. That is, that the population composition of the United States has undergone dramatic changes in the past period, yielding a multicultural population heretofore unknown in this country. People from all over the globe, but especially from Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean have come to this country in large numbers. They come with diverse cultures, a myriad of needs and diverse perspectives on how and whether they want to become immersed in this country's mainstream, whatever that is. Retention of cultural attributes is important for many people at the same time as they seek a new life for themselves. The negative reception experienced by many newcomers parallels that long experienced by others who preceded them, especially minorities of color. How social institutions, especially those close to the profession of social work can and must respond to the diverse interests of various groups is the focus of this article and sets the stage for much of the subsequent work.

Wynetta Devore and I first published *Ethnic Sensitive Social Work Practice* in 1981. The term—which implies that social work practice must be mindful of the effects of ethnic group membership on social life and on the problems brought to social workers—quickly caught on and came to be used in a variety of ways including those we presented initially. The article looks back over the past 15 or so years, and reviews a number of matters: the commonly used definitions, the theoretical constructs brought to bear in analysis of these matters, the nature and extent of attention paid in our literature and the practice principles and interventive strategies that have emerged. The focus on a minority, rather than an ethnocultural perspective is evident, as we consider the implications of this thrust. While a rich literature has emerged we have a long way to go if social workers are truly to be able to develop the requisite knowledge and skills for ethnic sensitive practice.

The concept of culture is frequently used and often not clearly defined. Doman Lum in "Cultural Values and Minority People of Color" makes a superb analysis of the concept, digs into the anthropological and other literature, and presents us with a series of concepts that highlight the role of different elements of the majority as well as the minority culture in the lives of immigrants, as well as minority persons long resident in this country. He also comments on cultural attributes which in his view are shared by various minority people of color.

The debate on whether or not an "underclass" truly exists is ongoing and was the topic of a special issue of this journal some years ago. Zelly tackles the question by keeping a clear and narrow focus on how stratification theory has traditionally defined the concept of social class, stressing that social class position is ordinarily defined in terms of persons' relationship to the economic system. He points out that this construct is ignored as various analysts focus on the unwelcome behavior of certain persons left behind by the stratification system; the term comes to be used, in his view in distorted ways which may only be described as pejorative.

A number of critical practice issues—not as fully considered in the literature as one might hope—are highlighted in McMahon's and Gullerud's article "Native American Agencies

for Native American Children: Fulfilling the Promise of the Indian Child Welfare Act". Whether practice with some members of some ethnic/minority group members is best carried out by indigenous workers is a question often asked, but one that we did not find clearly delineated in our review of recent practice literature. McMahon and Gullerud suggest that the promises of the Indian Child Welfare Act have not been fulfilled in the way it has been administered. They take a firm stand suggesting that the intent of the act will not be achieved unless the indigenous community has major responsibility for implementation.

Another practice issue is tackled by Ken Huang in his analysis entitled "Tripartite Cultural Personality and Ethclass Assessment". He finds the mental health establishment wanting in how it has responded to the needs of diverse ethnic /minority persons, especially persons from non western oriented cultures who do not share western perceptions of mental health, often do not speak English and encounter all sorts of obstacles in their interaction with various helping professions. He develops a creative approach to incorporating what he terms "ethclass" assessments in to the multiaxial diagnostic system subsumed in the *Diagnostic Statistical Manuals* published by the American Psychiatric Association. His proposals are based on insightful discussions of the processes by which people with serious emotional difficulties, who are not familiar with the culture, encounter a hostile, insensitive system.

As I took to heart the editor's charge to request submissions from various experts in the subject matter of interest I was reminded of my colleagues with experience in various parts of the world. It seemed clear that there are many commonalities as well as differences, and that these can add to our understanding.

In the ethnocentric fashion so typical of many of us who live and work in the United States, there is a tendency to neglect developments taking place in Canada, our neighbor to the north. From the perspective of issues focused on ethnicity and minority status, Canada is an exciting and diverse place. Chambon and Bellamy present a new, somewhat unique approach to studying components of the ethnic and minority experience in Canada. They depart from the customary modes of conceptual

and empirical analysis, and introduce us to discourse analysis as a way of using various documents, produced by members of different groups to highlight divergent approaches and needs. The mode of analysis, of intrinsic interest, also serves to shed light on the differing perspectives of ethnic subgroups in Canada.

One way of thinking about Israel might be as a laboratory for studying ethnic diversity, and intergroup conflict as well as intergroup collaboration. Eliezer Jaffe, thoroughly conversant with the issues extant in this country as well as Israel, reviews the Israeli situation at the same time as he identifies major points of congruence between the situation of that small country and the United States.

England is often thought of as a relatively small, homogeneous country. The facts are otherwise. For centuries, and especially in the post World War II period, persons from all over the globe have settled in England. In this period many have come from the Caribbean, from India, from Pakistan and from other countries in the developing world. Some have been there long enough to be classified as "aging". How the human services establishment responds to this multicultural population is the topic of Devore's analysis—and suggests, as do so many of the other works, that some issues have applicability on an international basis.

Taken as a whole, the articles in this issue remind us of how increasingly diverse the United States is becoming and of the challenges these changes pose if social work is to be responsive to the values and needs of diverse peoples. The articles from Canada, from Israel, and from England remind us that the international social work community has much to learn from the experiences in all countries.

The review of the "state of the art" suggests that while we have come a long way much remains to be done to assure that our literature and our practice reflect the ever present changes. Not all of the questions raised in the initial call for papers have been answered. But we have begun a process.

In closing this introduction I want to express special thanks to Dorcas Bowles, from the University of Texas at Arlington, Doman Lum from Sacramento State University in California

and Wynetta Devore from Syracuse University for their careful and critical analysis of these papers. Thanks also go to Bob Leighninger and Gary Mathews of the *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*.

