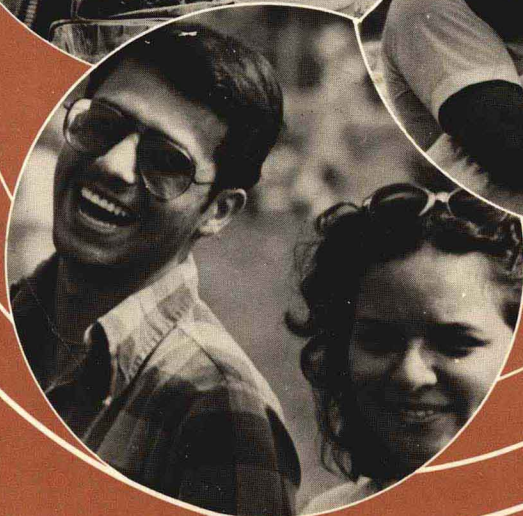
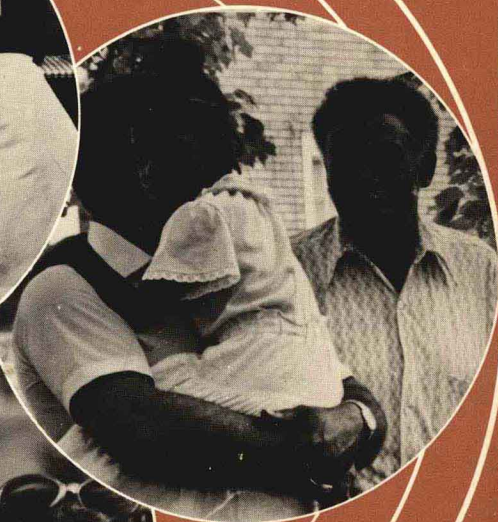
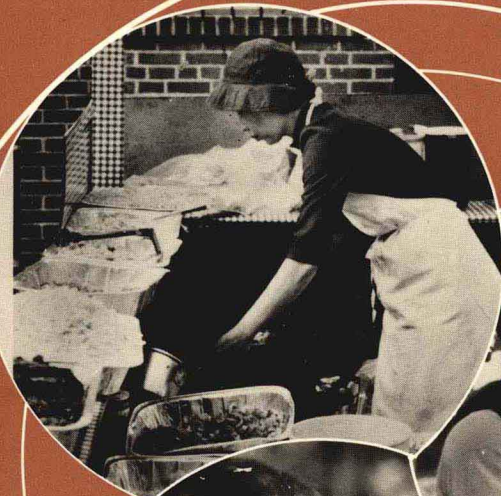


WYNETTA DEVORE
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ETHNIC-SENSITIVE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE



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Preface

This book is about ethnicity, social class, and social work practice. It was written because for many years we worried about the fact that knowledge about the life-styles and needs of different class and ethnic groups was not sufficiently integrated into principles and methods of social work practice.

There was considerable information about how ethnic and social class membership shapes responses to problems of living. Much rich material is and was available in the sociological and psychological literature. However, social work had made only limited systematic efforts to adapt sociological and psychological insights in a manner congruent with practice needs.

Unlike psychological theories that were used to explain the functioning of individuals and groups—and used as guidelines for intervention—ethnic and class data tended to serve merely as background or identifying information. Few attempts were made to delineate how understanding of class and ethnic factors could contribute to the assessment and intervention process.

We are not suggesting that such efforts were totally lacking. As early as 1917 Mary Richmond cautioned that the caseworker who ignores “national and racial characteristics . . . is liable to surprises.”* There are many reasons for the failure to act on Mary

*Mary Richmond. 1917. *Social Diagnosis*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Richmond's admonition. Egalitarian motives led many social workers to the conclusion that understanding of basic human needs and the dynamics of human behavior would serve them in their effort to provide equal service to all. Some believed that explicit attention to the relationship between ethnicity, social class, and behavior was somehow incongruent with social work's commitment to equality and the uniqueness of each individual.

The ferment of the sixties forced attention to these matters. The civil rights struggle led to the Black Power movement, which spoke out about the beauty of Blackness. This vitality subsequently generated emerging movements in other ethnic groups. Poverty was rediscovered and some called social work to task for faulting on its commitment to the poor.

The profession of social work did respond to these criticisms. A considerable literature emerged on the behavior and life-style of those groups who found themselves in poverty. This thrust is currently being revised as a body of literature focused on diverse stances or problems and problem resolution is emerging in various professional journals and publications. This new body of literature reflects the fact that the time has arrived when social work can comfortably integrate its commitment to deal with individuals as unique human beings at the same time as it draws on knowledge about ethnic and class related responses to refine and enhance practice.

These responses derive from immersion in various groups and from the way these groups are regarded in the society. They relate not only to issues of inequality and racism but also to dispositions associated with child rearing, appropriate sex role behavior, marriage, dispositions associated with seeking help outside of the immediate family, the discomfort felt when sharing intimate problems, and views about formally organized helping institutions. Much of the available material is scattered through the literature. This book is an attempt to synthesize contemporary perspectives on social work, social class, and ethnicity.

Two basic themes inform this work. The first suggests that ethnicity and social class play a large part in shaping life's problems as well as giving perspectives on problem resolution. The second presumes that social work is a problem-solving endeavor that must pay simultaneous attention to micro and macro problems if it is to respond effectively to the problems within its domain.

Using these perspectives a model of ethnic-sensitive practice is developed. The model incorporates general knowledge of human behavior and specific knowledge about the dispositions and behaviors that are generated at the intersect of ethnicity and social class. We have called these unique dispositions, behaviors, and associated experiences the *ethnic reality*. Also incorporated in the model are what we have termed the *layers of understanding* required for social work practice. Subsumed are (1) a general knowledge of human behaviors, (2) self-awareness—with an emphasis on the need for awareness of one's own ethnic and class background and how these impact on practice, and (3) the impact of the ethnic reality on the life of clients. A series of practice principles that highlight the importance of simultaneous attention to micro and macro tasks is presented. These practice principles emerge out of our review of various approaches to social work practice, including the psychosocial approach, the several problem-solving approaches, and the structural and social provision models.

Major attention is devoted to a review of basic social work skills and how these must be adapted in a manner designed to enhance sensitivity to the needs and dispositions of various groups.

Three chapters focus on work in three problem areas—social work with families, social work with recipients of Aid to Dependent Children, and social work in health care. These chapters are designed to illustrate the model in action.

In developing this book we made an extensive review of diverse literature on ethnicity, on social class, on the life cycle, and on prevailing approaches to social work practice. In synthesizing this material we drew heavily on our own experience as practitioners and social work educators. We also learned a great deal from our colleagues, our students, and others who readily talked with us when they learned what we were about. They told us how they experienced ethnicity and social class and how these characteristics affected their encounters with various helping professions.

This book is designed for social work practitioners, social work educators, and use in both graduate and undergraduate social work programs. It can serve as a primary text in social work practice courses and as a supplementary text in human behavior courses focused on the life cycle, in those intended to illustrate how practitioners can integrate both individual and systemic concerns, and in courses on the family, public welfare, and social work in health

care. We believe that our colleagues in related professions such as nursing, medicine, and psychology will find useful material and insights.

This book presents no new approaches to social work practice. Rather, we draw on existing approaches and suggest how these may be enhanced by attention to the ethnic reality. In presenting this model we are acutely aware of the fact that the adaptation of skill, in keeping with the ethnic reality, represents a series of hypotheses about how these adaptations can enhance practice. We make no claim that the proposed procedures have been systematically tested. In this respect we share the weakness of many other models. It is our fervent hope that others will join us in efforts to test these hypotheses in the course of practice.

Neither is this a book about different ethnic and class groups. There are many excellent books devoted to that subject. We draw on available material to suggest how knowledge about various groups can be incorporated into practice. The reader will find that our illustrations deal with some but not all ethnic groups. Our examples focus on American Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, and American Indians, as well as a number of Eastern European groups, including Poles and Slavics. Material on Italians and Jews is also included.

We want to make special reference to the fact that no illustrations are given about the group usually referred to as White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants. This group is generally characterized as representing mainstream American values and culture. It is the standards of this group by which many immigrants, migrants, and American Indians are judged. In making this statement we are well aware of the fact that this group has its own important traditions and attitudes. We hope that members of this group are not offended by this omission. Rather we hope they join us in this venture of trying to enhance the relationship between social class, ethnicity, and social work practice. We expect that readers will have certain concerns, anticipating that the effort to incorporate knowledge about ethnicity and social class into guidelines for practice raises the possibility of stereotyping. We are quite aware of this danger. While we have made every effort to avoid such stereotyping, we undoubtedly have not been totally successful. We believe the risk is necessary. No claim is made that all members of the groups discussed will behave or think or feel in the manner suggested by some of the descriptive

material. At the same time we saw no other way of highlighting important material. If we have presented incorrect or stereotypical information, we apologize and invite readers' comments about where we erred.

Finally, we want to thank the many people who have helped us in this work. We want to thank our students at Kean College and Rutgers School of Social Work who read and critiqued parts of the manuscript. We owe particular thanks to Susan Abrams, former editor at The C. V. Mosby Company, who encouraged us to embark on this work, and to Diane Bowen, Michelle Turenne, and Peggy Fagen, who patiently struggled with us to its completion. Many contributed examples from their practice and consulted with us in relation to certain ethnic groups. Others were helpful in areas of research; among those persons are Cynthia Alonzo, Geraldine Durden, Karl Esmark, Rosalie De Gillio, Paul Fishkin, Pamela Franey, Peter Garcia, Mildred Gaupp, Beverly R. Guest, Shirley Gurisic, Bertram Jones, Jane Kehoe, Judith Kunz, Catherine E. Marino, Lynn Markowitz, Ina Mitchell, Zaidia L. Mostareo, Stephanie Patti, Debbora Peterson, Dr. Albert Ramirez, Kyle Russ, Marjorie Sklar, Loretta Snook, Tom Sullivan, Micheline Swanson, Mottie Tate, and Janet Tuckman.

David Antebi and Jewlee Bryant were extremely helpful in thinking about and providing the photographs we hope illustrate some of our basic conceptions. Many people—friends, relatives, and students—readily talked with us about their experience as it bears on the issues covered in this book. Those whose names we forgot to mention, thank you and our apologies.

Most importantly, we thank our families—Jewlee and David Bryant and Richard, David, and Adrienne Schlesinger. They were patient when we locked ourselves up in a room to work and listened sympathetically as we moaned and groaned.

We also want to express our appreciation to the secretaries who carefully typed portions of the manuscript—Susan Tiller, Margaret Camisa, and Rose Gonzalez. Particular thanks are due to our colleagues Anne Adams, Marjory Alper, Kenneth Kazmerski, Ida Eiger, Frank Naughton, and Arthur Brown, who read and commented on various portions of the manuscript.

**Wynetta Devore
Elfriede G. Schlesinger**

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PART I CONCEPTUAL FORMULATIONS

In Part I, the conceptual base of ethnic-sensitive practice is developed.

In Chapter 1, material on ethnicity and social class is reviewed with an emphasis on how forces both internal and external to various groups serve to sustain the role of social class and ethnicity as powerful aspects of social life. The mechanisms by which ethnicity, culture, and work impact on dispositions to life's problems are reviewed, and the definition of the ethnic reality is developed.

In Chapter 2, prevailing models of life cycle stages and tasks are reviewed and integrated with information about ethnicity and social class to show how these forces affect transition through the life cycle. Points of stress and coping mechanisms, particularly as these relate to ethnicity and social class, are identified.

Chapter 3 outlines the "layers of understanding" required for social work practice. In Chapter 4, the various approaches to social work practice are reviewed and the extent to which understanding of ethnic and class functions have been incorporated in the basic assumptions and procedures is assessed.

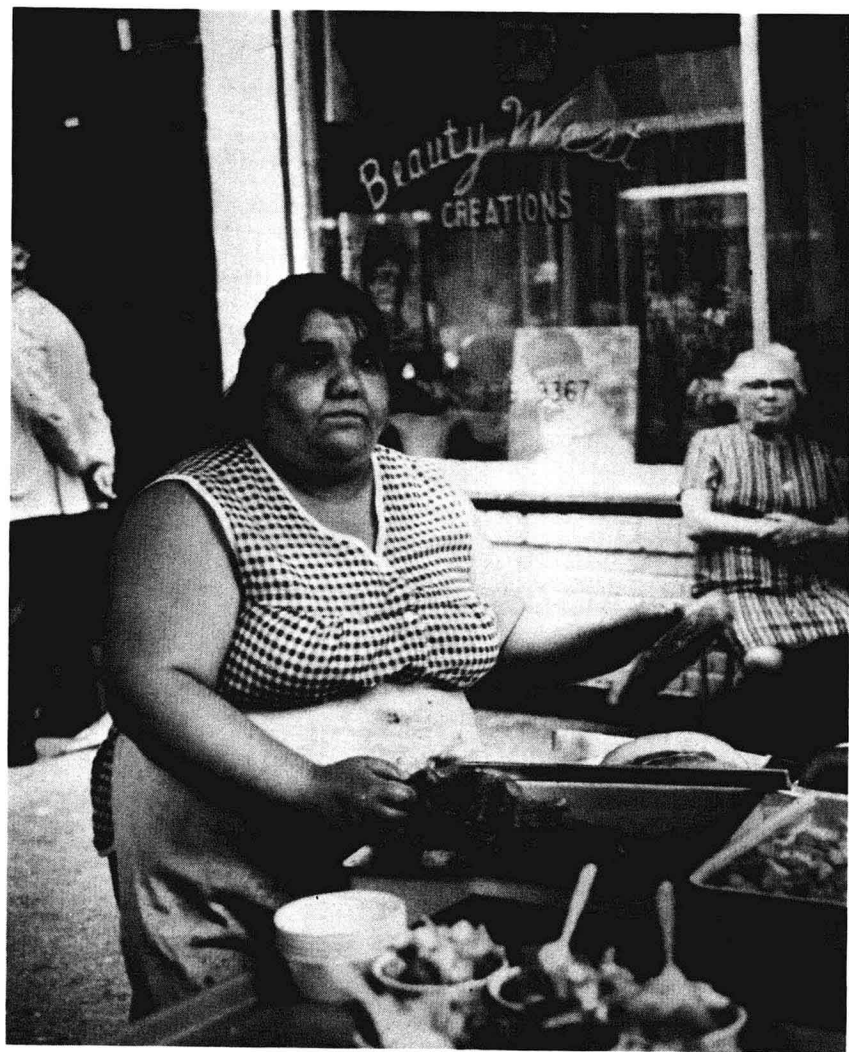
In Chapter 5, a model of ethnic-sensitive practice is presented. The model integrates social work values, the view of social work as a problem-solving endeavor, a perspective which focuses on individual and systemic issues, and the conceptualization on class, ethnicity, and the life cycle.



David Antebi



David Antebi



David Antebi

CHAPTER

1

The ethnic reality

There are many perspectives on how ethnic group membership, social class, minority group status, and culture affect individual and group life.

In this chapter we examine and assess a number of these perspectives. In so doing, we are guided by one basic objective—to cull those insights that can serve as the basis for the development of practice principles to guide practitioners in their efforts to respond with sensitivity to the values and dispositions that are related to ethnic group membership and position in the social stratification system.

There is a vast body of knowledge that identifies the manner in which ethnicity and membership in various social class groups shape approaches to the problems of living. When these are examined in the context of American society a number of overarching themes emerge. One theme focuses on the sense of cohesion, identity, and solidarity that derives from the association with one's own ethnic group. Another centers on how social class is defined, the consequences of membership in different strata of the society, and inequality.

Central to these considerations is the relationship between ethnic group membership, minority status, social class, and inequality. Those who have been assigned official responsibility “to help”

have a particular obligation to be aware of inequality as it derives from ethnicity, minority status, and social class and to demonstrate a special sensitivity to the sources of strength and coping capacity that are often ignored. This book presents some formulations that serve to highlight such understanding.

Major attention is focused on the concept of "ethclass" (Gordon, 1964). This formulation aids in examining the meaning of membership in an ethnic group and in the various social classes.

ETHCLASS AND THE ETHNIC REALITY

In his classic analysis, Gordon suggests that the point at which social class and ethnic group membership intersect be characterized as "ethclass." Gordon uses this concept to explain the role that social class membership plays in defining the basic conditions of life at the same time as it seeks to account for the differences between groups at the same social class level. These differences are in large measure explained by ethnic group membership. We suggest that the intersect of ethnicity and social class, what Gordon has termed ethclass, converge to generate identifiable dispositions and behaviors. We characterize these dispositions and the behaviors which flow from them as the *ethnic reality* or ethclass in action. The concept of the ethnic reality is depicted in Fig. 1.

Dispositions on such matters as appropriate child-rearing practices or proper care for the aged, though in large measure related to social class membership, are often affected by ethnicity.

Ethnic groups

According to Gordon, the ethnic group is a type of group contained within the national boundaries of America defined or set off by race, religion, or national origin. In this view religion is a cultural phenomenon. National origin calls attention to the fact that everyone in the United States, except American Indians, has migrated to this country from elsewhere, often bringing a set of customs, a language, and a unique history. Race is the result of differential concentrations of gene frequencies that are responsible for traits confined to physical manifestations such as skin color or hair form that have no intrinsic connections with cultural patterns and institutions.

Common to the ethnic group is a shared feeling of peoplehood

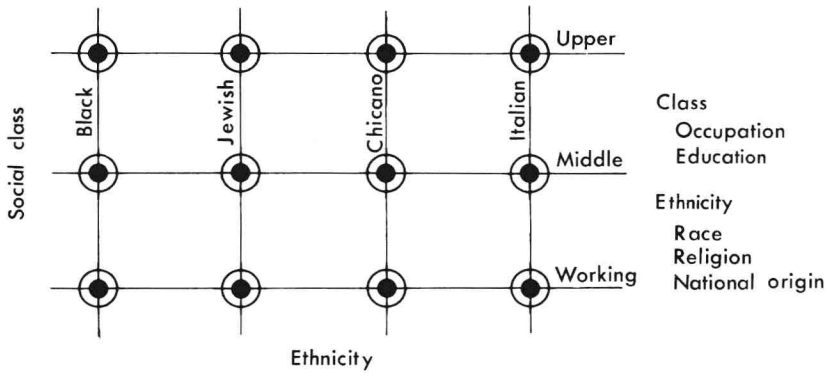


Fig. 1. The ethnic reality: ethclass in action.

The “social space” created by the intersect of social class and ethnicity has been called ethclass. The dispositions and behaviors that flow from this are termed the ethnic reality or ethclass in action.

Ethnicity and the associated sense of “peoplehood” are represented by the vertical axis and stress the fact that ethnicity is a component of social life at all social class levels. Social class is represented by the horizontal axes.

The circles represent the ethnic reality and suggest that as social class intersects with ethnicity a unique configuration is formed.

and a common sense of past and future. This sense of belonging often connotes cohesion, solidarity, and a basis of identity. Ethclass thus serves to clarify differences between groups at the same social class level who in many other ways are quite similar. Intimate relationships are most frequently found between people of the same social class within an ethnic group. These relationships, usually of an emotional nature, reinforce mutual expectations. These expectations and the behaviors that result from them are deeply embedded though often subtle. They may revolve around such issues as appropriate methods for punishing children, anticipated adult-adolescent relationships, public behaviors expected of men and women, the place of the church in family life, or the manner in which aging parents should be regarded.

ETHNICITY

To begin the examination of the ethnic reality we will focus first on the meaning of ethnicity in America today. There are two major

factors to consider: (1) the “growth of civilization” has altered and contributed to an increasingly complex basis of self-identification, and (2) varying views of culture and subculture enhance understanding of the role played by ethnic group membership in shaping responses to the joys and problems of living.

In developing the concept of ethclass, Gordon points out that the early hunting societies were characterized by what he terms a “simple model of self-identification.”

The rules governing family behavior, and political life and the values guiding them, were intricately and closely intertwined. Group, family, and political life were culturally uniform and took place within a limited and clearly demarcated geographical place. Distinctions between family, social class, ethnic group membership, work, and geography were virtually nonexistent and out of the frame of experience of most people. The development of stable agricultural societies, followed by massive industrialization and urbanization, gave rise to diverse bases of identity. Nation, region of birth, residence, occupation, and social class are but a few of the factors that help to shape our sense of who we are, where we belong, and how to behave.

In diversified and stratified societies each of these bases of group membership suggest varied and at times conflicting bases of identification, guides for behavior, and orientation to the vicissitudes of life. And yet

. . . the sense of ethnicity has proved to be hardy. As though with a wily cunning of its own, as though there were some essential element in man's nature that demanded it—something that compelled him to merge his lonely individual identity in some ancestral group of fellows smaller by far than the whole human race, smaller often than the nation—the sense of ethnic belonging has survived. It has survived in various forms and with various names, but it has not perished, and twentieth century urban man is closer to his stone-age ancestors than he knows.

(Gordon, 1964)*

*From *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* by Milton M. Gordon. Copyright © 1964 by Oxford University Press, Inc. Reprinted by permission.