Ethnic-Sensitive Social Work Practice

Fourth Edition

Wynetta Devore
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FOURTH EDITION

ETHNIC-SENSITIVE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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We hope that in some small way the perspectives presented in this book will contribute to the lives of those who follow us. In this spirit we dedicate this book to our children and grandchildren, Julia Newman Bryant, David Lovell Bryant, David Seth Schlesinger, Adrienne Lee Aldermeshian, Laura Jennifer Aldermeshian and Peter Harout Aldermeshian.

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PREFACE

It has been fifteen years since we sent the manuscript of the first edition of *Ethnic-Sensitive Social Work Practice* to the publisher. We were both excited and wary, wondering how readers would react to our effort to integrate understanding of the impact of ethnicity, social class, and minority status with the principles and strategies of social work practice. We were aware that our work was among the first to attempt to effect the union between the two areas of discourse. We suggested then that "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 for identifying information. Few attempts were made to delineate how understanding of class and ethnic factors could contribute to the assessment and intervention process" [from the preface, *Ethnic Sensitive Social Work Practice* (1st ed.), 1981. St. Louis: C. V. Mosby].

The positive response to the first and subsequent editions suggested that the profession of social work wanted, needed, and used the knowledge and strategies that were then and remain the substance of our work. This assessment is supported by the call for this fourth edition.

As we have developed each new edition, we have sought to take account of developments within our profession and within our country, and even matters of international scope.

By the time we began to work on the second edition it was becoming increasingly evident that changes in immigration legislation had made it possible for large numbers of new immigrants—especially from Asia and Latin countries—to come to the United States. We sought to incorporate understanding of their rich cultures and traditions as well as of service needs into our work. Increased interest in the issues confronting people of diverse origin had led to systematic analysis of their situation. Therefore, in the second edition we were able to present a more thorough and well-rounded treatment of the diverse perspectives on the role of ethnicity and social class.

As we worked on the third edition, the magnitude of the expanding profile of the population of the United States was becoming evident. Emerging data suggested

that this profile consisted of an increasing number of persons of color who had arrived as immigrants. Also included in this group were the other, more familiar groups from Western and Eastern Europe who had arrived in large numbers in prior waves of immigration. Sufficient information about the extent of these changes was available to introduce a new chapter, "We, the People of the United States," which focused on the history and current situation of immigration to the United States. We considered the situation of the newcomers as we tried to understand their lives by drawing on prevailing theories of ethnicity and social class and minority status. These matters remain a focus of the fourth edition.

In the fourth edition we have introduced a number of new materials. We begin with a new chapter, "The Case for Cases: Teaching and Learning Ethnic-Sensitive Practice," which suggests that ethnic-sensitive practice is best learned by introducing students to a combination of cognitive materials, case materials, and practice skills. In keeping with this stance, we have considerably expanded our use of case material. Each of the chapters in Part II, "Strategies for Ethnic Sensitive Practice," begins with one or two "lead cases." These cases are referred to throughout the chapter to illustrate the concepts and strategies being considered. In addition, case vignettes of varying length and complexity continue to be introduced, in keeping with the pattern established in earlier editions.

We have introduced some new chapters and have reduced the scope and length of materials included in prior editions. As always, we have tried to introduce current materials relevant to the topic at hand. In Chapter 3, "The Ethnic Reality," we introduce work that suggests new ways of looking at the adaptation of immigrants, from varying Asian and other countries, as well as work focused on people of color long resident in the United States.

Chapter 6 "Approaches to Social Work Practice and the Ethnic Reality," has been updated to take into account a series of developments in social work practice theory. These developments point to a greater convergence and unity of approaches than had been the case in past years.

Other changes reflect an effort to take into account the developments in social work education and in ethnic-sensitive practice. References for suggested readings are included in Part II that provide additional views of the American ethnic experience.

In 1992 the Council on Social Work Education developed a new Curriculum Policy statement mandating that all accredited programs of social work education, both at the baccalaureate and masters level, must instruct students in generalist practice. Chapter 8 adds this perspective in response to this mandate. We should note that our stance on the importance of simultaneous attention to individual and systemic concerns—a notion we emphasized in all prior editions—has long been in keeping with the generalist perspective. We suggest that the generalist and the structural perspective are congruent and important approaches to contemporary ethnic-sensitive practice.

We have made repeated reference to the increasing diversity of this country. Many people continue to come, looking to improve their chances for equality, equity, and safety. People come as families or as members of families whose relatives have been left behind. To help social workers all over the country, who find

themselves working with people from diverse parts of the globe, we introduce a chapter on "Ethnic-Sensitive Practice with Immigrants."

The chapters that have been retained have been updated to take into account recent literature and emerging issues. For example, the current ferment in welfare reform is reflected in Chapter 13 on social work in the public sector, and the increasing concerns with children's health and with AIDS are reflected in Chapter 14.

We recognize that increasing attention has been directed to the language used to refer to different groups, especially people of color. It is important that we let our readers know the terms we use. They are African American, Afro-Caribbean, American Indian, Asian Indian, Pilippino, Chicano, or Latino.

In introducing this fourth edition of *Ethnic-Sensitive Social Work Practice,* we believe that it is important to make some general comments about the role of ethnicity in social life. We focus on the subject because, in our professional as well as personal experiences, we have found that many elements of our being are bound up with ethnic traditions, with identity, and with the cohesion derived from membership in ethnic groups. Throughout our work we point to the fact that ethnicity is a source of comfort and cohesion as well as stress and strife. As we go to press for the fourth time, we are increasingly aware that in many sections of the world, as well as in the United States, tensions between groups often spill over into conflict. These conflicts have many sources, including oppression of people in different segments of the globe. It is our view that as social workers heighten their understanding of oppression, as well as of the positive impact of ethnic group membership on daily living, they can play an important role in reducing tensions and conflict, at home as well as elsewhere in the world.

Many people helped us in our work. Especially important in this edition was the contribution of those people who shared case material with us. We thank them without identifying their institutional affiliation, as a way of preserving the anonymity of the clients whose situations are presented. They include Janice Cranch, Rebekah Clark, Vincent Corso, Mary Ruffolo, Amelia Castillo, James Foley, Yuhwa Eva Lu, Sally Komar, Sally Goldman, Vivian Fu Wells, and Dee Livingston. There are others, too numerous to mention, whose discussions in various professional contexts—in our classes and at various professional meetings—contributed to our understanding of practice issues and strategies. We also wish to thank the reviewers who provided their comments and suggestions for this fourth edition: L. René Bergeron, University of New Hampshire; Walter J. Pierce, Barry University; and Rose S. Rogers-Harris, Loyola University. We also wish to thank the reviewers of the previous editions, whose help was invaluable.

Others, too, made major contributions. Graduate assistants Jennifer Gorski and Rebekah Clark of the School of Social Work at Syracuse University provided invaluable assistance. Suzanne Orsogna, secretary at the School of Social Work at Rutgers, spent many hours above and beyond the call of duty in typing sections of the manuscript. Audrey Knapp and Tina Ellis, secretaries at the Syracuse University School of Social Work, assisted in management of computer disks. We thank them all.

W.D.
E.G.S.

CONTENTS

PART I

CONCEPTUAL FORMULATIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON ETHNIC-SENSITIVE PRACTICE

Part I presents perspectives on ethnic-sensitive practice.

Chapter 1 suggests how the use of case material adds to learning the concepts introduced here. It considers how teaching and learning of ethnic-sensitive practice are enhanced when cognitive material, case material, and practice skills are introduced in an integrated fashion.

Chapter 2 reviews United States immigration policy from colonial times to the present. It includes a discussion of why and how people come to the United States and a review of the immigrants' experience.

Chapter 3 introduces the concept of the ethnic reality, which suggests that as ethnicity and social class intersect, distinct and identifiable dispositions are generated. This chapter places particular emphasis on how external and internal forces serve to sustain the role of social class and ethnicity in various groups.

Chapter 4 presents the assumptions and principles for ethnic-sensitive practice. These principles are built on certain assumptions about human behavior, the ethnic reality, the layers of understanding, and social work as a problem-solving endeavor.

Chapter 5 outlines the layers of understanding—the values, knowledge, skills, and self-awareness—basic to social work practice and incorporates the ethnic reality as part of these layers of understanding.

Chapter 6 examines the various approaches to social work practice. Recent developments in practice theory are reviewed and assessed to determine the extent to which ethnic and class factors have been incorporated into the basic assumptions of social work practice.

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THE CASE FOR THE CASE METHOD IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

The record from a charity organization society describes the efforts of the society to find Mr. Angus Doyle, a Scotch ship fitter who had left his Scotch-American wife, Kate, and four children, the oldest a girl of fifteen. He went off this time, as usual with him, when another baby was expected. He was a good workman, but a hard drinker and abusive. By energetic correspondence and the aid of a society in another state, Doyle was found. His employers were interested, and the man was induced to send $7.00 a week regularly to his family. After the fifth child was born, he came home and was overheard telling one of his mates that it made no difference where a man went in this country now, he was found out and made to support his family (Richmond, 1917, p. 140).

A school social worker requests that Mrs. P. come to see her. Of her three school-age children, two are having school-related problems. Jimmy, age ten, is not performing up to his capacity and is becoming a management problem in the classroom. Ann, age six, has excessive absences and gives the excuse that she is staying with her aunt. John, age eight, seems to have no problems. He is seen as a bright, well-adjusted child. The worker knows that the children's father died very suddenly about six months ago. (Johnson, 1992, p. 225)

These are the beginnings of "stories" used in the education of social work practitioners. In 1917 Mary Richmond presented the story of Angus Doyle, a deserting husband and father. Years later, Louise C. Johnson presents the story of the P family, a widow and her three school-age children. Both instances, one in the past and one in the present, these are stories of concern and need to which social workers are expected to respond. These stories and others like them, whether long or short, are essential tools in education and training for the profession of social work.

We have come to call these stories *cases.* Among the many definitions of the word *case,* the one that seems most appropriate for our consideration is, "a state of things requiring discussion, decision or investigation" (*Random House College Dictionary,* 1984). In the Richmond and Johnson stories of family distress we learn