ASSUMPTIONS AND PRINCIPLES FOR ETHNIC-SENSITIVE PRACTICE

This chapter presents the assumptions and principles for ethnic-sensitive practice. These principles are built on (1) select assumptions about human functioning, (2) the concept of the ethnic reality, (3) the layers of understanding, and (4) the view of social work as a problem-solving endeavor.

A synthesis of the perspectives presented in the preceding chapters suggests that social work practice needs to be grounded in an understanding of the diverse group memberships that people hold. Particular attention must be paid to ethnicity and social class and to how these contribute to individual and group identity, disposition to basic life tasks, coping styles, and the constellation of problems likely to be encountered. These, together with individual history and genetic and physiological disposition, contribute to the development of personality structure and group life.

ASSUMPTIONS

In the previous chapter, we reviewed a number of models for social work practice and considered the varying viewpoints about such matters as (1) the relative importance of the past or the present, (2) how problems are presented and viewed, (3) the importance of the unconscious, (4) the sense of strength and empowerment and, (5) the role of ethnicity in human life. From this array of perspectives, we have selected those most congruent with our views, and we present them here as basic assumptions that undergird our work. They are:

1. Individual and collective history have a bearing on problem generation and solution.
2. The present is most important.
3. Ethnicity is a source of cohesion, identity, and strength as well as a source of strain, discordance, and strife. Social class is a major determinant of life's chances.
4. The social/societal context, and resources needed to enhance the quality of life make a major contribution to human functioning.
5. Nonconscious phenomena affect individual functioning.

**PAST HISTORY HAS A BEARING ON PROBLEM GENERATION AND SOLUTION**

Theorists differ in their views concerning the relationship between the origins of a problem and the mechanisms that function to sustain or diminish that problem in the present (Fischer, 1978). Nevertheless, there is little question that individual and group history provide clues about how problems originate and suggest possible avenues for resolution.

**Group History**

In Chapter 2, we considered the factors that contribute to the persistence of ethnicity in social life. We reviewed how elements of a group’s experience—its joys and its sorrows—seep into the very being of group members. The particular history of oppression to which many groups have been subjected was noted, as was the fact that all groups attempt to develop strategies to protect and cushion their members from the effects of such oppression. Culture, religion, and language are transmitted via primary groups to individuals and serve to give meaning to daily existence.

Crucial to a group’s past is the history of the migration experience or other processes through which the encounter with mainstream culture took place. Some, like American Indians and many Chicanos, are a conquered people. Others, including the early Anglo-Saxon settlers, fled religious oppression. Many came for both reasons. Others, like the Irish, came to escape starvation. The contemporary immigrants from the Far East, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East come for many of the same reasons.

These experiences continue to affect how members of these groups perceive and organize their lives and how they are perceived by others. Howe (1975) suggested that the earlier generations of Jewish immigrants, fleeing oppression and economic hardship, were focused on seeing to it that their sons and daughters acquired the needed education in order to make it in the outer world. The “fathers would work, grub and scramble as petty agents of primitive accumulation. The sons would acquire education, that new-world magic the Jews were so adept at evoking through formulas they had brought from the ‘Old World’” (Howe, 1975). And so, many Jews went off to school in the mainstream, and a substantial numbers of them quickly moved into the middle class. Jews' traditional respect for learning and the particular urban skills in which they had been schooled—a function of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, where they were not permitted to work the land (Zborowski & Herzog,

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1Today many American Indian tribes view themselves as nations negotiating on a basis of equality with the United States.
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1952)—converged to speed their entry into middle-class America. Education, success, and marriage were the serious things in life. Sensuality and attending to the body were downplayed.

There was a deeply ingrained suspicion of frivolity and sport. "Suspicion of the physical, fear of hurt, anxiety over the sheer 'pointlessness' of play; all this went deep into the recesses of the Jewish psyche" (Howe, 1975). There may be little resemblance between Jewish life on New York's Lower East Side at the turn of the century and the contemporary urban Jew. And yet, the emphasis on intellectualism persists, as does the haunting suspicion of things physical and a tendency to take illness quite seriously. Jewish men are still considered to make good husbands—they are seen as steady, kind providers who value their families.

Mexican revolutions early in the 1900s, together with the history of American conquest, generated much family disruption. Conscription of men into the armed forces was common. Poor Mexicans migrating into the larger cities of Texas left behind a history, a way of life centered about homogeneous folk societies. In these societies "God-given" roles were clearly assigned. Women did not work outside the home, unless it was in the fields. Each individual had a sense of place, of identity, of belonging. Work was to be found tilling the soil, and education in the formal sense did not exist. Rituals of the church were an intricate part of daily life (West, 1980). These new rural immigrants whose language and belief systems were so different from the frontier mentality were not welcomed.

The history of African Americans in this country has become well known. They were brought in by slavery, an institution of bondage that lasted for 200 years. Yet the astute social worker must know that the history began before the Mayflower, on the African continent, where they developed a culture that reflected skill in agriculture, government, scholarship, and the fine arts (Bennett, 1964). Unlike the ethnic groups mentioned earlier, African Americans were unable to openly preserve their customs, religion, or family tradition in this new land. The institution of slavery actively sought to discourage all that.

Yet, present developments point to the persistence of African customs and values. Sikh immigrant parents struggle to maintain a balance between their traditions, including those focused on family, on dress, and on religious observance, while helping their children to take advantage of the educational opportunities offered here (Gibson, 1988). Although there is considerable congruence between their educational values and those found in educational systems in the United States, there is considerable struggle around other issues. The past history of oppression, imposed by the mainstream society, continues to generate problems in the present—oppression continues.

These are but a few examples of how the nature of migration and the values that people bring with them may converge with the mainstream in the United States and affect present functioning. Intervention strategies must take these into account.

The collective experience of a group affects individuals differently. Personality and life history serve as filters and determine which facets of ethnic history and identity remain an integral part of a person's functioning, which are forgotten, and
which are consciously rejected. It is nevertheless unlikely that any Jew does not emit a particular shudder when reminded of the Holocaust. Japanese Americans of any generation recall the relocation experience. In a racist society, they can never be sure how they will be received, for their difference is physically visible.

*Individual History and Group Identity*

Individual members of groups have a sense of their group's history. For some it is dim and for others it is clearly articulated; for each it provides a sense of identification with the group. Such identification becomes a component, an integral part of the personality. Erikson (1968) suggested that identity is a process "located" in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his or her communal culture. The individual maintains a sense of ethnicity, and communal culture, as part of his or her personality. Events in the present that remind one of a past ethnic history may affect decisions made in the future. Such was the experience of a young African American woman who considered her past and its implications for the future. The memories were dim and called forth in response to a class assignment focused on exploring family origins:

*There were always sports persons like Joe Louis and Jackie Robinson to be proud of but they [the media] never mentioned Paul Robeson or Marcus Garvey. I used to go to the movies and watch Tarzan kill those savages. After several movies it finally dawned on me that those savages were actually my people. Today, I go out of my way to instill racial pride in my children and make sure they are aware of Third World people.*

The same assignment brought to the surface dim identifications with a Jewish tradition:

*Education was of prime importance to him [my father], followed closely by social class, religion, and background. Most of my parents’ teachings influenced me in other ways. It was understood that I would attend college… This push toward the pursuit of education and the importance of proper background influenced me in the rearing of my daughters.*

In both of these instances, the personality of the mothers has been influenced by the core of the communal culture, with a connection to a clearly identifiable ethnic history. They recognize that their ethnic experiences influence the way they relate to their children.

A final example highlights the integration of the communal culture into the personality and lifestyle of two generations. In this instance the writer has adult children who, as she states, are somewhat removed from their Italian background. Nevertheless, she notes

*My grown son on occasion will request that I 'make one of them ethnic meals.' When my daughter visits she always tries to time her trip to coincide with some*
Each individual has an ethnic history with roots in the past. Traditions, customs, rituals, and behavioral expectations all interface with life in the United States. There are those people—on the increase among all groups—who intermarry. Often, those in such a relationship will try to preserve elements of both cultures. Their marriage ceremony may include elements of both groups' traditions. At a wedding between a Chinese American woman and a Jewish man, the bride may wear white at the ceremony that is performed by a rabbi. Then, she dons traditional Chinese wedding finery at the reception held in the Chinese tradition.

These aspects of the past have the potential of affecting perceptions of problems in the present. For those Slavs who were raised with the expectation of intergenerational support is or should be available, its absence may be particularly disquieting and in the extreme devastating. The individual and collective history of African Americans suggests that resources are available in time of trouble. Families across the social classes respond to the needs of kin, both emotional and financial. The response in either instance may rest upon an awareness, articulated or not, of the past (Stack, 1975; Krause, 1978; Boyd-Franklin, 1989). Those people who come from families with a multiethnic and perhaps multiclass background experience joy and strain. One student wrote about the experience of growing up with a Jewish intellectual father and a Puerto Rican mother who had been on welfare before her marriage. The marriage did not last, but the student recalls celebrating holidays at different times with her mother and with her father. They were occasions for joy and for sorrow. But her feeling of identification with both groups remains strong. Her own marriage to someone with a Slavic background adds to the personal mosaic. The fact of her diverse background does not, in the situation of this person at least, minimize the feeling of identity with several groups.

We assume, then, that in any situation that comes to the attention of the social worker, part of the response to that situation derives from an individual's sense of the past as it is intertwined with his or her personal history. Experience with the ethnic reality is an integral part of this history.

**THE PRESENT IS MOST IMPORTANT**

The past affects and gives shape to problems manifested in the present. Social work's major obligation is to attend to current issues, with full awareness that the distribution and incidence of problems is often related to the ethnic reality. Thus, alcohol-related problems are extensive among American Indians, Latinos, and Irish Americans. A disproportionate number become alcoholics and develop the medical problems associated with chronic heavy drinking. Suicide and homicide rates among some native tribes are increasing. These problems require attention in the present. Socioeconomic well-being is threatened. The contact with the urban
United States has had particularly negative effects on American Indians. The pride and noble sense of self and tribe so intrinsic to American Indian life must be drawn upon as a mechanism and source of strength for dealing with current problems. However, there is a surge of economic growth as some communities win treaties and develop a variety of businesses.

Understanding and knowledge of the history, customs, and beliefs of different ethnic groups are required for effective practice, both at the individual and the institutional level. Appreciation for customs and beliefs is essential in response to diverse problems. These are manifest in the wishes of members of many ethnic groups to take care of their own in times of trouble. For example, the infant daughter of a paranoid schizophrenic Italian woman needs placement. The schizophrenia is the major problem. It is the grandfather's wish that a cousin adopt the child, thereby keeping her within the family. The ethnic-sensitive worker will realize that the grandfather's effort to keep the infant in the family may well be founded upon the sociopolitical history of Southern Italy. In the midst of that political turmoil, the family was the only social structure upon which an individual could depend. Survival depended upon a strong interdependence among family members that influenced all areas of life. It was a bulwark against those who were not blood relatives (Papajohn & Spiegel, 1975). Yet cousins may not be in a position to offer care in the "old country way" envisioned by the father. At the same time, workers must not only recognize this disposition but make every effort to help the family explore those family resources that will minimize an already traumatic situation.

The current problem must always receive primary attention. However, the practitioner must recognize that ethnic group history may affect present perception of the problem and its solutions.

THE ETHNIC REALITY AS A SOURCE OF COHESION, IDENTITY, AND STRENGTH AND AS A SOURCE OF STRAIN, DISCORDANCE, AND STRIFE

In Chapter 2, the effects of ethnicity and social class were sketched in broad outline. We now focus attention on those specific components of the ethnic reality that serve as sources of cohesion, identity, and strength, as well as sources of strain, discordance, and strife.

The Family

As one of the major primary groups, the family is responsible for the care of the young, transmission of values, and emotional sustenance. All families are expected to carry out related tasks.

The value placed on the family and the extent of commitment to involvement in the solution of diverse family problems varies by ethnicity and social class. Attention must be paid to how these same values may produce strain, clash, or conflict with the demands and prejudices of the larger society. Particular cohesive
family structures can be observed in the response of members of the Navajo tribe to family problems. It is expected that aunts, cousins, sisters, and uncles will all share in the burden of childrearing and will help out with problems. Relatives do not live far away from one another. Old people give guidance to their children and grandchildren. There is strength in this bond. The family becomes a resource when the courts have questions related to child neglect and custody. Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Asians, and many Eastern Europeans have similar attitudes toward family obligations.

The sense of family cohesion often diminishes in the second and third generation of immigrants or migrants. The family as transmitter of old values, customs, and language is often seen as restrictive by members of the younger generation.

Zaidia Perez is a single parent, estranged from her family. She has violated a family expectation by refusing to marry the father of her children. Her Puerto Rican extended family withholds the support usually offered. The result is a life of loneliness and isolation. Additional turmoil comes from Ms. Perez’s struggle with her ethnic reality. She is a poor Puerto Rican. It is her conviction that her Spanish heritage and dark coloring have denied her entrance into the middle class. In response she attempts to reject her background by refusing to associate with other Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood.

Zaidia’s struggle with the ethnic reality denies her those supports that come from affable relationships with family and neighbors. Some of that support is provided by ritual and other celebrations.

**Rituals and Celebrations**

As Puerto Ricans celebrate *Noche Buena* (Christmas Eve), there is a feeling of relaxation, of caring, and of temporary retreat from problems. The extended family gathers with close friends to celebrate “the Good Night.” The regular diet of rice and beans becomes more elaborate—yellow rice and pigeon peas are most important, as is the *pernil asado* (roast pork).

The ethnic church—Italian, Polish, and African American churches, the Jewish synagogue, and the Asian Indian temple—is where those with similar histories and like problems gather to affirm their identity and beliefs. This is enhanced by feast days, which combine reverence with ethnic tradition.

The Academy Award-winning film *The Deer Hunter* vividly depicts how rituals and the church serve to buttress and sustain. A wedding takes place in the “Russian Orthodox Church with its spirals that might well have been set in the steppes of the Ural” (Horowitz, 1979). The old Russian women carry cake to the hall for the wedding of one of three young men about to go off to war. There is joyous celebration, Russian folksinging, and “good old-fashioned patriotism.” These second-generation, working-class Russian Americans have strong allegiances to this, “their native land.” The wedding provides the occasion for the community’s show of love and support as their young men go off to war.
There is excitement in rituals and celebrations. For weeks or days before the event, family members in many ethnic groups prepare for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Christmas, weddings, and saints' days and *samskaras*. On each of these occasions there is the potential for stress. Each participant does not have the same perception of the event.

Sax (1979) describes his return to his parents' home for the Jewish holidays. No matter what your age, as a child you are assigned a seat at the dining room table. He is a single male, and at *shul* fellow worshipers offer condolences to his parents, who try to be stoic on the matter. But it is time he was married. Proud to be a Jew, he returns to his home for the celebration of Yom Kippur, but he has not fulfilled a communal obligation and the strain seeps through, even on this holiest of days.

Just as the ritual is an occasion for joy and celebration, it is also a time when the young are reminded of transgressions or departures from tradition. Perhaps the David Saxes will think twice about returning for the next celebration.

**Ethnic Schools and Parochial Schools**

The Hebrew school, the Armenian or Ukrainian language school, and parochial schools are examples of mechanisms for the preservation of language, rituals, and traditions.

The tie to the old generation and its values is often maintained through such schools. The young do not always feel the need for such an experience. While they attend after-school programs, other children are involved in a variety of activities from which they are excluded. The feeling of strain is expressed by young adults as they recall their childhood experience. "Needing to go to Hebrew school, they felt left out of neighborhood activities two afternoons a week and Sunday morning. They couldn’t belong to Little League, or play Pop Warner football or do the other things that other kids did."

Parochial schools in many neighborhoods are expected to transmit ethnic tradition and values, as are the many secular ethnic schools. They assure a continuation of the faith as well as a place in which morality and social norms can be reinforced.

In this design there are inherent conflicts as ethnic neighborhoods change. Gans's (1962) study of the Italians of Boston's West End describes such a neighborhood, in which the church and its school were founded by the Irish, who slowly moved away and were replaced by Italians. The church, however, retained Irish Catholicism. Rather than providing the solace anticipated for association with church-related institutions, discordance is quite evident.

An example of the stress that may come from such a conflict is provided by an Italian who attended such a school:

*I like being Italian. I grew up in a mixed neighborhood. But it wasn’t mixed in terms of what the authority was in relation to church and school if you were Catholic. It was Irish…. I went to a parochial school run by Irish nuns and priests. That is important to mention because there was an insensitivity to our cultural needs at the*
days before the Tashanah, Yom Kippur, each of these tash holidays. No, this is his parents, not to be a Jew, as not fulfilled a whole of days. I see a time when this tradition. Perhaps creation.

On the other hand, and parochial, rituals, and activities such as. While they are not activities by young adults, every school, they would Sunday morning, football or do the teams. It is not transmitted ethnic traditions can be altered such that what such a neighbor, the Irish, who slowly spread, retained Irish traditions with the association with priests. That is, a rural needs at the

... The Americanization of the Italians was a cultural genocide, at least when I grew up. St. Patrick’s Day would come and we would all celebrate.... Obviously there were other saints who were Italian but the cultural pride was not brought in the way St. Patrick was (Frank Becello, personal communication).

The ethnic church, through its schools, has the ability to provoke discomfort in students and parents when it does not provide the opportunity for affirmation by all ethnic groups who attend.

Language

Many immigrant and migrant groups are identified with a past that includes a language other than English. That language is variously used by or familiar to first-, second-, and third-generation children of immigrants. Each language generates a unique ambiance and contributes to a group’s Weltanschauung (world view) (Sotomayor, 1977). Although language can serve as a self- and group-affirming function, and the individual bilingual is to be admired, the use of the second language often generates problems. This is particularly true in those institutions that refuse to listen to anything but mainstream words. Nevertheless, the language can function as a solution in an alien place. For Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and many Asian people, linguistic identification and affirmation can serve to ease internal stress imposed by political, economic, and social degradation.

Many groups, especially many Latinos, reject the notion that they should abandon their language and its associated culture. This is also true for many Sikhs (Gibson, 1988). Others develop a new sense of identity, as with a pan Asian group (e.g., Kibria, 1997). Bilingual education, which facilitates the acquisition of skills needed for participation in the economic sector of society, is strongly supported. Many minorities view this as essential, refusing to relinquish this basis of uniqueness. Nevertheless, “talking funny” attracts attention and increases the risk of being called a “dumb” wop, Polack, spick, or chink.

Language—the Sounds of Discord

The effect of mainstream negation of native language has already been noted. There are those group members who consciously deny their native language as a way of “losing” their ethnicity. To speak Italian, Polish, Hungarian, Chinese, orSpanish may well cause strain for those who feel this inhibits their efforts to become American.

In the struggle to become American, Prosen (1976) did not speak Slovenian, the language of her birth, from the time she entered high school until she reached womanhood. When addressed in that language, more often than not she did not respond.

Names such as Franzyshen, Bastianello, and Turkeltaub attract attention. Asian languages and names are difficult for Europeans to hear. Teachers, employers, and new acquaintances stumble over and often resist attempts to learn how to pronounce these names, yet many maintain these names with pride.
NONCONSCIOUS PHENOMENA AFFECT FUNCTIONING

A comprehensive body of literature has developed that addresses the extent to which social workers must attend to or be aware of the nonconscious, unconscious, or preconscious aspects of human functioning. Hollis (1972) pointed out that there is some confusion about the meaning of the unconscious and the preconscious. There is consensus that in their contacts with social workers people often refer to "hidden" feelings and vague and obscure thoughts and memories. Turner (1979) suggested that significant portions of the personality are not available to the conscious mind. Hollis's treatment of the subject is thorough. There is little question that matters of which people are unaware or that they cannot articulate affect their behavior and feelings. This position is maintained by Woods and Robinson (1996).

One dimension of nonconscious phenomena is particularly important in relation to the ethnic reality. In Chapter 2, culture was defined as involving perspectives on the rhythm and patterns of life, which are conveyed in myriad ways. Nonconscious phenomena factors not quite within awareness are operative when we speak of the routine and habitual dispositions to life that become so thoroughly a part of the self that they require no examination. These dispositions, not articulated, go to the core of the self. The rhythm of Polish community life may be conveyed through the sounds heard by children as they grow. The sounds become routine, an accepted part of life; they are not examined for meaning. They may evoke joy or sadness for reasons unknown to the listener. The Polish experience is described as follows: "The sounds emanating from our home were a potpourri of language, music and shouts.... We were a rather emotional and demonstrative family. Laughter and tears, anger and affection were fully given vent... We were often headstrong, hasty, sinning, repenting, sinning and repenting again" (Napierkowski, 1976). Recognition of cultural and other life experiences not quite within awareness is a critical component of ethnic sensitive practice.

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

Our review of various approaches to social work practice has shown that the profession is diverse and encompasses a variety of viewpoints about the optimal ways of achieving social work objectives of facilitating people's efforts to solve the myriad problems of daily living that are the social worker's concern. Although these approaches are varied and diverse, there is unanimity about the importance the profession attaches to the means that facilitate enactment of the profession's value base.

Our review also suggests that for the most part the approaches to practice are consonant with the view of the ethnic reality presented here. Thus, it is apparent that an understanding of the ethnic reality can be incorporated into all approaches to practice. Especially applicable, however, are those models that focus on simultaneous attention to micro and macro issues.
Simultaneous Attention to Micro and Macro Issues

The interface between private troubles and public issues is an intrinsic aspect of most approaches to social work practice. All models identify efforts toward systemic change or "environmental work" as a component of professional function. The integration of individual and systemic change efforts is a basic component of the model of ethnic-sensitive practice presented here. Such integration is essential if practice is to be responsive to the particular needs and sensitivities of various groups and individuals. We focus particular attention on the structural source of problems and on those actions that adjust the environment to the needs of individuals (Wood & Middleman, 1989).

Practice is a problem-solving endeavor (Perlman, 1957, 1986; Turner & Jaco, 1996). Problems are generated at the interface between people and their environments. Many of the problems with which social workers deal involve economic and social inequity and its consequences for individuals. This inequity is frequently experienced at the individual and small group level.

Ethnic-sensitive practice calls particular attention to the individual consequences of racism, poverty, and discrimination. Examples are internalization of those negative images the society holds of disvalued groups and learning deficits that are a consequence of inadequate education provided for minorities.

Members of all groups experience some difficulties in their intimate relationships, become ill, and struggle to master the varying tasks associated with different stages of the life cycle. Simultaneous attention to micro and macro tasks focuses the social worker's attention on individual problems at the same time that the systemic source of and possible solution of the difficulty is recognized. Support for personal change efforts and help in altering dysfunctional behaviors is crucial.

A useful framework for highlighting the process of simultaneous attention to micro and macro tasks is the one presented by Middleman and Goldberg (1974) and amplified by Wood and Middleman (1989). They identify practice as bounded by locus of concern (the problem calling for social work intervention) and persons engaged (persons and/or institutions involved as a consequence of the problems being confronted). This formulation suggests an approach to intervention that follows the demands of the client task. The generalist perspective and practice model is congruent with this framework.

The social worker must look beyond the problems presented by individual clients to see if others are suffering from the same problem. The perspective also serves to call attention to those community and ethnic networks in which people are enmeshed and that they can call upon to aid in problem resolution.

Problems, as identified by the client or social worker, have diverse sources and call for a variety of systemic and individual action. This can be seen in the following example. A Jewish boy may feel torn between parental injunction not to become involved in celebration of Christmas and his need to join the children in his public school as they trim Christmas trees and sing carols. The turmoil may result in the child becoming withdrawn and searching for reasons not to go to school. Support and counseling from the school social worker may be needed. This
may be particularly true if there are few other Jewish children in the school and if alternate sources of support and identity affirmation are not available. At the same time, actions can be planned that are designed to enhance cultural diversity and respect for and knowledge of diverse customs. Suggestions that the school incorporate celebrations unique to various groups as part of the holiday celebration are part of the plan for action. The Jewish and Greek Orthodox children may share the fact that their holiday is celebrated at a different time and in some unique ways.

Social workers must be attuned to both levels of intervention as they go about the task of helping people who are caught in the clash between varying cultures. Many of the problems with which we deal involve inequity and discrimination. Systemic actions are often called for by the presenting problems. If successfully carried out, such action can forestall or minimize similar problems for other people.

We present here a number of cases to illustrate how practice is enhanced when simultaneous attention is paid to micro- and macro-level tasks, coupled with sensitivity to the ethnic reality.

A Mexican American woman accustomed to delivering her babies at home surrounded by family and friends, suffers greatly when placed in the Anglo maternity ward. The sounds are unfamiliar to her and the strangers do not speak her language. She is denied privacy when she is placed in the labor room with other women. Wrapped in a towel, she gets up, searching for familiar faces and more familiar sounds. Physical force may be used to return her to bed. She may be termed an uncooperative, unappreciative patient.

Little consideration has been given to the possibility of adapting hospital procedures to meet the needs of a large Mexican American community in the area. An understanding of Chicano childbirth rituals would enhance the experience rather than induce terror in an alien setting. A variety of actions are required in this situation, based on the assumptions and theoretical formulations previously discussed: (1) sociological insights call attention to the ethnic reality and suggest an explanation for the action of wandering out of the labor room—although the possibility of pathology must be explored; (2) the patient needs help to avoid a crisis; (3) alternatives to the alien delivery room structure need to be explored. Birthing centers may provide a more comfortable structure, one in which family members participate in the delivery process. This Chicano mother is an "involuntary" social work client. However, institutional and individual needs require the social worker's attention. The crisis nature of the situation compels quick action. Subsequent efforts to modify delivery procedures should involve Chicano women in the planning process.

In the midst of a city, hidden within a Latino population, is a community of old Orthodox Jews. Their life is barren. Their housing is substandard. The few clothes that they own are threadbare. Many basic necessities of living are missing from their lives. Language separates them even more from the mainstream. A Yiddish-speaking outreach worker from a community senior citizen program discovers that a significant number of the adults are in need of health care. A particular need is
school and if e. At the same diversity and school incorpor- celebration are may share the unique ways. they go about ying cultures discrimination successfully care other people. enhanced when puted with sen-

home sur lo maternity vak her lan other women. ore familiar ne termed an hospital proce- in the area. An experience rather red in this situa tously discussed: an explanation sibility of pathol- 3) alternatives t bers may provide pate in the deliv client. However, etion. The crisis modify delivery is.

in the area of nutrition. They do not get enough to eat. As a relationship develops, they are able, with the worker assuming a broker role, to obtain the services of a local Nutrition for the Elderly program, which will respect their dietary tradition. Such an accommodation is accomplished with the rabbi of the community. Together they attempt to work this out, realizing that the nutrition program has no basic stake in providing services for members of this religious group. This response was noted despite the fact that the program's mandate was to meet the nutritional needs of the elderly. Special meals for the orthodox add to the program's work load. However, success means that not only will this group be fed but that other ethnic groups will be more likely to have their requests heard.

The activity has provided regular, nutritious meals that meet dietary tradition through work with the elderly, their rabbi, and the various staff members and administrators of the Nutrition for the Elderly program. The outreach worker began from a point of sensitivity to the ethnic reality.

Application of the principle of following the demands of the client task was successful in beginning a process of change in the policy of a community service program.

Christine Taylor is a small, thin African American woman in her middle years. She has been receiving AFDC for herself and her two children, who are 10 and 8 years old. With changes in the welfare law, she is now required to work 30 hours a week cleaning bathrooms in a public facility. Her sister, Florence Jackson, lives in the same community. During the past few years, Ms. Taylor has had a number of medical problems, including a hysterectomy and a cerebrovascular accident, which caused paralysis of her left side. She feels she can't do this hard work though she doesn't mind working. She is trying to get her assignment changed. The worker doubts her story and wonders if she is cheating. The worker is aware that they have sufficient food and the children are well clothed. Suspecting a hidden income, the worker probes and discovers that Ms. Taylor is part of a community process known as "swapping." The primary participants are her sister Florence and their close friends. These women have lived on welfare for some time and have had little ability to accumulate a surplus of goods. They share food, clothing, and daily necessities. The limited supply in the community is continually redistributed among family and close friends. Without this system, the sisters, their friends, and neighbors may not survive.

The practitioner who is aware of this survival technique, which has grown out of the reality of the experience of poor minority people, would not have assumed that deviance, illicit relationships, and perhaps fraud were at work. Knowledge of the existence of such support systems could have minimized premature suspicion and harassment.

Hidden in the community is another support that enables Ms. Taylor to cope with the guilt and anger she feels about her handicap. Sister Sawyer is an African
healer. She claims to have been born in a little village in South Africa and believes a special blessing has been given to her that enables her to remove evil spells, change luck from bad to good, ease pain, and remove unnatural illness. From Sister Sawyer Ms. Taylor receives comfort and reassurance that she is indeed a special person, as well as potions and scriptures that assist in her need for affirmation.

In this situation two environmental supports of the type often overlooked or considered illegitimate have been identified. If the principle of maximizing potential supports in the client’s environment is to be applied, then ethnic coping practices must be viewed as valid. More extensive knowledge of these practices may enable the practitioner to enhance the established structures. Swapping is a well-established custom but may be enhanced if the network is enabled to purchase in bulk from a local cooperative, known to the practitioner and used by the entire community. This would make more commodities available to the group at lower prices, thus maximizing the benefits of a well-established and useful custom.

A young probationer was under court supervision and had strict orders to remain with responsible adults. His counselor became concerned because the youth appeared to ignore this order. The client moved around frequently and, according to the counselor, stayed overnight with several different young women. The counselor presented this case at a formal staff meeting, and fellow professionals stated their suspicion that the client was either a pusher or a pimp. The frustrating element to the counselor was that the young people knew one another and appeared to enjoy one another’s company. Moreover, they were not ashamed to be seen together in public with the client. This behavior prompted the counselor to initiate violation proceedings. (Red Horse, Lewis, Feit, & Decker, 1978)

This counselor is unaware that these young women are functioning as a support system for his client. They are in fact his first cousins, who are viewed in the same way as sisters. He has been obeying the orders of the court and staying with different units within his family network, which includes more than 200 people and spans three generations. With this knowledge of the client’s ethnic reality, the system can be recognized and encouraged. Appropriate family members can be enlisted to participate in plans for the future.

A Chinese man in his 40s, an engineer by profession, is admitted to a rehabilitation hospital following a stroke. He seems to be making a good recovery, when he makes a suicide attempt. The social worker, startled, explores the reasons with him, his wife, and literature on the Chinese experience. All agree that this is not uncommon for Chinese men facing an illness with potentially devastating consequences.

Many additional examples could be given. Individual problems often bring to the surface the need for changes in agency policy and administrative practices. Client concerns continually highlight the need for change in existing legislation, the development of new public policy, and research on appropriate service delivery.
The examples have pointed to the need for sensitive awareness of unique cultural patterns, whether the service rendered involves one-to-one counseling with individuals or the need to adapt or develop community programs consonant with the ethnic reality. Each of these and other types of services call for an extensive repertoire of skills. The principle of following the demands of the client task suggests that client need shall determine the nature of the service rendered. In the example cited earlier of the pregnant Chicano woman who runs out of the labor room searching for a familiar face, a number of interventive tasks are suggested. On-the-spot intervention calls for the ability to help her to minimize her fears and avert a crisis. A long-range perspective points to the need to adapt hospital routines in the manner congruent both with the perspective of other Chicano women like her and good medical practice. Perhaps the solution would have been as simple as assuring her that bilingual staff are available to facilitate communication with women when they move into a period of crisis. In the case of a suicidal Chinese man, workers need to be prepared to extend many supports to seriously ill Chinese men. In the community where the hospital is located, the Chinese population is on the increase. If practitioners are to respond to diverse consumer needs, they must be aware of the range of activities commonly suggested by any one problem.

All of these activities involve extensive skill and a readiness to adapt to and learn about the multiple groups that inhabit this land and their members who find their way to social agencies.

**SUMMARY**

The basic assumptions of ethnic-sensitive practice are as follows:

1. Individual and collective history have bearing on problem generation and solution.
2. The present is most important.
3. Ethnicity is a source of cohesion, identity, and strength, as well as a source of strain, discordance, and strife. Social class is a major determinant of life's chances.
4. The social/societal context and resources needed to enhance the quality of life make a major contribution to human functioning.
5. Nonconscious phenomena affect individual functioning.

In addition to these assumptions, ethnic-sensitive practice is based on a particular set of principles, which include:

1. Paying simultaneous attention to individual and systemic concerns as they emerge out of client need and professional assessment.
2. Adapting practice skills to respond to the particular needs and dispositions of various ethnic and class groups.
Those approaches most congruent with simultaneous attention to psychological and structural issues are most adaptable to the assumptions of ethnic-sensitive practice.

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