# CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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## Second Edition

*By*

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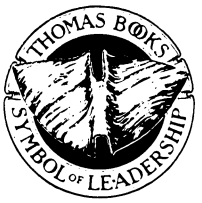


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# PREFACE

We are pleased that the favorable reception accorded to the First Edition of *Cultural Diversity and Social Work Practice* has generated sufficient demand for a revised and expanded Second Edition. Each previously included chapter is newly written and updated, and we were fortunate to be able to recruit authors for two additional chapters dealing with client groups we were unable to include the earlier edition, chapters on persons with developmental disabilities, and persons with adult-onset physical disabilities. Each of these groups possesses significantly distinct attributes to warrant inclusion in a text on culturally diverse practice. There is precedent for this. Mary Richmond's (1917) class text, *Social Diagnosis,* contained chapters on practice with the "feebleminded" and blind individuals, as well as more traditional client groups such as women.

The reader will note that we have taken a largely atheoretical orientation to conceptualizing culturally diverse practice in social work in favor of a more broadly based empirical approach. In part, this is because we believe that the existing theoretical approaches are insufficiently developed to encompass the many aspects of diversity seen among social work clients, and in part we have found that the empirical research itself is derived from such a plethora of orientations that reconciling them in review chapters would be an insurmountable task.

The concept of cultural diversity is receiving considerable press lately, much of it controversial. In part, this is because the term itself is not well defined. For our purposes, we have adopted the point of view suggested by Marsella and Kameoka (1989): "Culture is shared learned behavior that is transmitted from one generation to another for purposes of human adjustment, adaptation, and growth" (p. 233).

Cultural diversity refers to shared, not idiosyncratic, ways of behaving transmitted to one by family and peers. Culture is *learned,* and such learned behavior is capable of being understood in terms of its past adaptive significance to the client and to the survival of his/her culture.

All of us, social workers and clients alike, are immersed in a cultural milieu which affects our ways of seeing, believing, acting and reacting. When there is disparity between social worker and client, the potential exists for misunderstandings to arise and for a less than optimal helping relationship to develop. By understanding certain aspects of the culture experienced by a client, a social worker is better equipped to be of service, to assess, to plan, to cooperate, and to intervene.

The profession of social work has a long history of concern for individuals and groups who are oppressed or disenfranchised in our society. As is true today, much of early social work practice dealt with immigrant groups. Professional organizations such as the National Association of Social Workers and the Council on Social Work Education have adopted formal policies which mandate social workers to be knowledgeable about cultural diversity, including the characteristics of racial and ethnic minorities and other so-called special populations, such as women. This book was written to provide social work practitioners and students with increased knowledge and sensitivity toward cultural diversity in social work practice.

As social work educators, practitioners, and researchers, we have been aware of the need for current, research-based information about client characteristics and special issues associated with race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, age and gender. While such information is available, it is typically scattered throughout the literature from several disciplines. Further, this knowledge is only infrequently made directly relevant to social work practice, policy, research, and educational concerns. *Cultural Diversity and Social Work Practice, Second Edition* is intended to bridge these gaps and to present to readers, in one source, a wealth of practice-relevant information about African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals, women, the aged, the developmentally disabled, and those with adult-onset physical disabilities. It is designed for both undergraduate and graduate students, as well as for practitioners who desire to enhance their skills in working with culturally diverse clients.

As editors and authors, the contributors to this second edition reflect the diverse makeup of the profession and society at large. We are men and women, coming from White, Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian backgrounds. Some of us are elderly, others comparatively young; our sexuality is expressed in differing ways; and some of us possess various physical disabilities. We believe that this diversity has

enabled us to produce a book with greater integrity and credibility than a work any one of us could have authored alone. This reflects a fundamental fact of contemporary life: In diversity there is strength.

A central theme of this book is that knowledge about cultural diversity should encompass both historical information and current knowledge that is applicable to direct practice, human behavior, social policy, research, and education in social work. We are deeply committed to the advancement of effective, ethical, and culturally sensitive social work practice. We hope that this book contributes toward that goal.

As with the first edition, the editors would like to gratefully acknowledge the marvelous contributions of the individual chapter authors and to our culturally diverse students, friends, colleagues, and clients, who have so enriched our lives.

Dianne F. Harrison
Bruce A. Thyer
John S. Wodarski

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# CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

# Chapter 1

# CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: AN OVERVIEW

NANCY P. KROPF AND ALICIA R. ISAAC

During the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement was instrumental in beginning to identify and eradicate forms of discrimination. Subsequent initiatives such as desegregation, fair housing legislation, and affirmative action laws had goals of instituting a more equal and just society. The impetus for change spearheaded other disenfranchised groups to demand increased political and social power. Groups of gay/lesbian/bisexual individuals, the elderly, and the physically challenged formed political organizations and lobbies to address their concerns. With the increased awareness of diversity within society, the ensuing years could have been times of increased tolerance and acceptance for cultural pluralism.

Prejudice, discrimination, and violence continues to persist against individuals based upon personal characteristics, however. Hate crimes, defined by Barnes and Ephross (1994) as "crimes directed against persons, families, groups, or organizations because of their racial, ethnic, religious, or sexual identities or their sexual orientation or condition of disability" (p. 247), are common occurrences. Hate groups such as Neo-Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan, and other racially based supremist groups, continue to attract recruits. These events indicate that intolerance against many different groups continues to exist. While some progress has been made in eradicating prejudice and discrimination, much additional work has yet to be done.

## An Historical Overview of Social Work and Diversity

As a profession invested in social justice, social work has a long history of intervention with culturally diverse client groups. Though the characteristics of these individuals have changed and broadened through the

years, the mandate to provide services to an array of client groups has remained intact. When Mary Richmond (1899) wrote *Friendly Visiting Among the Poor: A Handbook for Charity Workers,* she could not have envisioned such a spectrum of social work practice with people of color, immigrants from other countries, the aged, the physically challenged, women, gay/lesbian and bisexual individuals. The "friendly visitors" of these times were female workers assisting poor and/or sick women and children. During this period, the recognizable poor and chronically ill constituted a culturally diverse population in the midst of a larger, less tolerable society.

The settlement house movement, initially for immigrants, was one of the earliest formalized interventive efforts specifically focused on culturally diverse clients. Two of the most famous settlement houses in the United States were the Neighborhood Guild on the Lower East Side of New York and Hull House in Chicago. Settlements quickly spread to other large and middle-sized cities in the country. Despite language barriers, poverty, scarce resources, and discrimination, the planned focus and efforts to provide specialized services to a diverse population made the settlement house movement effective. Social workers actually lived in the impoverished neighborhoods and attempted to understand the values, traditions, and feelings of immigrants who were trying to integrate into American society. These early residents and staff of settlement houses became champions of social reform.

Since the early days of social work, a great deal of change has occurred in society and the profession. The roles and contexts of social work practice have expanded dramatically, as social workers practice in situations as diverse as private therapy and within elected political office. Equally diverse are the clients with whom social workers practice. The expansion of professional roles and contexts has allowed our profession to have influence on multiple levels—from working with individual clients to improve or maintain functioning, to creating more humane and socially just programs and policies.

Recently, the profession has been chastised for losing perspective of our historical mission to social justice (Specht & Courtney, 1994). The profession has also been accused of paying inadequate attention to clients of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, prompting the question of whether social work is a racist profession (McMahon & Allen-Meares, 1992). Into the next century, the profession of social work must embrace with a new enthusiasm the concepts and models for effective interven-

tion with culturally diverse client systems. Homelessness, problems of aging in an increasingly complex and technological society, discrimination in employment against gay and lesbian individuals, treatment of family systems affected by HIV/AIDS, and the dramatic increase in Hispanic population are some examples of the continuing need for cultural sensitivity.

## Culturally Sensitive Practice

Since the clients with whom social workers practice have become a more heterogenous group, sensitivity to issues of cultural diversity has increased in all areas of practice. It is not enough to have an intellectual understanding of particular characteristics of clients, but the ability to acknowledge their different perceptions and experiences must be incorporated into practice applications. This information must then be translated into appropriate and culturally congruent interventions and practice roles (Henderson, 1994). As stated by Greene (1994), "effective multicultural practice requires the simultaneously simple and complex activity of putting the client—with all that implies about the particular aspects of the client's life experience and meaning system—at the center of the helping process" (p. 17).

Unfortunately, racism, sexism, ageism, ableism and heterosexism are deeply interwoven into the social fabric of our culture. Examples of institutional discrimination include the feminization of poverty, employment discrimination against older workers and adults with disabilities, and economic and social discrimination against same-sex households. Effective social work practice involves a commitment to eradication of these social inequalities as well as promoting optimal functioning with individual clients who experience problems as a result of oppression and discrimination.

## Culturally Sensitive Research

Practice evaluations with diverse client systems need to determine effective treatment and service delivery models. The importance of empirically based interventions is becoming more appreciated and acknowledged in social work. For example, the NASW National Committee on Lesbian and Gay Issues (1992) issued a policy statement that condemned as unethical the use of reparative therapy for people who are gay/lesbian, in part based upon the lack of empirical support for these so-called reparative treatments. One wonders how many other psychosocial