

Religious Literacy in the Social Work Profession

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ABSTRACT

Multiculturalism and diversity are terms we hear about often in the United States. For many years now, the discourse about embracing multiculturalism and racial diversity has been a fact of life in the United States. The last couple of decades have brought religious diversity to the forefront of the discussion about multiculturalism. Religious diversity has gained attention in the mainstream media, especially since the September 11th attacks and events that have occurred afterwards. It is troublesome to note, as a recent report published by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life demonstrates, that Americans are ignorant about various world religions. The lack of knowledge about world religions is incredibly disheartening when human services professionals are concerned, such as social workers. Social workers work with clients who differ in racial, socioeconomic, and religious diversity. The fact that the general public does not know much about different religions is troublesome because social workers in general do not take separate Religious Studies classes during their graduate programs. I argue that the academic discipline of Religious Studies provides useful theories social workers can use in their professional work with religiously diverse clients. Robert Orsi and Thomas Tweed, well-known Religious Studies scholars, have dynamic theories about the role religion plays in people's lives that could improve social workers' effectiveness in working with religiously diverse clients.