OVERVIEW

Living in a racist society poses a great challenge to social workers who are often themselves part of the majority. Social work, as a profession, has been criticized for lack of knowledge of other minority cultures and has responded with programs and articles to help educate its members. This study analyzed such literature to see if social workers have been able to overcome their unconscious racism.

The study looked at articles from four major social work journals dated 1980-89. The articles chosen dealt with racism or a minority culture and proposed intervention. The 117 articles chosen were then organized according to the nature of racism addressed (individual or institutional) and the minority group addressed.

The conclusion of the study was that "most of the literature on social work practice with minorities is naive and superficial and fails to address their social context." (p. 533). First of all, the literature assumes that minorities can only be assisted one by one; social workers as a whole do not see themselves operating in a larger, systemic framework. The literature focuses mostly on helping workers become more sensitive to other cultures, which is a necessary step, but "ultimately focuses on change in the social worker, not the client nor the client’s external conditions," (p. 537) and unconsciously promotes assimilation on the part of the minority client. The recommendation of the authors is that "the general failure of the literature in this survey to address the context of minorities points to the pressing need for social workers, and social work authors from now on, to foster contextual, critical, and detailed programs with minority clients." (p. 537).

The implications of this study not only apply to social workers, but also to our society. Whether we intend to or not, our actions and attempts to help others are often ethnocentric and unconsciously uphold the status quo. The authors state it best: "Being antiracist implies transformative action to remove the conditions that oppress people. There is no neutral position. Not to take a stand is a political statement in itself because it reinforces the
present institutional racism. Antiracist [social] work means both helping people reflect on their situation so that they can understand the oppressive system they are in and working with them to change it." (p. 538). To be antiracist requires that each of us do both.

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