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1 HUMAN BEHAVIOR

A Multidimensional Approach

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1 Recognize one's own emotional and cognitive reactions to a case study.

1.2 Analyze the historical connection between social work and the person-in-environment perspective.

1.3 Outline the elements of a multidimensional person-in-environment approach to human behavior.

1.4 Advocate for an emphasis on a global perspective; human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice; and antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in social work's approach to understanding human behavior.

1.5 Summarize four ingredients of knowing how to do social work.

1.6 Analyze the roles of theory and research in guiding social work practice.

1.7 Apply knowledge of the multidimensional person-in-environment framework; human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice; antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion to recommend guidelines for social work engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation.

A CASE STUDY ABOUT PERSON AND ENVIRONMENT

Throughout this book, we use case studies to facilitate learning. The case students allow application and analysis of conceptual content presented within each chapter. The cases are fictitious unless otherwise noted.

Case Study 1.1: Joshua, Making a New Life

Joshua spent the first 10 years of his life in the city of Uvira, in the South Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), formerly Zaire. He is the fourth oldest child in a family that included 11 children. He is of the Banyamulenge ethnic group, and his family spoke Swahili, Kinyamulenge, and French while living in Uvira. He was raised Christian in the United Methodist Church. Joshua's family lived comfortably in Uvira. His mother owned a boutique that sold clothes, shoes, lotions, accessories, and petroleum. His father bought cows, had them butchered, and then sold the meat.

Of his life in Uvira, Joshua recalls that a typical day included getting up for breakfast and spending the day at school. After school, he did chores and sometimes helped his mom in her boutique. Then he played soccer until dinner. It was a good life.

All of that changed in 2003. The long-standing Congo civil war was getting closer to his family's home in Uvira. Joshua recalls hearing gunshots about 15 miles away. His family left their home in Uvira in the middle of the night by foot and walked across the Burundi border to the nearby Gatumba refugee camp run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). They were joined on the walk and in the camp by a lot of other people from Uvira. Life was hard in the crowded camp, where people slept in tents with mosquitoes buzzing around. Sometimes there was not enough water or food for the whole camp. The hygiene in the camp was not good, and a lot of people were sick. Joshua lost a lot of friends and family in the camp. He recalls that the children were not able to attend school in the camp.

A terrible thing happened on August 13, 2004. There was a heinous massacre at the Gatumba refugee camp, killing 166 refugees and seriously wounding over 100 more. News reports indicate that refugees who were members of the Banyamulenge ethnic group were the specific target of the massacre. Joshua's mom died of gunshot wounds, and his 8-year-old sister's body was never found. The whole

camp was burned down, and Joshua's family was separated. Joshua, who was 11 years old at the time, ran with his 7-month-old sister. They were first in the hospital and then taken in by a stranger with whom they stayed for several weeks before finding their father and other siblings. Their father had been shot during the massacre and was taken to the hospital. Two of Joshua's siblings were also found in the hospital. Other siblings had found safety a few miles away at a makeshift camp. After finding his father and siblings, Joshua and his 7-month-old sister stayed with an extended family relative in Bujumbura, Burundi, for about 4 months. His father went to a hospital in Kenya, and some siblings were in an orphanage. At some point, Joshua and some older siblings went back to Uvira in the DRC. They stayed in the house where they had lived before they fled and were able to go to school again, but not right away.

In 2006, Joshua's father was discharged from the hospital, came back to Uvira, and took all the family back to Bujumbura, Burundi, where he filed for refugee status. Joshua and his siblings went to a few interviews for the refugee status application, but mostly the process was handled by his father, and Joshua doesn't know much about it.

In May 2007, Joshua's family, consisting of a single father and 10 children, arrived in Boise, Idaho. Joshua was almost 14 years old, and he felt excited and eager to begin school. He was also struck by how cold the weather was. Joshua's father received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) because of disability related to wounds from the massacre. His father also had to continue with treatment for his wounds, was hospitalized from time to time, and continues to receive periodic treatment. His father is now ordained as a pastor in a local African church and currently serves on a committee for the local African community. He received his citizenship in 2013.

The language issue was really hard at first for Joshua, but it was even harder for his older siblings and father. Joshua graduated from high school in 2011, from community college in 2013, and from university in May 2017. He received citizenship in September 2017 and was married in October 2017. He coaches local Nations United and Boys & Girls Club soccer teams and works as the employment specialist and donations manager at the Agency for New Americans, the refugee resettlement agency that sponsored his family during their resettlement. All of Joshua's surviving siblings still live in Boise. Unfortunately, his oldest sister died in November 2016. She had been shot in the head during the massacre, and her injuries left her paralyzed on the left side of her body. She had gotten married after the family arrived in Boise and left six children behind when she died. Joshua says the family misses her very much.

Story provided by Agency for New Americans, Boise, Idaho

HUMAN BEHAVIOR: INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

As eventful as it has been, Joshua's story is still unfolding. As a social worker, you will become a part of many unfolding life stories, and you will want to have useful ways to think about those stories and effective ways to be helpful to people like Joshua, his family, and other refugees from the DRC, as well as the many other people you will encounter in your social work journey. This book provides ways for you to think about the nature and complexities of human behavior—the people and situations at the center of social work practice. To begin to do that, we must first clarify the purpose of social work and the approach it takes to individual and collective human behavior. This is laid out in the 2022 *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE):

> The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community wellbeing. Guided by a person-in-environment framework, a global perspective, respect for human diversity, and knowledge based on scientific inquiry, the purpose of social work is actualized through its quest for social, racial, economic, and environmental justice, the creation of conditions that facilitate the realization of human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of life for all people, locally and globally. (CSWE, 2022, p. 14)

Let's put that statement into some historical context. The CSWE was formed in 1952 to bring the accreditation of social work education under a single body, bringing together separate accrediting

bodies for medical social work, psychiatric social work, and generalist practice to accredit both undergraduate and graduate social work education programs. Three years later, in 1955, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) was formed by consolidating seven existing organizations, the American Association of Social Work plus specialized associations of psychiatric social workers, medical social workers, school social workers, group workers, community organizing social workers, and social work researchers. Both the newly formed CSWE and NASW were dedicated to identifying what was common to all social work practice. The CSWE immediately set to work to develop curriculum policy and accreditation standards for a social work education that could prepare students for all practice settings and social work roles.

In these early efforts to identify the common base of social work, presenters of one workshop at the 1952 meeting of the American Association of Schools of Social Work, a forerunner of CSWE, argued that "knowledge and understanding of human behavior is considered an indispensable base for social work education and for all social work activity" (Social Welfare History Archives, 1952, p. 1). I agree wholeheartedly with that statement. We are concerned about human behavior whether we are concerned about

- how an individual can recognize the role of emotions and cognitive biases shaping their behavior;
- how a family can improve its communication patterns;
- how a group can become more cohesive;
- how a community can become empowered to solve problems;
- how to maximize the benefits of increasing diversity in an organization; or
- the most effective ways to organize efforts to advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.

In 1958, in the first working definition of social work practice after the formation of CSWE and NASW, Harriett Bartlett linked the person-in-environment perspective on human behavior to the definition of social work (Kondrat, 2008). That connection has endured for six decades. In discussion of social work competencies, the CSWE 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) notes that social workers "apply knowledge of human behavior and person-in-environment, as well as interprofessional conceptual frameworks" to engage with, assess, intervene with, and evaluate practice with "individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities" (CSWE, 2022, pp. 11–13).

It is important to recognize that the social work profession, like all disciplines and professions, continues to change and evolve. In 2020, in the midst of health disparities in a global pandemic and the high-profile brutal murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers, social work—like other professions and disciplines—began to reexamine its own history of racism and white supremacy (see Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Wright et al., 2021). In July 2021, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2021a) submitted a report to the profession on racial justice, noting some ways that the social work profession had contributed to ongoing discrimination and oppression of people of color. In this report, NASW apologized for grave mistakes in the profession's history and called for a renewed effort to live up to its mission to pursue justice. Here are some of the grave mistakes in the history of social work noted in the report:

- The white social reformers in the progressive era did not welcome Black Americans into the programs developed for white immigrants.
- Many white social reformers of the progressive era supported the eugenics movement and participated in involuntary sterilization programs that targeted women of color and low-income women.
- White suffragists, including some social work and social welfare leaders, blocked efforts of Black women to vote in their efforts to secure the right for white women to vote.

- African American social reformers were not allowed to attend most of the first schools of social work and were not included in the telling of the history of social work until recent times.
- Social workers played a role in the Indian boarding school movement that separated Indigenous children from their families and cultures.
- New Deal safety net programs created during the Franklin Roosevelt administration excluded people involved in domestic work and farm labor, the two low-wage occupations open to African Americans at that time.
- Poor Black men were recruited into the fraudulent Tuskegee medical experiment by social workers.
- Social workers were part of the intake teams at the internment camps for Japanese American families during World War II.

The contributing authors and I applaud the reinvigorated effort to live up to social work's mission to pursue justice for all and have attempted to revise the chapters of this book in a way that supports that renewed mission. As social workers, we must recognize the roles we play in existing systems of oppression, avoid interventions that maintain those systems, and develop new interventions to challenge those systems.

In this book, we often use the language of "person and environment" rather than "person-in-environment" because the emphasis is not always on the individual person. Although the person-in-environment (person and environment) construct noted in the CSWE educational policy is an old idea in social work, it still is a very useful way to think about human behavior—a way that can accommodate such contemporary themes in human life as the emotional life of the brain, human–robot relationships, social media, human rights, economic globalization, the racialization process, and environmental justice. This book elaborates and updates the person and environment construct that has guided social work intervention since the earliest days of the profession. The element of time is added to the person and environment construct to call attention to the dynamic nature of both people and environments. This is important in rapidly changing societies around the world. Early social workers could not have imagined television and air travel, much less cell phones, a plethora of social media platforms, remote education, or instant communications across continents. And, no doubt, the world 50 years from now would seem as foreign to us as the United States seemed to Joshua and his family when they first arrived here.

As you reflect about Joshua's story, you may be thinking, as I am, not only about Joshua but also about the different environments in which he has lived and the ways in which both Joshua and his environments have changed over time. As they live their lives in the natural environment, humans join with other humans to develop physical landscapes and structures, technologies, and social systems that form the context of their lives. These landscapes, structures, technologies, and social systems are developed by collective action, by humans interacting with each other. Once developed, they then come to shape the way humans interact with each other and with their natural environments. Landscapes, structures, technologies, and social systems can support or deter individual and collective wellbeing. Usually, they benefit some individuals and groups while causing harm to others. Social workers are concerned about both individual and collective behavior and wellbeing; when we talk about human behavior, we are referring to both the individual and collective behavior of humans. Sometimes we focus on individual behavior, and other times we are more concerned about the social systems created by human interaction.

This book identifies multiple dimensions of both person and environment and draws on ongoing scientific inquiry, both conceptual and empirical, to examine the dynamic understanding of each dimension. Special attention is paid to globalization; human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice; and antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in examination of each dimension. In this chapter, a multidimensional approach to person and environment is presented, followed by discussion of human rights and social, racial, economic, environmental justice; anti-oppressive and antiracist practice; diversity; and equity and inclusion. After a brief discussion of the process by which

professionals such as social workers move from knowing to doing, the chapter ends with a discussion of how scientific knowledge from theory and research informs social work's multidimensional understanding of human behavior.

Organization of Book

In this book, two stage-setting chapters introduce the framework of the book and provide a foundation for thinking critically about the discussions of theory and research presented. Three chapters then analyze the multiple dimensions of persons (one chapter each on the biological person, the psychological person, and the spiritual person), followed by chapters analyzing environmental dimensions (the physical environment, cultures, social structure and social institutions, families, small groups, formal organizations, communities, and social movements). The second half of the book integrates this knowledge into exploration of human development across major life course phases.

As noted earlier, presenting person and environmental dimensions separately is a risky approach. We do not wish to reinforce any tendency to think about human behavior in a way that camouflages the inseparability of person and environment. In our work as social workers, we engage in both *analysis* and *synthesis.* Sometimes we need to think analytically, breaking down a complex situation by thinking more critically about specific aspects and dimensions of the situation, whether that is a biological system or a pattern of family relationships. But we also need to be able to put the puzzle pieces back together to see the whole story. That is synthesis. We are always working back and forth between analysis and synthesis. Each chapter attempts to capture some of the complexity of multiple interacting dimensions of behavior.

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH

Social work's person and environment construct has historically recognized both person and environment as complex and **multidimensional**, that is, as having several identifiable dimensions. A **dimension** refers to a feature that can be focused on separately but that cannot be understood without also considering its embeddedness with other features. This last piece is really important: Although we can focus on one dimension of a human story to help us think about that dimension more clearly, no one dimension can be understood without considering other dimensions as well. We are walking a treacherous path here by separating out the dimensions to explore each in some depth. The fear is that by doing so, we will reinforce the human tendency to think of these dimensions as things that are separate and unrelated rather than recognizing how they are all utterly intertwined. As neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky (2017, p. 5) warns, "It's human behavior. And, it is indeed a mess, a subject involving brain chemistry, hormones, sensory cues, prenatal environment, early experience, genes, both biological and cultural evolution, and ecological pressures, among other things." In a similar vein, writing about child development, Arnold Sameroff (2010, p. 7) writes that "it is both child and parent, but it is also neurons and neighborhoods, synapses and schools, proteins and peers, and genes and governments." Throughout this book, we try to call attention to how dimensions of human behavior are related to each other and intertwine to influence specific behaviors. Think about Joshua. What comes quickly to your mind as you think about the factors that influence his current behavior?

If we were writing a book focusing on only one type of behavior, such as aggression as Sapolsky (2017) writes about, we could demonstrate how all the elements of person and environment are intertwined to create that one type of behavior. Because, instead, we are writing about the wide range of human behaviors, both individual and collective behaviors, we organize our writing around various dimensions of person and environment and do our best to illustrate how those dimensions are related to each other. For example, the discussion of cultures includes exploration of the neuroscience of prejudice as well as gene–culture coevolution. We encourage you to pay particular attention to these discussions of the way in which different dimensions of person and environment are intertwined.

With an explosion of behavioral science research across a number of disciplines in the past few decades, the trend has been to expand the range of dimensions of both person and environment folded into the person and environment construct. Time too can be thought of as multidimensional. Let's look at some of the dimensions of person, environment, and time in Joshua's story.

If we focus on the *person* in Joshua's story, we think about the conditions in the refugee camp that threatened his biological systems and how he survived while many others died in the camp, where hygiene was poor and water and food were scarce. We also think about the biological damage done to members of his family at the time of the massacre and are reminded how humans often carry both biological and psychological reminders of physically and emotionally traumatic situations. Joshua appears to have emotional resilience and good problem-solving skills, having had the discernment to run from the massacre with his baby sister, the fortitude to survive the perilous days while the family waited to be resettled in the United States, and the flexibility to adapt to a new life once he arrived in the United States. He was able to learn a new language and culture and plan for the future. It appears that he has been able to build meaningful interpersonal relationships at work and in the community. The Christian faith has been a source of comfort for him and his family as they adapted to a new environment.

If we focus on the *environment*, we see many influences on Joshua's story. Consider first the physical environment. Joshua lived a comfortable life in the city of Uvira, where he spent his days in school and was able to be outside playing soccer after chores were done. From there, he traveled across the Burundi border to a crowded and primitive refugee camp where he has memories of being bothered by mosquitoes. After the massacre, he, his father, and his siblings lived where they could—in camps, hospitals, and other people's homes. They were finally resettled in a city about the size of his original city of Uvira but where the climate was much colder. They were surrounded by mountains as they had been in Uvira. Joshua is once again able to be outside playing soccer but for a shorter season.

Culture is a dimension of environment that exerts a powerful influence in Joshua's story. Ethnic culture clash was a large part of the Congo civil war, and Joshua and his family were of the Banyamulenge ethnic group that had been targets for ongoing discrimination and exclusion since the colonial period. Such cultural conflict is not new; historical analysis suggests that intercultural violence has actually declined in recent times (Pinker, 2011), but it continues to be a source of great international upheaval and the driving force behind refugee resettlement. As is true in many parts of the world, ethnic conflict is intertwined in the Congo with control over a natural resource, in this case coltan, a metallic ore used in electronics such as computers and cell phones (McMichael & Weber, 2021).

Joshua's story has been powerfully influenced by the geopolitical unrest that marked his early life in Africa. His relationships with social institutions have changed over time, and he has had to adapt his behavior to the changing situations. Even though his country was engaged in civil war during much of his childhood, it did not reach his city until he was 10 years old. Before that, his family lived in relative comfort and peace. His family was relieved to get to the United Nations refugee camp, but life there was hard, and ultimately the war followed them there, even though the camp was supposed to be protected by the Burundi government. Once they arrived in the United States, Joshua and his siblings were able to go to school again, to make their way economically, and to work toward citizenship in their adopted country.

Another dimension of the environment, family, is paramount to Joshua. He has suffered family loss and endured a time when members of his family were separated before resettling in the United States. He has been lucky, however, to have his father and surviving siblings living nearby. Many refugee families end up spread across several continents, and that may or may not be true for Joshua's extended family. Joshua now has a wife to count as family.

Small groups, organizations, and communities have been important forces in Joshua's life, but he has had little direct contact with social movements. His soccer teams are important small groups in the life he has created in Boise. He participates in small groups at church and in the African community in Boise. He is a member of the small staff group at the refugee resettlement agency.

Several organizations have been helpful to Joshua and his family since they fled Uvira. The refugee camp was an organization that brought initial safety but ultimately trauma and loss. Joshua's association with other organizations has been much more positive; he did well in several school organizations and has returned to work for the refugee resettlement agency that sponsored his family and assisted them to make a successful resettlement. The African Christian church where his father is a minister is a source of close relationships, spiritual connectedness, and continuity with life in Uvira.

Joshua and his family needed to adapt their behavior to live in several different types of communities. In Uvira, they were surrounded by extended family, long-term friends and neighbors, and a church community. In the crowded refugee camp, disease and despair were common, and Joshua was not able

to go to school. That community was split, with some being targeted for massacre while others were not. After the massacre, Joshua and his family moved about from camps and hospitals to strangers and family relatives in Burundi and even back to Uvira, always trying to find safety. Now he lives in a city in southwestern Idaho in proximity to other refugees from the DRC and worships with many of them.

We don't know if Joshua is aware that the Gatumba Refugees Survivors Foundation (Davey et al., 2022) has spearheaded a social movement to undertake inquiry about the Gatumba massacre, seek justice for the survivors of the Gatumba genocide, raise global awareness of torture and genocide, organize memorial gatherings to help survivors heal, reunite family members who were separated during the evacuation of the camp, relocate survivors from unsafe areas, and advocate for medical support for survivors. It is possible that the Boise community of Banyamulenge refugees has benefited from the work of the GRSF as they heal from the trauma of that massacre.

Time is also an important part of Joshua's story. His story, like all human stories, is influenced by the human capacity to live not only in the present time but also in past and future times. Escape, crowded camps, massacre, family loss and separation, and resettlement are past events in his family's life and can be vividly recalled. There were times in the family's life when they needed to focus on future possibilities with such questions as "Will our father get better?" and "Will we be granted refugee status, and if so, when and where will we go?" This future thinking has had an enormous impact on the current circumstances of the family's lives. In the interview for this case study, Joshua engaged in thinking about his past life in Uvira and the refugee camp, as well as the massacre event, but for the most part, he lives largely in the present while imagining possibilities for the future with his wife, siblings, and father.

Joshua's story is also influenced by the historical times in which he has lived and is living. He has lived in a time of violent ethnic discord in his home country, and the civil strife continues in the DRC (Human Rights Watch, 2021). He is lucky to have been resettled to the United States in an era of international support for refugees. The times in which we live shape our behaviors in many ways.

Another way to think about the role of time in human behavior is to consider the way in which age, or life stage, influences behavior. Joshua notes that although learning English was difficult for him, it was much easier for him at age 13 than it was for his father. He finds this stage of his life, with school behind him and a new marriage, to be an exciting time with a future stretching out before him.

As suggested, social work has historically recognized human behavior as an interaction of person with environment, although the relative emphasis on different dimensions of person and environment has changed over time. Today, a vast multidisciplinary literature is available to help us in our social work efforts. The good news is that the multifaceted nature of this literature provides a broad knowledge base for the varied settings and roles involved in social work practice. The bad news is that this literature is highly fragmented, scattered across a large number of fields. What we need is a structure for organizing our thinking about this multifaceted, multidisciplinary, fragmented literature.

The multidimensional approach provided in this book should help. This approach is built on the person–environment–time model described earlier. Although in this book we focus on specific dimensions of person and environment separately, including information on how our understanding of these dimensions has changed over time, keep in mind the earlier caution that *dimension* refers to a feature that can be focused on separately but cannot be understood without considering other features. The dimensions identified in this book have largely been studied as detached or semidetached realities, with one dimension characterized as causing or leading to another. In recent years, however, behavioral science scholars have collaborated across disciplines, leading to exciting new ways of thinking about human behavior, which the contributing authors and I share with you. We emphasize again that we do not see the dimensions analyzed in this book as detached realities, and we are not presenting a causal model. We want instead to show how these dimensions work together, how they are interwoven with each other, and how many possibilities are opened for social work practice when we think about human behavior in a multidimensional way. We are suggesting that humans engage in **multidetermined behavior**—that is, behavior that develops as a result of many causes. As Sapolsky (2017, p. 8) says, "It is impossible to conclude that behavior is caused by *a* gene, *a* hormone, *a* childhood trauma— because all these factors and many others interact in one individual to produce unique results . . . you have to think complexly about complex things" like human behavior. Figure 1.1 is a graphic overview of the dimensions of person, environment, and time discussed in this book. Table 1.1 defines and gives examples of each dimension.

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Person, Environment, and Time Dimensions

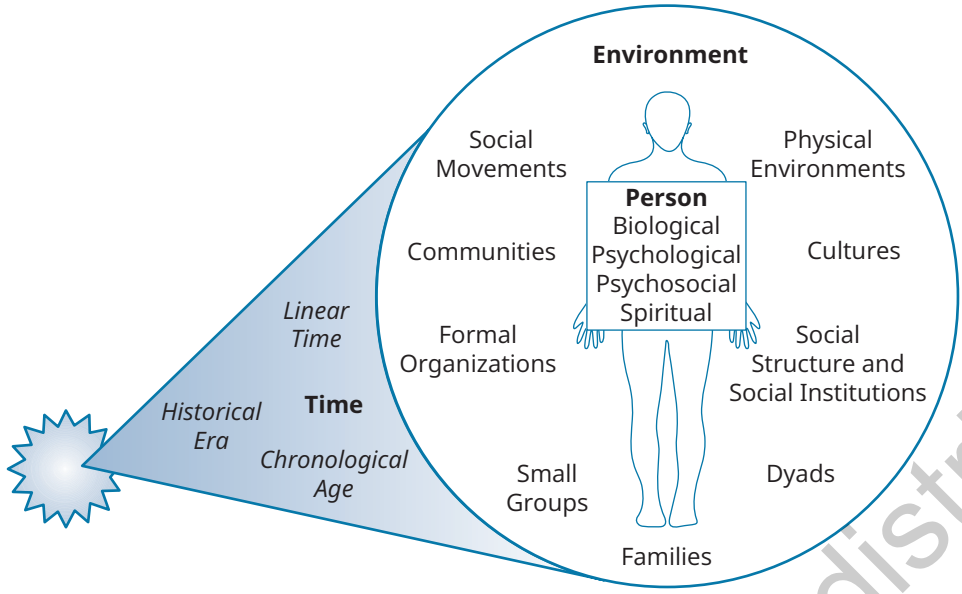


TABLE 1.1 ■ Definitions and Examples of Dimensions of Person, Environment, and Time

Dimension	Definition	Examples
Person		
Biological	The body's biochemical, cell, organ, and physiological systems	Nervous system, endocrine system, immune system, cardiovascular system, musculoskeletal system, reproductive system
Psychological	The mind and behavior	Cognitions, emotions, personality, and self
Psychosocial	Self in relationship	Relationships, stress, coping
Spiritual	The aspect of the person that searches for meaning and purpose in life	Themes of morality; ethics; justice; interconnectedness; creativity; mystical states; prayer, meditation, and contemplation; relationships with a higher power
Environment		
Physical	The natural and human-built material aspects of the environment	Water, sun, trees, climate, buildings, landscapes
Culture	A system of knowledge, beliefs, values, language, symbols, patterns of behavior, material objects, and institutions that are created, learned, shared, and contested by a group of people	Values, beliefs, symbols, language, norms, subcultures, countercultures
Social structure and social institutions	Social structure: a set of interrelated social institutions Social institutions: stable, organized, patterned sets of roles, statuses, groups, and organizations that provide a basis for behavior in particular areas of social life	Social structure: social class; social institutions: government, economy, education, health care, social welfare, religion, mass media, and family

(*Continued*)

TABLE 1.1 ■ Definitions and Examples of Dimensions of Person, Environment, and Time (*Continued*)

Dimension	Definition	Examples
Dyads	Two persons bound together in some way	Parent and child, romantic couple, social worker and client
Families	A social group of two or more persons, characterized by ongoing interdependence with long-term commitments that stem from blood, law, or affection	Nuclear family, multigenerational family, chosen family
Small groups	Two or more people who interact with each other because of shared interests, goals, experiences, and needs	Friendship group, self-help group, therapy group, committee, task group, interdisciplinary team
Organizations	A collection of people deliberately coming together to pursue a common purpose	Civic and social service organizations, business organizations, professional associations
Communities	People bound either by geography or by webs of communication, sharing common ties, and interacting with one another	Territorial communities such as neighborhoods; relational communities such as the social work community, a faith community, a soccer league, social media community
Social movements	Sustained and intentionally organized collective efforts, usually working outside of established institutions, to advance causes and challenge existing social systems	Civil rights movement, poor people's movements, disability movement, gay rights movement, environmental justice movement
Time		
Linear time	Time in terms of a straight line	Past, present, future
Historical era	A discrete block of time in human history	Progressive Era, the Great Depression, 1960s
Chronological age	Age of a person measured in years, months, and days from the date the person was born; may also be described in terms of a stage of the human life course	Six months old (infancy), 15 years old (adolescence), 80 years old (late adulthood)

Critical Thinking Questions 1.1

What courses have you taken that added to your understanding of human behavior? How does content from any of these courses help you to understand Joshua's story and how a social worker might have been helpful to Joshua and his family at any time during their resettlement? Do you agree that the person and environment construct is still useful for social work? Explain your answer.

Personal Dimensions

Any story could be told from the perspective of any person in the story. The story at the beginning of this chapter is told from Joshua's perspective, but it could have been told from the perspectives of a variety of other persons, such as a member of a different ethnic group in the DRC, Joshua's father or one of his siblings, a staff member at the Gatumba refugee camp, the family in Burundi who took Joshua and his baby sister in, or the case manager at the refugee resettlement agency. You will want to recognize

the multiple perspectives held by different persons involved in the stories of which you become a part in your professional role(s).

You also will want tools for thinking about the various dimensions of the persons involved in these stories. In recent years, social work scholars, like contemporary scholars in other disciplines, have taken a *biopsychosocial approach* that recognizes human behavior as the result of interactions of integrated biological, psychological, and social systems (see Choy et al., 2015; Sapolsky, 2017; Yeager et al., 2016). In this approach, psychology—personality, emotion, cognition, and sense of self—is seen as inseparable from biology. Emotions and cognitions affect the health of the body and are affected by it (D. Banerjee et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2013; Yeager et al., 2016). Neurobiologists are identifying the brain circuitry involved in thoughts and emotions (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Sapolsky, 2017). They are finding evidence that the human brain is wired for social life and identifying the regions and circuitry of the "social brain" (Porcelli et al., 2019). They are also finding that physical and social environments have an impact on brain structure and processes and on body systems and disorders (McEwen & Bulloch, 2019). Interpersonal relationships are an important part of social environments. Two concepts are important in this study of the connection between physical and social environments and the human body: biological embedding and epigenetics. **Biological embedding** occurs when life experience changes biological processes, potentially shaping later life health and wellbeing (Nist et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2022). **Epigenetics** is the study of how behaviors and environments can affect the way genes work, changing how the body reads a DNA sequence without changing the DNA (Li, 2021). Environments influence biology, but the same environment acts on diverse genetic material. This can help us understand how some people survived and some did not before the massacre in the Gatumba refugee camp. Two people with the same genetic makeup and biological characteristics can have very different behavioral outcomes, and two people with very different genetic makeup and biological characteristics can have the same or similar behavioral outcomes. In addition, two people with the same or similar experiences with the environment can have very different behavioral outcomes, and two people with very different experiences with the environment can have the same or similar behavioral outcomes (Sameroff, 2010).

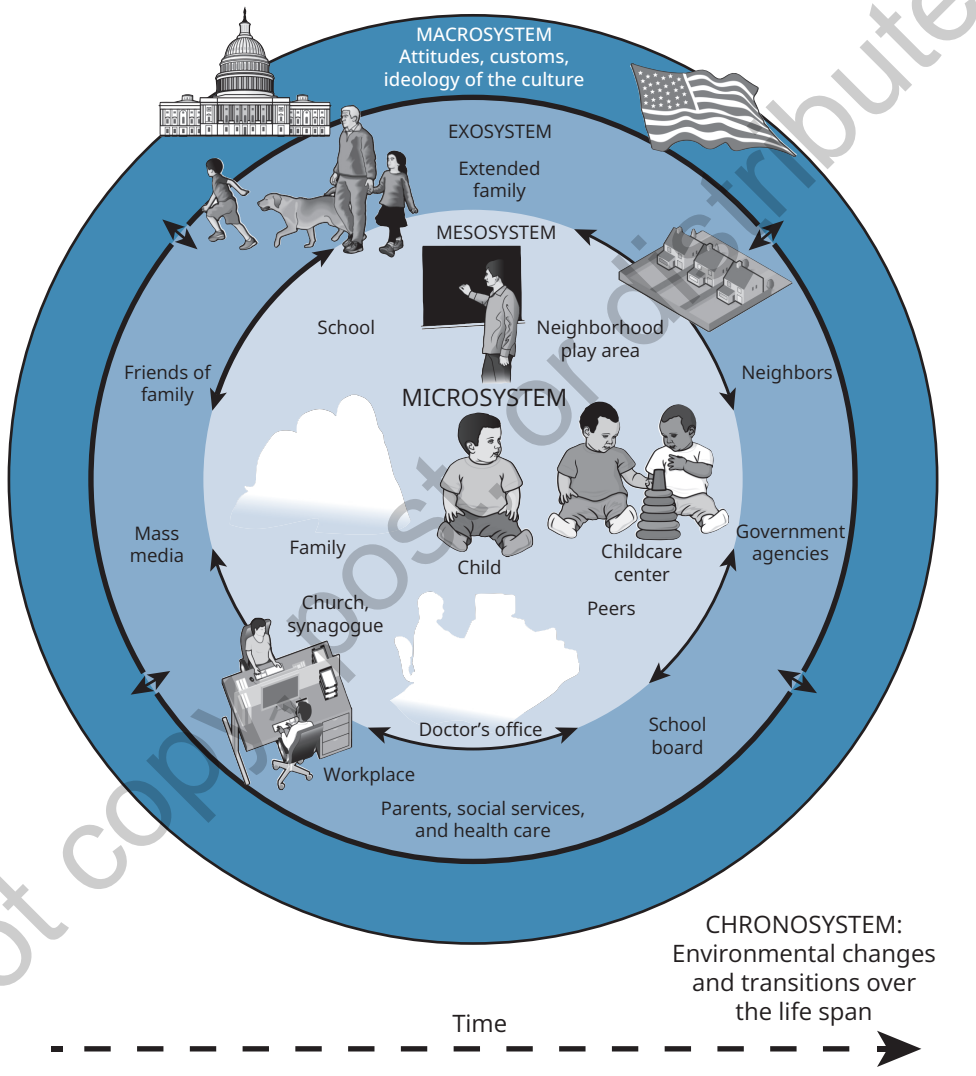
Social work scholars and those in the social and behavioral sciences and medicine have argued for greater attention to the spiritual dimension of persons as well (Bowles et al., 2017; Crisp, 2017; Pandya, 2016; Pathan, 2016). Beginning in the late 20th century, a group of U.S. medical faculty and practitioners initiated a movement to reclaim medicine's earlier spiritual roots (Fleenor et al., 2022), and in 2014, Puchalski et al. reported that content on spirituality and health was incorporated into the curricula of over 75% of U.S. medical schools. Developments in neuroscience have generated new explorations of the unity of the biological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of the person. For example, some research has focused on the ways that emotions and thoughts, as well as spiritual states, influence the immune system and some aspects of mental health (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Dehghan et al., 2021; Holmes et al., 2019). One national longitudinal study examined the role of spirituality in physical and mental health after the collective trauma of the 9/11 attacks and found that high levels of spirituality were associated with fewer infectious ailments, more positive emotions, and more immediate processing of the traumatic event in the 3 years following the attacks (D. McIntosh et al., 2011). Spirituality and religious affiliation appear to be a source of resilience for Joshua, his family, and the Boise African community.

Environmental Dimensions

As we think about Joshua's story, we are aware of the important role that the multidimensional environment has played in his life journey to date. Social workers have always thought about the environment as multidimensional. Several models for classifying dimensions of the environment have been proposed over time. Social workers (see, e.g., Ashford et al., 2018) have been influenced by Urie Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological perspective, which identifies the five interdependent, nested categories or levels of systems presented in Figure 1.2. You might notice some similarities between Bronfenbrenner's model and the one presented in Figure 1.1. By adding chronosystems in his later work, Bronfenbrenner was

acknowledging the importance of time in person–environment transactions, but this book presents a more fluid, less hierarchical model of person and environment than presented by Bronfenbrenner. Some social work models have included the physical environment (natural and built environments) as a separate dimension (see Norton, 2009). There is growing evidence of the impact of the physical environment on human wellbeing and growing concern about environmental justice issues in the physical environment.

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Five Categories or Levels of Systems as Presented by Urie Bronfenbrenner

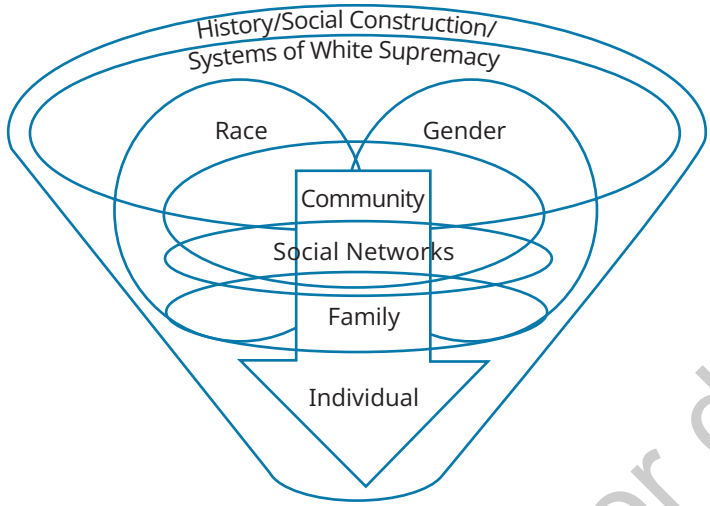


Sources: Adapted from Siegler, R. S., DeLoache, J. S., & Eisenberg, N. (2011). *How children develop* (3rd ed.). Sage. Based on Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In W. Damon & R. Learner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 1. Theoretical models of human development* (6th ed.). John Wiley.

Crudup et al. (2021) argue that the Bronfenbrenner ecological framework needs to be revised for antiracist practice. They note that Bronfenbrenner's model puts the individual at the center of nesting systems and does not accurately portray the relationships, the interactions among and between systems. They suggest that visual representations like the one presented in Figure 1.2 put the focus and responsibility on the individual to overcome years of historical trauma, discrimination, and exclusion. They raise the question, "What would happen if the community was at the center rather than the individual?" (p. 657). These are important questions for social workers to consider. See Figure 1.3 for the

visual model for the revised ecological systems framework proposed by Crudup et al. (2021). The funnel approach presented in Figure 1.3 captures the ongoing mix of history, systems of oppression (race and gender), community, social networks, family, and individual. It is an important addition to human behavior theory.

FIGURE 1.3 ■ Crudup et al. Revised Ecological Systems Framework



Source: Crudup, C., Fike, C., & McLoone, C. (2021). "De-centering whiteness through revisualizing theory in social work education, practice, and scholarship." *Advances in Social Work, 21*(3), 654–671.

To have an up-to-date understanding of the multidimensional environment, I recommend that social workers have knowledge about the eight dimensions of environment described in Table 1.1. We also need knowledge about dyadic relationships—those between two people, the most basic social relationship. Dyadic relationships receive attention throughout the book. Simultaneous consideration of multiple environmental dimensions provides new possibilities for action, perhaps even new or revised approaches to social work practice.

These dimensions are neither mutually exclusive nor hierarchically ordered. For example, family is sometimes referred to as a social institution, families can also be considered small groups or dyads, and family theorists write about family culture. Remember, dimensions are useful ways of thinking about person–environment configurations, but we should not think of them as detached realities.

Time Dimensions

Time is an important part of Joshua's story. He spent 10 years in his native land of the Democratic Republic of Congo, followed by 4 years of seeking safety in various places, and has now lived 15 years in Boise, Idaho, in the United States. He graduated from high school in 2011, from community college in 2013, and from university in 2017, the same year he received U.S. citizenship and married. The situation for Joshua and his family is very different from that of many DRC refugees resettled in the United States in more recent years, many of whom spent 10 to 20 years in refugee camps in Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda, or Zambia before being resettled in the United States (Mahoney et al., 2020). Consider how years in refugee camps may affect the resettlement experience.

When I was a doctoral student in a social work practice course, Professor Max Siporin began his discussion of social work assessment with this comment: "The date is the most important information on a written social work assessment." This was Siporin's way of acknowledging the importance of time in human behavior, of recognizing the ever-changing nature of both person and environment. The importance of time in human behavior is reflected in the finding that *time* is the most commonly used noun in print in the English language; *person* is the second most common (English Club, 2022).

There are many ways to think about time. Physics is generally seen as the lead discipline for studying time, and quantum physics has challenged much about the way we think about time. Various aspects of time are examined by other disciplines as well, and there are a number of different ways to think about time. In this book, we examine three dimensions of time that have been studied by behavioral scientists as important to the understanding of human behavior: linear time, historical era, and chronological age.

Linear time—time ordered like a straight line from the past through the present and into the future—is the most common way that humans think about time. Although it is known that people in some cultures and groups think of time as stationary rather than moving (Boroditsky et al., 2011), contemporary behavioral science researchers are interested in what they call "mental time travel," the human ability to remember events from the past and to imagine and plan for the future (Eacott & Easton, 2012). There is some evidence that mental time travel is not human-specific but is better developed in humans than in other primates, currently thought to be related to evolutionary changes in the hippocampus (Benítez-Burraco, 2021). The research on mental time travel has focused on the conscious processes of reminiscence and anticipation, but there is also considerable evidence that past events are stored as unconscious material in the brain and the body and show up in our thoughts, emotions, and behavior (see Davidson & Begley, 2012; Sapolsky, 2017; Prescott et al., 2019). Traces of past events also exist in the natural and built environments, for example, in centuries-old buildings or in piles of debris following a hurricane or tornado.

Sapolsky (2017) uses the perspective of linear time to demonstrate how different dimensions of person and environment influence a specific behavior. When a behavior occurs, we can think about the multiple influences on that behavior in the context of time:

1. *A second before the behavior:* What went on in the person's brain a second before the behavior?
2. *Seconds to minutes before the behavior:* What sensory input reached the brain?
3. *Hours to days before the behavior:* What hormones acted hours to days earlier to change how responsive the person was to a particular sensory stimulus?
4. *Days to months before the behavior:* What features of the environment in the days and months before the behavior changed the structure and function of the person's brain and thus changed how it responded to hormones and environmental stimuli?
5. *Early development:* What genetic codes were created at the time of conception; what elements of the fetal and early childhood environment shaped the structure and function of the brain and body and affected gene expression?
6. *Centuries to millennia before the behavior:* How has culture shaped the behavior of people living in that individual's group? What ecological factors, including the physical environment, helped shape that culture?

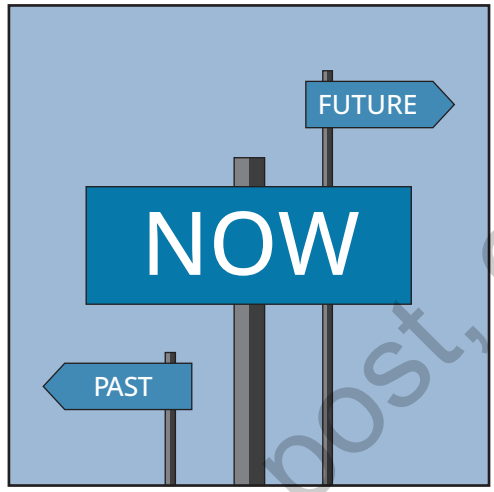
Linear time is measured by clocks and calendars. This approach to time has been called *clock time* (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). However, this approach to time is a relatively new invention, and many people in the contemporary world have a very different approach to time. In nonindustrialized countries and in subcultures within industrialized countries, people operate on *event time*, allowing scheduling to be determined by events. For example, in agricultural societies, the most successful farmers are those who can be responsive to natural events—sunrise and sunset, rain, drought, temperature—rather than to scheduled events (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). On his farm in rural Tennessee, my grandfather operated with a combination of event time and clock time.

Clock time cultures often use the concept of **time orientation** to describe the extent to which individuals and collectivities are invested in the three temporal zones—past, present, and future (see Figure 1.4). Research indicates that cultures differ in their time orientation. In most cultures, however, some situations call for us to be totally immersed in the present, others call for historical understanding of the past and its impact on the present, and still others call for attention to future consequences and possibilities. Psychologists Philip Zimbardo and John Boyd (2008) have been studying time

orientation for more than 30 years and have identified the six most common time perspectives held in the Western world:

- *Past-positive:* invested in the past, focused on its positive aspects
- *Past-negative:* invested in the past, focused on its negative aspects
- *Present-hedonistic:* invested in the present and getting as much pleasure as possible from it
- *Present-fatalistic:* invested in the present, sees life as controlled by fate
- *Future:* invested in the future, organizes life around goals
- *Transcendental-future:* invested in the future, focuses on new time after death

FIGURE 1.4 ■ Mental Time Travel/Time Orientation



Zimbardo and Boyd's research using the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI) in a number of Western societies indicates that human wellbeing is maximized when people in these societies live with a balance of past-positive, present-hedonistic, and future perspectives. People with biases toward past-negative and present-fatalistic perspectives are at greater risk of developing physical and mental health problems. Zimbardo and Boyd's (2008) book *The Time Paradox* suggests ways to become more past-positive, present, and future oriented to develop a more balanced time orientation. You might want to visit www.thetimeparadox.com and complete the ZTPI to investigate your own time orientation. It is important to remember the important role that life experiences play in time orientation and avoid pathologizing people who have developed past-negative time orientations as a result of an accumulation of mistreatment and marginalization.

Three dimensions of human behavior are captured in this photo—person, environment, and time.

iStock.com/ErithJohn

Zimbardo and Boyd have carried out their research in Western societies and acknowledge that the ZTPI may not accurately reflect time orientation in other societies. They make particular note that their description of present-hedonistic and present-fatalistic does not adequately capture the way Eastern religions think about the present. Western behavioral scientists have begun to incorporate Eastern mindfulness practices of being more fully present in the current moment (present orientation) to help people buffer the persistent stresses of clock time and goal monitoring (future orientation). Research also indicates age-related differences in time orientation, with older adults tending

Time is one of the three elements outlined in this text for studying human behavior. It recognizes that people and environments are ever changing, dynamic, and flowing.

iStock.com/underworld111

to be more past oriented than younger age groups (Yeung et al., 2012). Women have been found to be more future oriented and men more present oriented (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). Researchers have observed that trauma survivors who experienced the most severe loss are more likely than other trauma survivors to be highly oriented to the past (see Zimbardo et al., 2012). Zimbardo and colleagues (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008; Zimbardo et al., 2012) suggest that trauma survivors may need assistance to think in different ways about past trauma and to enhance their capacity for past-positive, present, and future thinking. With this goal in mind, they have developed what they call *time perspective therapy* for working with people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Sword et al., 2014). Researchers have found time perspective therapy to be effective in increasing psychological wellbeing in veterans with PTSD (Malekiha & Moradi, 2019). This approach might be useful to some members of the refugee community of which Joshua is a part. It is something to keep in mind when we interact with refugees, military veterans who have served in war zones, and other groups who have an increased likelihood of having a history of trauma, including racialized and other marginalized groups. It is also important for social workers to be aware of the meaning of time for the individuals and communities they serve.

Two other dimensions of time have been identified as important to the understanding of human behavior. Both dimensions are aspects of linear time but have been separated out for special study by behavioral scientists. The first, *historical era*, refers to the specific block or period of time in which individual and collective lives are enacted. The historical era in which we live shapes our environments. The economies, physical environments, institutions, technologies, and geopolitical circumstances of a specific era provide both options for and constraints on human behavior. Consider the historical era in which Joshua spent his childhood and its impact on his life trajectory. In an earlier time, he might have continued to live peacefully in Uvira. How would his life have been different or the same? Historical era has influenced Joshua's story in another way. His family resettled in the United States in 2007, a historical era in which large refugee admissions programs existed in the United States. If his family had wanted to resettle in the United States between 2016 and 2020, they might have met the plight of many DRC refugees who were denied an opportunity to settle here during a time when federal funds for resettlement service organizations were slashed (Mahoney et al., 2020). Researchers who study the impact of external migration across national lines (also known as international migration) on health point out that external migrants face different social, political, and economic contexts during different historical eras as conditions change in both their sending and receiving countries. In addition, shifting immigration policies and shifting attitudes toward particular migrant groups change the landscape for external migrants over different historical eras (see Torres & Young, 2016).

The second time dimension, *chronological age*, seems to be an important variable in every society. How people change at different ages and life stages as they pass from conception to death has been one of the most enduring ways of studying human behavior. Historical era is examined throughout Part I of this book and chronological age is the organizing framework for Part II.

Critical Thinking Questions 1.2

How would our understanding of Joshua's story change if we had no knowledge of his prior life experiences in the DRC and the Gatumba refugee camp—if we only assessed his situation based on his current functioning? What personal and environmental dimensions would we note in his current functioning?

ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL, RACIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The CSWE's statement of the purpose of social work indicates that social work practice is guided by a global perspective (CSWE, 2022). What exactly does it mean, and why is it valued? We are increasingly aware that we are part of an interconnected world, and Joshua's story is one reminder of this. Here are some aspects of what it means to take a global perspective:

- To be aware that my view of the world is not universally shared, and others may have a view of the world that is profoundly different from mine
- To have a growing awareness of the diversity of ideas and cultural practices found in human societies around the world
- To be curious about conditions in other parts of the world and how they relate to conditions in our own society
- To understand where I fit in the global social structure and social institutions
- To have a growing awareness of how people in other societies view my society
- To have a growing understanding of how the world works, with special attention to systems and mechanisms of privilege, inequality, and oppression around the world

We have always been connected to other peoples of the world, but those connections are being intensified by **globalization**, a process by which the world's people are becoming more interconnected economically, politically, environmentally, and culturally. It is a process of increased connectedness and interdependence that began at least 5 centuries ago but has intensified in recent times and is affecting people around the world (Mann, 2011; Sernau, 2020). This increasing connectedness is, of course, aided by rapid advancements in communication technology. There is much debate about whether globalization is a good thing or a bad thing, a conversation that is picked up when we consider the globalization of social institutions later in Part I. What is important to note here is that globalization is increasing our experiences with social diversity and raising new questions about racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As we strive to provide a global context, we encounter current controversies about appropriate language to describe different sectors of the world. Following World War II, a distinction was made between First World, Second World, and Third World nations, with *First World* referring to the Western capitalist nations, *Second World* referring to the countries belonging to the socialist bloc led by the Soviet Union, and *Third World* referring to a set of countries that were primarily former colonies of the First World. More recently, many scholars have used the language of First World, Second World, and Third World to define global sectors in a slightly different way. First World has been used to describe the nations that were the first to industrialize, urbanize, and modernize. Second World has been used to describe nations that have industrialized but have not yet become central to the world economy. Third World has been used to refer to nonindustrialized nations that are considered expendable in the global economy. This approach has lost favor in recent years because it is thought to suggest some ranking of the value of the world's societies. Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1979) uses different language but makes a similar distinction; he refers to wealthy *core* countries, newly industrialized *semiperiphery* countries, and the poorest *periphery* countries. Wallerstein is looking not to rank the value of societies but to emphasize the ways that some societies (core) exploit other societies (periphery).

Other writers divide the world into *developed* and *developing* countries (McMichael & Weber, 2021), referring to the level of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. Although scholars who use those terms are not necessarily using them to rank the value of different societies, the terms are sometimes used that way. Still other scholars divide the world into the *Global North* and the *Global South*, calling attention to a history in which the Global North colonized and exploited the people and resources of the Global South. This system of categorization focuses specifically on how some

societies exploit other societies. And, finally, some writers talk about the *West* versus the *East*, where the distinctions are largely cultural. We recognize that such categories carry great symbolic meaning and can either mask or expose systems of power and exploitation. Different researchers have used different language and different characteristics to describe categories of nations, and when reporting on their findings, we have used their own language to avoid misrepresenting their findings—with some critique of the language and measures used.

Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice

In its statement of social work competencies, the CSWE (2022, p. 9) identifies the following two interrelated competencies: "advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice" and "engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion." In the following section, we begin with a discussion of human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice and move to a discussion of anti-oppressive and antiracist practice, diversity, and equity and social inclusion (ADEI). Before examining the different concepts presented in these two competencies, it is important to note that social, racial, economic, and environmental justice are intertwined and integrated in major social institutions.

Let's look first at *human rights.* The CSWE (2022) states that "social workers understand that every person regardless of position in society has fundamental human rights" and "engage in practices that advance human rights to promote social, racial, economic, and environmental justice" (p. 9). As social workers have expanded the conversation about social justice to include global social justice, they have more and more drawn on the concept of human rights to organize thinking about social justice (see Mapp, 2021; Wronka, 2017). In the aftermath of World War II, the newly formed United Nations (1948) created a Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) that spelled out the rights to which all humans were entitled, regardless of their place in the world, and this document has become a point of reference for subsequent definitions of human rights. Cox and Pawar (2013) identify eight philosophical values suggested by the UDHR: life (human and nonhuman); freedom and liberty; equality and nondiscrimination; justice; solidarity; social responsibility; evolution, peace, and nonviolence; and relationships between humankind and nature. This listing of human rights values reminds us of the many ways that basic human rights were denied to Joshua and his Banyamulenge ethnic group. It is important for social workers who work in refugee resettlement organizations to recognize the history of human right violations faced by the refugee families they meet and to ensure human rights protections in their resettlement work.

The idea that every human has certain basic rights is a relatively new idea and is not equally shared around the world today. Slavery was a universal institution in ancient and medieval times and still exists in some places, and the limitation of human rights of some was a feature of colonialization and continues today (Moore, 2020). Joshua's story is one example of the ways that human rights as we now think of them continue to be violated around the world. One of the issues that arises when we think of human rights is whether reparations should be made for human rights violations. The UDHR claims that victims of human rights violations are entitled to compensation (United Nations, 1948). *Transitional justice* is an approach to systematic and massive violations of human rights that calls for both accountability of the perpetrators and redress for victims. It includes such measures as criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparation programs, and institutional reforms (Seul, 2019). Growing numbers of such measures are being implemented in the United States and around the world.

Now, let's look at the concept of *social justice.* Several theories of social justice have been proposed. Probably the most frequently cited theory of social justice in the social work literature is John Rawls's (1971, 2001) theory of justice as fairness that focuses on the fair distribution of primary social goods. In the past decade or so, some social work scholars (M. Banerjee & Canda, 2012; Carlson et al., 2016; Navratilova et al., 2021) have recommended the capabilities approach to social justice as an alternative to Rawls's theory of justice as fairness. The capabilities approach was originally proposed by Amartya Sen (1992, 2009) and revised by Martha Nussbaum (2011). The capabilities approach draws on both Western and non-Western thinking. In this approach, capabilities are, in simplest terms, opportunities

and freedoms to be or do what we view as worthwhile; justice is served when people have such opportunities and freedoms. Nussbaum carries the capabilities approach a step further and identifies 10 core capabilities that all people in all societies must have to lead a dignified life. She asserts that promotion of social justice involves supporting the capabilities of people who are denied opportunities and freedoms related to any of the core capabilities:

- *Life.* To live to the end of a normal life course
- *Bodily health.* To have good physical health and adequate nourishment and shelter
- *Bodily integrity.* To exercise freedom of movement, freedom from assault, and reproductive choices
- *Senses, imagination, and thought.* To have pleasant sensory experiences, pain avoidance, adequate education, imagination, free self-expression, and religious freedom
- *Emotion.* To experience a full range of emotions and to love and be loved
- *Practical reason.* To think critically and make wise decisions
- *Affiliation.* To live with others with empathy and compassion, without discrimination
- *Concern for other species.* To show concern for animals, plants, and other aspects of nature
- *Play.* To laugh and play and enjoy recreational activities
- *Control over one's political and material environment.* To participate freely in the political process and have equal access to employment and property

In contrast with Nussbaum, Sen argues that no list of core capabilities can be arbitrarily delineated because of the great diversity of people and environments in the world. He thinks that individuals should be left to decide which capabilities they choose to enhance or neglect.

Social workers also value the advancement of *racial justice*, which is the systemic fair treatment of all people and equitable opportunities for everyone. The identity of the United States is rooted in the political ideals of liberty, equality under the law, dignity, and individual rights, an identity juxtaposed with a history of racial injustices such as slavery, Jim Crow, racial terror, stolen property, discrimination in many forms, and genocide and cultural annihilation of Indigenous people, a history that has created pervasive structural inequality. Heather Cox Richardson (2020) writes that the history of the United States is built on paradox and contradictions. The very men who wrote the founding documents that declared "all men" equal were slave owners. When thinking of racial justice, the first question that arises is how does a society make the transition from a long history of racial injustice that has accumulated over time to become a society characterized by racial justice? Is transitional justice necessary and, if so, what measures are needed? There are some examples of reparation compensations in the United States: payments to Japanese Americans interned during World War II, survivors of police abuse in Chicago, victims of forced sterilization, and Black residents of a Florida town that was burned by a murderous mob. In 2021, Virginia legislators passed a law that requires five public universities to make reparations to descendants of enslaved workers who built their institutions, using such measures as scholarships, community-based economic development, and memorial programs (Perry & Barr, 2021).

The future of transitional racial justice in the United States is unclear, but social workers can participate in two types of reforms to advance racial justice in the United States and other countries. First, the truthful racial history must be told. In the United States, there are many attempts to prevent the true telling of racial history in public primary and secondary schools. Recently, this resistance to racial truth-telling in public schools has appeared in the form of state and local laws prohibiting the teaching of critical race theory. Social workers should join in the effort to promote truth-telling about race in public school curricula. Second, every major social institution must be examined for ways it perpetuates systemic racism and the necessary institutional reforms must be pursued. Social workers must put

a critical eye to the systemic racism in the organizations in which they are employed and the ones with which they have collaborative relationships. In addition, themes of white superiority in interpersonal interactions must be recognized, challenged, and disrupted.

Advancing *economic justice* is a goal of social work both internationally and in the United States (CSWE, 2022; International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2020). And yet there is no agreed-on definition of economic justice. The Boston University School of Public Health (2017) defines economic justice as "a set of moral principles for building economic institutions, the ultimate goal of which is to create an opportunity for each person to create a sufficient material foundation upon which to have a dignified, productive, and creative life beyond economics" (para. 3). This definition focuses on economic justice as the provision of the necessary economic resources for social inclusion, a topic to be covered shortly. As I am sure you have observed, there are many conflicting ideas about what constitutes a fair distribution of income, wealth, and economic opportunity. Economic justice includes issues of fair price in the economic market, fair wage, and just profit.

Writing about economic justice and social work, Simmons (2021) defines six realms of economic justice for social work consideration:

1. Issues of the interplay of economic inequality with racial and gender inequalities
2. Workplace rights, including the right to organize
3. Wage levels
4. Immigrant worker rights
5. Community-labor partnerships
6. Expansion of social programs, such as assistance to unemployed, underemployed, and never-employed people; expanding unemployment insurance; expanding nutritional assistance

In its statement of the grand challenges for social work, the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASWSW, 2021) includes two economic justice issues: (1) building financial capability and assets for all and (2) reducing extreme economic inequality.

Social work has recently committed to advancing *environmental justice*, which involves equitable access to clean and healthy environments for all people, the same degree of protection from environmental hazards or degradation across demographic groups or communities, and equal inclusion in decision-making about how to create healthy communities.

Anti-Oppressive and Antiracist Practice

In the case study at the beginning of the chapter, Joshua's ethnicity (but not his race) led to human rights violations in the DRC. He has been surprised to learn the extent of racial bias and discrimination in the United States. The CSWE (2022) states that "social workers demonstrate anti-racist and anti-oppressive social work practice" at all levels of practice (p. 10). Let's look first at the broader idea, anti-oppressive practice. **Oppression** is the act of disempowering, marginalizing, silencing, or otherwise subordinating a social group or category. It may include observable actions but more typically refers to complex, covert, interconnected processes and practices (such as discriminating, devaluing, and exploiting a group of individuals). To practice anti-oppressive social work, social workers must recognize and disrupt a variety of mechanisms of oppression.

Suzanne Pharr (1988) provides some useful conceptual tools that can help us recognize oppression and injustice when we see it. She identifies a set of mechanisms of oppression, whereby the everyday arrangements of social life systematically block opportunities for some groups and inhibit their power to exercise self-determination. Table 1.2 provides an overview of these mechanisms of oppression. As you review the list, you may recognize some that are familiar to you, such as stereotyping and perhaps blaming the victim. There may be others that you have not previously given much thought to.

You may also recognize that although some of these mechanisms of oppression are sometimes used quite intentionally, others are not so intentional but occur as we do business as usual. For example, when you walk into your classroom or other public room, do you give much thought to the person who cleans that room, what wage this person is paid, whether this is the only job this person holds, and what opportunities and barriers this person has experienced in life? Most likely the room is cleaned in the evening after it has been vacated, and the person who cleans it is invisible to many. Giving serious thought to common mechanisms of oppression can help us to recognize oppression and social injustice and think about ways to challenge it.

TABLE 1.2 ■ Common Mechanisms of Oppression

Mechanism	Definition
Economic power and control	Limiting of resources, mobility, education, and employment options to all but a few
Myth of scarcity	Myth used to pit people against one another, suggests that resources are limited and blames people (e.g., poor people, immigrants) for using too many of them
Defined norm	A standard of what is good and right, against which all are judged
The other	Those who fall outside "the norm" but are defined in relation to it, seen as abnormal, inferior, marginalized
Invisibility	Keeping "the other's" existence, everyday life, and achievements unknown
Distortion	Selective presentation or rewriting of history so that only negative aspects of the other are included
Stereotyping	Generalizing the actions of a few to an entire group, denying individual characteristics and behaviors
Violence and the threat of violence	Laying claim to resources, then using might to ensure superior position
Lack of prior claim	Excluding anyone who was not originally included and labeling as disruptive those who fight for inclusion
Blaming the victim	Condemning the others for their situation, diverting attention from the roles that dominance plays in the situation
Internalized oppression	Internalizing negative judgments of being the other, leading to self-hatred, depression, despair, and self-abuse
Horizontal hostility	Extending internalized oppression to one's entire group as well as to other subordinate groups, expressing hostility to other oppressed persons and groups rather than to members of dominant groups
Isolation	Physically isolating people as individuals or as a "minority" group
Assimilation	Pressuring members of minority groups to drop their culture and differences and become a mirror of the dominant culture
Tokenism	Rewarding some of the most assimilated others with position and resources
Emphasis on individual solutions	Emphasizing individual responsibility for problems and individual solutions rather than collective responsibility and collective solutions

Source: Adapted from Pharr, S. (1988). *Homophobia: A weapon of sexism*. Chardon Press.

One form of anti-oppressive practice is *antiracist practice.* **Antiracism** is a process of actively identifying and opposing racism. **Racialized groups** and *racialized communities* are terms frequently used to refer to all people who are not considered white in the processes of categorizing and marginalizing people according to race for the purpose of maintaining white supremacy and social exclusion. In the United States, racialized groups are also referred to as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), often with the intent of centering their experiences in a racialized world. In this book, both racialized group and BIPOC are used to refer to the same group of people. At times, researchers study only one racialized group, such as Black or African American or Indigenous, and in those situations, the specific group will be noted using the researcher's language.

Although social work has long had a stated commitment to social justice, both social work education and the practice of social work have too often reflected white supremacy. The telling of the history of the profession has focused on white women leaders, such as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond, and been silent on the early leadership of the many BIPOC social work pioneers, such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Eugene Kinckle Jones, Dorothy Height, W. E. B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, and many other hidden BIPOC social reform leaders (Wright et al., 2021). The profession has too often thought of BIPOC people as receivers, not providers, of service and used theories and diagnostic systems of trauma that do not consider the cumulative trauma faced by racialized groups (Riquino et al., 2021). It has too often failed to recognize the natural helping networks of Indigenous and other racialized groups (McCleary & Simard, 2021). Human behavior and practice theories that center white culture have been used, and educational institutions and service organizations have too often been unwelcoming, even hostile, spaces for members of racialized groups. The issue of culture-bound human behavior theories will be explored in the next chapter of this book. Social workers dedicated to anti-oppressive, antiracist practice can benefit from learning the methods for identifying and opposing racism presented in Sue and colleagues' book *Microintervention Strategies* (Sue et al., 2021).

Diversity

The CSWE (2022) states that

> Social workers understand how diversity and intersectionality shape human experiences and identity development and affect equity and inclusion. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of factors including but not limited to age, caste, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, generational status, immigration status, legal status, marital status, political ideology, race, nationality, religion and spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status. (p. 9)

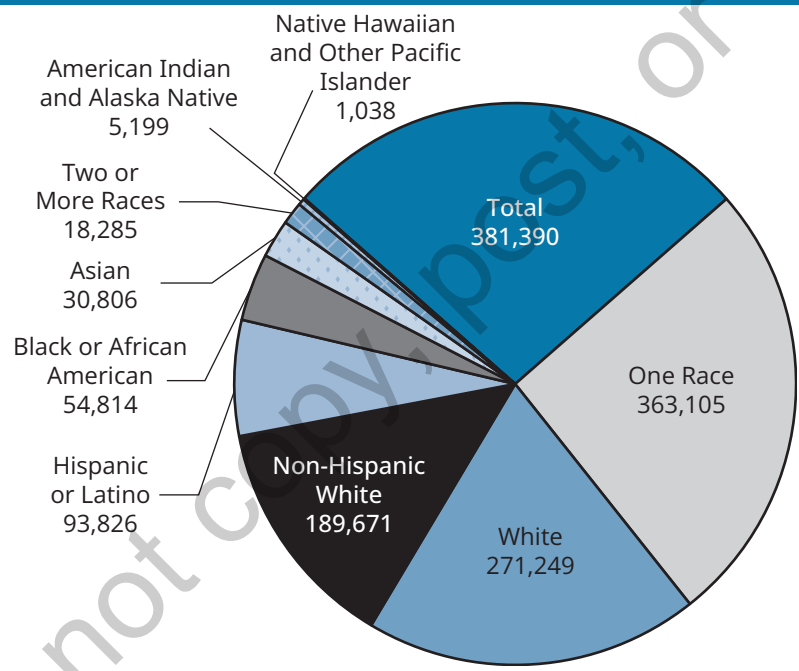
To understand who Joshua (case study at the beginning of the chapter) is, we would want to think of him in relation to some of these factors.

Diversity has always been a part of the social reality in the United States. Even before the Europeans came, the Indigenous people were divided into about 200 distinct societies with about 200 different languages (Parrillo, 2013). Since the inception of the United States of America, many waves of immigration have created the multiethnic, multicultural character of the country. There have always been tensions about how we as a nation handle diversity. Are we a *melting pot* where all are melted into one indistinguishable model of citizenship, or are we a *pluralist society* in which groups have separate identities, cultures, and ways of organizing but work together in mutual respect? Pluralism is consistent with social work's concern for human rights.

Even though diversity has always been present in the United States, it is accurate to say that some of the diversity in our national social life is new. There is increasing racial, ethnic, and religious diversity in the United States, and the mix in the population stream has become much more complex in recent years. The United States was 87% white in 1925, 80% white in 1950, and 72% white in 2000; by 2045, it is projected that we will be about 49.7% white (Frey, 2018; Taylor & Cohn, 2012). Figure 1.5 shows the projected racial profile of the United States for 2045. It is important to note that the meaning of *white* has been and continues to be a moving target in the United States. But why is this demographic change happening at this time? A major driving force is the demographic reality that native-born white people are no

longer reproducing at replacement level in the wealthy postindustrial nations, which, if it continues, will lead to a declining population skewed toward advanced age. One solution used by some countries, including the United States, is to change immigration policy to allow new streams of cross-national migration. The current rate of foreign-born persons in the United States is lower than it has been throughout most of the past 150 years, but foreign-born persons are less likely to be white than when immigration policy, prior to 1965, strictly limited entry for persons of color. With the recent influx of immigrants from around the globe, the United States has become one of many ethnically and racially diverse nations in the world today. In many wealthy postindustrial countries, including the United States, there is much anti-immigrant sentiment, even though the economies of these countries are dependent on such migration. Waves of immigration have historically been accompanied by anti-immigrant sentiment. There appear to be many reasons for anti-immigrant sentiment, including fear that new immigrants will dilute the "purity" of the native culture, racial and religious bias, and fear of economic competition. Wilkerson (2020) proposes that fear of no longer being the majority race is fueling a rise in white nationalism in the United States and is the motive behind such political phenomena as calls for restricted immigration, gerrymandered congressional districts, and voter suppression laws. A "great replacement" conspiracy theory claims that there is an ongoing active but covert effort to replace white populations in countries that are currently white majority (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2022).

FIGURE 1.5 ■ Racial Profile of U.S. Population, 2045



Source: Adapted from U.S. Census Bureau. (1918). Older people projected to outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/cb18-41-population-projections.html; *U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). 2017 national population projections tables.* https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2017/demo/popproj/2017-summary-tables.html

On the other hand, some of the diversity in our social life is not new but simply newly recognized. In the contemporary era, we have been developing a heightened consciousness of human differences—gender, gender identity, and gender expression differences; racial and ethnic differences; cultural differences; religious differences; differences in sexual orientation; differences in abilities and disabilities; differences in family forms; and so on. It is important for social workers to respect diversity of human experiences and recognize differences *within* groups as well as *between* groups.

As we seek to honor differences, we make a distinction between heterogeneity and diversity. We use *heterogeneity* to refer to individual-level variations—differences among individuals. For example,

as a social worker who came in contact with Joshua's family at the time they were resettled in Boise, you would want to recognize the ways in which they are different from you and from other people you know and different from other people of Banyamulenge heritage. An understanding of heterogeneity allows us to recognize the uniqueness of each person and situation. **Diversity**, on the other hand, is used to refer to patterns of group differences. Diversity refers to social groups, groups of people who share a range of physical, cultural, or social characteristics within a category of social identity. Knowledge of diversity helps us to provide culturally responsive services.

When we think about human diversity, it is important to think in terms of **intersectionality**, a theory of group-based social identity that recognizes that all of us are simultaneously members of a number of socially constructed identity groups, such as those based on gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, age, religion, geographical location, disability/ability, and so on (Crenshaw, 2021; Guittar & Guittar, 2015; Holman & Walker, 2021). Intersectionality theory is rooted in the writings of U.S. Black feminists who challenged the idea of a universal gendered experience (see Collins, 2012; Collins & Bilge, 2020). Linda Alcoff (1988), focusing on self-analysis and the role of power relations in knowledge creation, developed a related concept coined **positionality**, or the individual's social and political context (Hampton et. al., 2020). For any one of us, our *social location* (place in society) is at the intersection of our multiple identity groups. We must recognize how our own particular social location shapes how we see the world, what we notice, and how we interpret what we "see." Intersectionality theory emphasizes that either advantage or disadvantage is associated with identity groups, and when considering the life journey of any one individual, it is important to consider the multiple identity groups of which they are a part (Brown, 2018).

Attending to diversity involves recognition of the power relations and the patterns of opportunities and constraints for social groups. If we are interested in the Banyamulenge community in our city, for example, we will want to note, among other things, the neighborhoods where they live, the access to community resources and quality of the housing stock in those neighborhoods, the comparative educational attainment in the community, the occupational profile of the community, the comparative income levels, and so on. When we attend to diversity, we not only note the differences between groups but also how socially constructed hierarchies of power are superimposed on these differences.

Recent U.S. scholarship in the social sciences has emphasized the ways in which three types of categorizations—gender, race, and class—are used to develop hierarchical social structures that influence social identities and life chances (Rothenberg, 2016; Sernau, 2020). This literature suggests that these social categorizations create **privilege**, or unearned advantage, for some groups and disadvantage for other groups. In a much-cited article, Peggy McIntosh (2016) has pointed out the mundane daily advantages of white privilege that are not available to members of groups of color, such as assurances "that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race," and "Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability." We could also generate lists of advantages of male privilege, age privilege, economic privilege, heterosexual privilege, ability privilege, religious privilege, and so on. McIntosh argues that members of privileged groups benefit from their privilege but have not been taught to think of themselves as privileged. They take for granted that their advantages are normal and universal and are often resistant to attempts to point out the privilege of their social locations. For survival, members of nonprivileged groups must learn a lot about the lives of groups with privilege, but groups with privileged status are not similarly compelled to learn about the lives of members of nonprivileged groups.

Michael Schwalbe (2006) argues that those of us who live in the United States also carry "American privilege," which comes from our dominant position in the world. (I prefer to call this "U.S. privilege," because people living in Canada, Ecuador, and Brazil also live in America.) According to Schwalbe, among other things, American privilege means that many believe they don't have to bother to learn about other countries or about the impact of our foreign policy on people living in those countries. For example, we don't have to learn about how our use of cell phones helps to drive conflict over the natural resource of coltan in the Congo. American privilege also means that we have access to cheap goods that

are produced by poorly paid workers in impoverished countries. The income and wealth gap between nations is mind-boggling. In 2020, the average per capita income in the DRC was $544.00 in U.S. dollars, compared with $63,593.40 in the United States (World Bank, 2020). The DRC is rich in natural resources wanted by the United States and other wealthy nations, but the country's economic conditions have been hurt by a colonial history followed by continuous war (Sernau, 2020). It is becoming increasingly difficult to deny the costs of exercising American privilege by remaining ignorant about the rest of the world and the impact our actions have on other nations.

This is a good place to interject some words about the language of diversity as used in this book. In their study of human diversity, human behavior researchers continuously struggle to find respectful language to define different identity groups. You have probably noticed that the language used to describe identity groups is ever-changing and that not every member of a given identity group embraces the same language at a given point in time. For example, there is much controversy over the use of the term Latinx to describe people from Latin America (Newport, 2022). There are personal, generational, regional, and other types of variations in preferred diversity language. We have also found that different researchers define and measure identity groups in different ways—and the U.S. Census Bureau and other governmental agencies use their own, sometimes peculiar, language to describe and measure identity groups. In this book, when we report on human behavior research, we use the language of the researcher so as not to distort their work. Likewise, when we report on census data, research based on census data, or data from other governmental agencies, we use the language of those agencies. That means that different terms are used at different points to describe the same identity group. We are also guided by copyediting style manuals regarding bias-free language. We hope that you will recognize that the ever-changing language of diversity has both constructive potential to find creative ways to affirm diversity and destructive potential to dichotomize diversity into *the norm* and *the other*.

Critical Thinking Questions 1.3

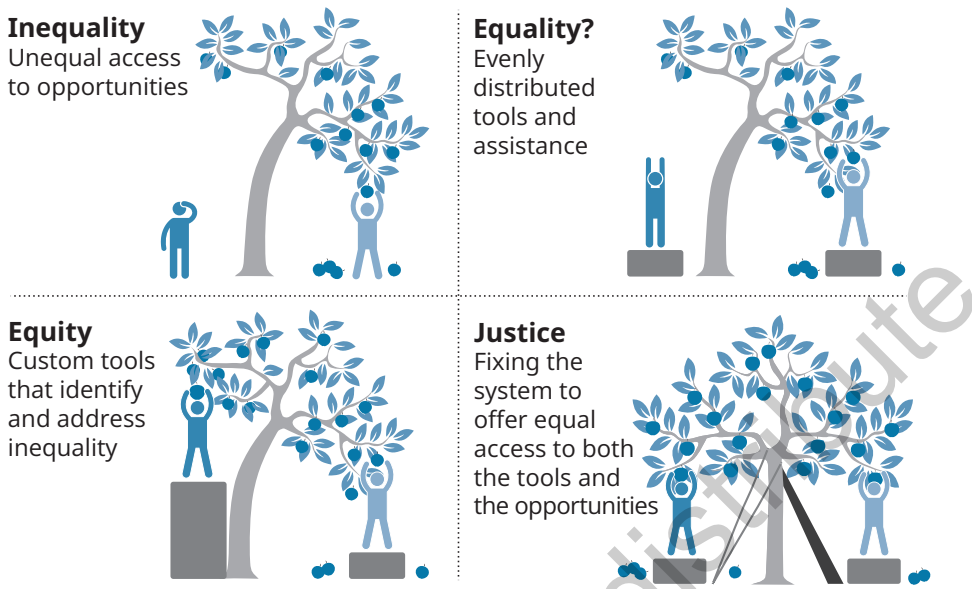
What impact is globalization having on your own life? Do you see it as having a positive or negative impact on your life? What about for Joshua? Do you think globalization is having a positive or negative impact on his life? Do you agree with Martha Nussbaum that it is important for all people to have opportunities and freedoms in relation to the 10 core capabilities she identifies? How do you see Joshua in relation to these core capabilities?

Equity and Social Inclusion

When Joshua and his siblings entered public school in Boise, Idaho, their lack of knowledge of the English language meant they were not on a level playing field with native English speakers. Joshua and his siblings were among the one in five students in the United States who speak a language other than English at home (New America, 2022). Special assistance to English learners in the school system is essential to allow them to effectively pursue learning and to be included in the social life of the school.

As social workers participate in advancing social, racial, economic, and environmental justice, we focus on two important interrelated goals: equity and social inclusion. **Equity** is an ethical norm that proposes that existing social, racial, economic, political, and environmental inequalities require policies and practices that aim to level the playing field for those in disadvantaged positions, recognizing that not all people are starting from the same place. As demonstrated in Figure 1.6, the principle of equity recognizes that equal treatment may be unfair, and measures must be taken to ensure that those with fewer resources have equal access to social inclusion. Although it has not been fully realized, equity was the goal of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which became law in the United States in 1990 (Pappas, 2020). It required reasonable accommodations to allow people with disabilities to be included in all sectors of society.

FIGURE 1.6 ■ Inequality, Equality, Equity, and Justice



Social inclusion is a multidimensional process to ensure that people at risk of being left out gain the opportunities and resources needed to participate fully in all aspects of life, including civic, social, economic, political, and cultural life. It involves creating environments where individuals and groups are respected, valued, and supported and eliminating policies, practices, and behaviors that result in the marginalization and exclusion of some. Social inclusion involves removing both structural and interpersonal barriers to the full participation by excluded groups. It recognizes that some groups have been excluded not only by social policies and social institutions but also by stigmatizing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Berger and Sarnyai (2015) report that chronic exposure to social exclusion affects the brain in such a way to lead to social defeat, a sense that one has no power to affect the course of one's life, and may contribute to the development of mental health disorders.

Figure 1.6 demonstrates that social inclusion and justice require changing social systems where possible to offer equal access to resources and opportunities. Social inclusion also requires that people have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. This idea has been captured in the phrase "nothing about me without me," a phrase that has been used to mean that medical decisions should not be made without consulting the patient. It has also been stated as "nothing about us without us" to communicate that no social policy should be decided without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) affected by that policy. Social workers have an important role to play to ensure that all people have a voice in decisions that affect their lives.

The U.S. social welfare institution has, historically, put primary emphasis on promoting independence and preventing dependence. In contrast, the European social welfare states have put more emphasis on promoting social inclusion and using the social welfare institution as an investment to protect the health of the society, which they refer to as social protection (European Commission: Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, 2022). Some policy analysts in the United States argue that social inclusion should be the goal of U.S. social welfare policy (Boushey et al., 2007), and this should be a goal of legislative advocacy by U.S. social workers.

KNOWING AND DOING

Social workers, like other professional practitioners, must find a way to move from knowing to doing, from "knowing about" and "knowing that" to "knowing how to" (for fuller discussion of this issue, see Hutchison et al., 2007). Social workers *know about* human behavior for the purpose of *doing*. Like architects, engineers, physicians, and teachers, social workers are faced with complex problems and

case situations that are unique and uncertain. You no doubt will find that social work education, social work practice, and even this book will stretch your capacity to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty. That is important because, as Carol Meyer (1993) suggested, "There are no easy or simple [social work] cases, only simplistic perceptions" (p. 63). There are four important ingredients of "knowing how" to do social work: knowledge about the case, knowledge about the self, values and ethics, and scientific knowledge. These four ingredients are intertwined in the process of doing social work. The focus of this book is on scientific knowledge, but all four ingredients are essential in social work practice. Before moving to a discussion of scientific knowledge, let's take a brief look at the other three ingredients.

Knowledge About the Case

In this context, *case* is used to mean the situation at hand, a situation that has become problematic for some person or group of people, resulting in a social work intervention. Our first task as social workers is to develop as good an understanding of the situation as possible: Who is involved in the situation, and how are they involved? What is the nature of the relationships of the people involved? What are the physical, societal, cultural, organizational, and community contexts of the situation? What are the contextual constraints as well as the contextual resources for bringing change to the situation? What elements of the case are maintaining the problematic situation? How have people tried to cope with the situation? What preferences do the involved people have about the types of intervention to use? What are the purpose, culture, and social resources of the social agency to whose attention the situation is brought? You might begin to think about how you would answer some of these questions in relation to Joshua's family when they arrived in Boise and were assisted by the refugee resettlement agency.

It is important to note that knowledge about the case is influenced by the quality of the relationship between the social worker and client(s). There is good evidence that people are likely to reveal more aspects of their situation if they are approached with commitment, an open mind, warmth, empathic attunement, authentic responsiveness, and mutuality (Hepworth et al., 2017). For example, as Joshua became comfortable in the interview, feeling validated by the interviewer, he began to engage in deeper reflection about what happened in the DRC and Burundi. He had never put the story together in this way before. This can be an important part of his grieving and adjustment process. The integrity of knowledge about the case is related to the quality of the relationship, and the capacity for relationship is related to knowledge about the self.

But knowledge about the case requires more than simply gathering information. We must select and order the information at hand and decide if further information is needed. This involves making a series of decisions about what is relevant and what is not. It also involves searching for recurring themes as well as contradictions in the information. For example, family loss is a consistent theme throughout Joshua's story, as is his strength and commitment to move forward to adjust to new situations. Listening to his story, you notice that the Gatumba massacre is mentioned very early in the story telling, and this alerts us to the possibility that other Banyamulenge refugees may need to reflect on the Gatumba massacre.

To assist you in moving between knowledge about the case and scientific knowledge, each chapter in this book begins as this one does with one or more case studies. Most of the case studies change names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality. Each of these unique stories suggests what scientific knowledge is needed. For example, to work effectively with Banyamulenge refugees like Joshua, you will want to understand some things about the DRC, the Banyamulenge ethnic group, grief reactions, the acculturation process, challenges facing immigrant families, and cross-cultural communication. Throughout the chapters, the stories are woven together with relevant scientific knowledge. Keep in mind that scientific knowledge is necessary, but you will not be an effective practitioner unless you take the time to learn about the unique situation of each person or collectivity you serve. It is the unique situation that guides what scientific knowledge is needed.

Knowledge About the Self

In his book *The Spiritual Life of Children*, Robert Coles (1990) wrote about the struggles of a 10-year-old Hopi girl to have her Anglo teacher understand Hopi spirituality. Coles suggested to the girl that

perhaps she could try to explain her tribal nation's spiritual beliefs to the teacher. The girl answered, "But they don't listen to hear *us;* they listen to hear themselves" (p. 25, emphasis in the original). This young girl has captured, in a profound way, a major challenge to our everyday personal and professional communications: the tendency to approach the world with preconceived notions that we seek to validate by attending to some information while ignoring other information (Kahneman, 2011). The capacity to understand oneself is necessary to tame this very human tendency.

Three types of self-knowledge are essential for social workers: understanding of one's own thinking processes, understanding of one's own emotions, and understanding of one's own social location. We must be able to think about our thinking, a process called *metacognition.* We all have biases that lead to thinking errors, and it is very difficult to get control of our biases. In addition, both anger and stress can lead us to think less critically and make erroneous judgments (Sapolsky, 2017). As Daniel Kahneman (2011) suggests in his book *Thinking Fast and Slow*, constant questioning of our own thinking can become tedious and immobilize us. The best we can do, therefore, is to understand the types of situations in which we are likely to make mistakes and slow down and use multiple sources of information to help correct for our biases. We also must be able to recognize what emotions get aroused in us when we hear stories like Joshua's and when we contemplate the challenges of a given situation, and we must find a way to use those emotions in ways that are helpful and avoid using them in ways that are harmful. Although writing about physicians, Gunnar Biorck (1977) said it well when he commented that practitioners make "a tremendous number of judgments each day, based on inadequate, often ambiguous data, and under pressure of time, and carrying out this task with the outward appearance of calmness, dedication and interpersonal warmth" (p. 146).

In terms of social location, social workers must identify and reflect on where they fit in a system of social identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, social class, sexual orientation, religion, ability/disability, age, and so on. A strong personal identity in relation to important societal categories and an understanding of the impact of those identities on other people is essential for successful social work intervention across cultural lines. This type of self-knowledge requires reflecting on where one fits in systems of privilege and disadvantage.

Values and Ethics

The CSWE (2022) indicates the importance of values and ethics for social work practice by making it number one in its identification of social work competencies (Competency 1: Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior [p. 4]). Knowledge about the self is critical to ethical and professional social work practice. To engage in such practice, we must recognize the difference between personal and professional values and use reflection and self-regulation to manage our personal values and our very human cognitive biases and emotional reactions. That is why the first learning objective for each chapter in this book is to recognize one's own cognitive and emotional reactions to the case studies that introduce the chapter. Doing this kind of self-reflection is an important part of ethical social work practice.

The process of developing knowledge about the case is a dialogue between the social worker and client system, and social workers have a well-defined value base to guide the dialogue. Six core values of the profession have been set out in a preamble to the code of ethics established by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in 1996 and revised in 2021 (NASW, 2021b). These values are service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. The value of social justice was discussed earlier in the chapter. The code of ethics articulates an ethical principle for each of the core values:

1. Service. Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.
2. Social justice. Social workers challenge social injustice.
3. Dignity and worth of the person. Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person.
4. Importance of human relationships. Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships.

5. Integrity. Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner.
6. Competence. Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.

Value 6, competence, requires that we recognize the science available to inform our work. It requires understanding the limitations of the available science for considering the situation at hand but also that we use the strongest available evidence to make practice decisions. This is where scientific knowledge comes into the picture.

Critical Thinking Questions 1.4

If you were the social worker at Joshua's refugee resettlement program when he first arrived in the United States, what knowledge about the case would you like to have? What information would you find most important? What emotional reactions did you have to reading Joshua's story? What did you find yourself thinking about his story? Where do you see Joshua fitting in systems of privilege and disadvantage? Where do you see yourself fitting? How might any of this impact your ability to be helpful to Joshua and his family?

SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE: THEORY AND RESEARCH

The CSWE (2022) notes that social work practice is guided by "knowledge based on scientific inquiry" (p. 14). Ethical social workers are always searching for or recalling what is known about the situations they encounter, turning to the social and behavioral sciences for this information. Scientific knowledge serves as a screen against which the knowledge about the case is considered. It suggests *hypotheses*, or tentative statements, to be explored and tested, not facts to be applied, in transactions with a person or social group. Because of the breadth and complexity of social work practice, usable knowledge must be culled from diverse sources and a number of scientific disciplines. **Science** is a systematically organized body of knowledge on a particular subject. Scientific knowledge is the knowledge produced by scientific inquiry. Two interrelated approaches to knowledge building, theory and empirical research, fit the scientific criteria of being logical, systematic, and documented for the public. Together, they create the base of knowledge that social workers need to understand human behavior. In your coursework on social work research, you will be learning much more about these concepts, so only a brief description is provided here to help you understand how this book draws on theory and research.

Theory

As we discuss in Chapter 2, the CSWE (2022) notes that "social workers understand theories of human behavior and person-in-environment and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge" (p. 11). Social workers use theory to help organize and make sense of the situations they encounter. A **theory** is a system of ideas that helps us make sense of interrelated phenomena. Human behavior theories help us think about and understand the complexities of human behavior, both individual behavior and collective behavior. As Elaine Leeder (2020) so aptly put it, "To have a theory is to have a way of explaining the world" (p. 8). Thus, theory gives us a framework for engaging with, assessing, and intervening with client systems. It seems to be human nature to develop theories to make sense of the world. As social workers, we put our personal theories of the world to the test by studying theories proposed by serious scholars of human behavior. Theories allow us to organize our thinking, but theories are not "fact" or "truth." They can provide a window on human behavior, but if taken as fact or truth, they can put us in a box that does not allow us to see alternative views of human behavior.

Other terms that you will often encounter in discussions of theories are *model, paradigm*, and *perspective. Model* usually is used to refer to a visual representation of the relationships between

concepts, *paradigm* most often means a way of seeing the world, and *perspective* is an emphasis, view, or lens through which we look. Paradigms and perspectives are broader and more general than theory. But different scholars use these terms in different ways and sometimes interchangeably.

If you are to make good use of theory, you should know something about how it is constructed. *Concepts* are the building blocks of theory. They are symbols, or mental images, that summarize observations, feelings, or ideas. Concepts allow us to communicate about the phenomena of interest. Some relevant concepts in Joshua's story are culture, cultural conflict, refugee, resettlement, acculturation, trauma, loss, and grief. Theoretical concepts are put together to form *propositions*, or assertions about the relationships among concepts. For example, loss and grief theory proposes that the loss of a person, object, or ideal leads to a grief reaction. This proposition, which asserts a particular relationship between the concepts of loss and grief, may help a refugee resettlement social worker understand some of the sadness and sometimes despair that they see in work with refugee families. They have lived with an accumulation of losses—loss of land, loss of livelihood, loss of roles, loss of status, loss of family members, loss of familiar language and rituals, and many more. It is important to remember that theory is about likelihood, not certainty. Not all who experience loss will grieve, and not all grief reactions are the same.

Social and behavioral science theories are based on *assumptions*, or beliefs held to be true without testing or proof, about the nature of human social life. Human behavioral theoretical assumptions have raised a number of controversies, three of which are worth introducing at this point.

1. Do the dimensions of human behavior have an *objective reality* that exists outside a person's consciousness, or is all reality based on personal perception (*subjective reality*)?
2. Is human behavior determined by forces beyond the control of the person (*determinism*), or are people free and proactive agents in the creation of their behavior (*voluntarism*)?
3. Are the patterned interactions among people characterized by harmony, unity, and social cohesion or by conflict, domination, coercion, and exploitation?

It is important to consider the assumptions a theory makes as you think about its usefulness for social work practice. The contributing authors and I take a middle ground on these controversies: We assume that reality has both objective and subjective aspects, that human behavior is partially constrained and partially free, and that social life is marked by both cohesion and conflict.

Empirical Research

Traditionally, science is equated with empirical research, which is widely held as the most rigorous and systematic way to understand human behavior. Research is typically viewed, in simple terms, as a problem-solving process, or a method of seeking answers to questions. If something is empirical, we experience it through our senses, as opposed to something we experience purely in our minds. The process of **empirical research** includes a careful, purposeful, and systematic observation of events with the intent to note and record them in terms of their attributes, to look for patterns in those events, and to make our methods and observations public. Each empirical research project is likely to raise new questions, often producing more questions than answers. The new questions become grist for future research. Like theory, empirical research is a key tool for social workers. The CSWE (2022) specifies that social workers "apply research findings to inform and improve practice, policy, and programs" (p. 10). It is important to understand, however, that empirical research, like theory, informs us about probabilities, not certainties (Firestein, 2012). For example, research can tell us what percentage of parents who were abused as children will become abusive toward their own children, but it cannot tell us whether a specific parent who was abused as a child will become abusive toward their children. Social workers, of course, must make decisions about specific parents, recognizing the probabilities found in research as well as considering the knowledge about the case.

We must recognize both the benefits and limitations of empirical research. Human behavior is complex, and human observers have limitations in their ability to capture that complexity. Neuroscientist

Stuart Firestein (2012) reminds us that we must learn to live with "unknowable unknowns" (p. 30) and become capable of working with uncertainties. The lack of available research on a novel coronavirus produced much uncertainty during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the uncertainties paved the way for the politicization of the pandemic. Nevertheless, research remains the most rigorous and systematic way to understand human behavior.

Research can serve a number of purposes; it can be used to define and describe social phenomena (descriptive research), explore what is going on with a population or situation about which little is known (exploratory research), identify causes and effects of social phenomena and predict future occurrences (explanatory research), and evaluate programs and practices (evaluation research). For example, descriptive research could be used to gather facts about the Banyamulenge refugees in Boise, such as their ages, their English proficiency, their educational level, and their medical needs. Exploratory research could be used to study what it has been like to be resettled in Boise, perhaps with narrative methods that capture stories of refugee experiences. Explanatory research could be used to understand the connection between accumulated losses and mental and physical health. Evaluation research could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of specific resettlement interventions with this population.

Different methods of research are used for different purposes of research. No single research method can adequately capture the whole, the complexity of human behavior. The CSWE (2022) indicates that "Social workers demonstrate knowledge and skills regarding qualitative and quantitative research methods and analysis, and they interpret data derived from these methods" (p. 10). **Qualitative methods of research** are methods such as participant observation, intensive interviewing, and focus groups that are designed to understand the lives of the participants in their own words rather than in categories predetermined by the researcher. These methods usually involve exploratory research questions and seek the meanings participants attach to events in their lives. The findings are reported in words. **Quantitative methods of research** are methods such as surveys and experiments that record variation in human behavior and social life in categories that are predetermined by the researcher. These methods use quantifiable measures of concepts, standardize the collection of data, attend only to preselected variables, and use statistical measures to look for patterns and associations (Hilton et al., 2020). Some researchers combine qualitative methods and quantitative methods in the same study, an approach known as *mixed methods*. Mixed methods research can provide a fuller picture of the phenomena under study by utilizing the strengths of both methods.

Recently, researchers have used narrative and other qualitative research approaches to tell the stories of members of racialized and other marginalized groups to develop deeper understanding of the role racism and other forms of oppression have played in their lives. Examples of this research include examination of forms of racism faced at different life course stages (Breheny et al., 2021); life course trajectories of African American centenarians, the changing nature of racism they faced, the survival skills they used, the support systems that sustained them (Heinz et al., 2021); and how different cohorts of Black parents have prepared their sons for racial bias and discrimination (DiAquoi, 2018). Other researchers have examined the impact of chronic physical and mental health conditions on life trajectories (Jetha et al., 2018; Müller et al., 2011); the career trajectories of gay men (MacCharles & Melton, 2021); and the experiences of transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse people (Hereth, 2021; Tasker & Gato, 2020). Use of qualitative exploratory research is essential for telling the stories of members of racialized and other marginalized groups in their own words, filling an important gap in available research. Researchers are also developing measures for anti-oppressive, anti-racist quantitative research (see Knowles & Hawkman, 2019), such as the Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS; Williams et al., 1997) and the Gender Minority Stress and Resilience Measure (Testa et al.; 2015).

Critical Use of Theory and Research

You may already know that social and behavioral science theory and research have been growing at a fast pace in modern times, and you will often feel, as McAvoy (1999) aptly put it, that you are "drowning in a swamp of information" (p. 19), both case information and scientific information. Ironically, as you are drowning in a swamp of information, you will also be discovering that the available scientific information is incomplete. You will also encounter contradictory theoretical propositions and research

results that must be held simultaneously and, where possible, coordinated to develop an integrated picture or understanding. That is, as you might guess, not a simple project. It involves weighing available evidence and analyzing its relevance to the situation at hand. That requires critical thinking. **Critical thinking** is a thoughtful process of questioning and reflecting on knowledge and information that is presented; it involves thinking about your own thinking and the influences on that thinking, as well as a willingness to change your mind. It also involves careful analysis of assumptions and evidence. Critical thinkers also ask, "What is left out of this conceptualization or research?" "What new questions are raised by this research finding?" Throughout the book, we call out critical thinking questions to support your efforts to think critically. As you read this book and other sources of scientific knowledge, begin to think critically about the theory and research they present. Give careful thought to the credibility of the claims made.

Let's look first at theory. It is important to remember that although theorists may try to put checks on their biases, they write from their own cultural frame of reference, from a particular location in the social structure of their society, and from life experiences. As we work in a highly diversified world, we need to be attentive to the possibilities of biases related to race and ethnicity, gender and gender identity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, abilities/disabilities, social class, and so on. One particular concern is that such biases can lead us to think of marginalized members of society as pathological or deficient rather than focusing on the systemic and interpersonal mechanisms that marginalize them.

Social and behavioral science scholars disagree about the criteria for evaluating theory and research. However, we recommend the criteria presented in Table 1.3 because they are consistent with the multidimensional approach of this book and with the value base of the social work profession. There is agreement in the social and behavioral sciences that theory should be evaluated for coherence and conceptual clarity as well as for testability and evidence of empirical support. The criterion of comprehensiveness is specifically related to the multidimensional approach of this book. We do not expect all theories to be multidimensional, but critical analysis of a theory should help us identify deterministic and unidimensional thinking where they exist. The criterion of consistency with emphasis on antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion examines the utility of the theory for a profession that places high value on social justice, and the criterion of usefulness for practice is essential for a profession.

Now let's look at research. The CSWE (2022) calls for social workers to "use ethical, culturally informed, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive approaches in conducting research and building knowledge . . .

TABLE 1.3 ■ Criteria for Evaluating Theory and Research

Criteria for Evaluating Theory
Coherence and conceptual clarity. Are the concepts clearly defined and consistently used? Is the theory free of logical inconsistencies? Are propositions stated in the simplest possible way, without oversimplifying?
Testability and evidence of empirical support. Can the concepts and propositions be expressed in language that makes them observable and accessible to study by persons other than the theoretician? Does research support the theory?
Comprehensiveness. Does the theory address multiple dimensions of persons, environments, and time? What is included and what is excluded? What dimension(s) is (are) emphasized? Does the theory account for important variables that other theories have overlooked or been unable to account for?
Consistency with social work's emphasis on antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Does the theory help us understand human diversity? Does it help us understand racism, systems of oppression, and power arrangements? How inclusive is it? Does it avoid pathologizing members of marginalized groups? Is the theory strengths oriented rather than deficit oriented? Is it useful for understanding how to promote equity and social inclusion?
Usefulness for social work practice. Can principles of action be derived from the theory? How can the theory be used at different levels of practice? Can the theory be used in practice in a way that is consistent with the NASW Code of Ethics and the goals of anti-oppressive, antiracist practice?

Criteria for Evaluating Research
Corroboration. Are the research findings corroborated by other researchers? Are a variety of research methods used in corroborating research? Do the findings fit logically with accepted theory and other research findings?
Multidimensionality. Does the research include multiple dimensions of persons, environments, and time? Does it include social structural variables as well as individual and family measures? If not, do the researchers acknowledge the omissions, connect the research to larger programs of research that include omitted dimensions, or recommend further research to include omitted dimensions?
Definition of terms. Are major variables defined and measured in a manner accessible to people other than the researchers? Are they defined and measured in ways that avoid bias against members of racialized and other marginalized groups?
Limitation of sample. Does the researcher make sufficient effort to include diversity in the sample where appropriate? Are underrepresented groups represented in sufficient numbers to show the variability within them? Are the terms used to describe diversity in the sample precise and accurate? When demographic groups are compared, are they equivalent on important variables? Does the researcher specify the limitations of the sample for generalizing to specific groups?
Influence of setting. Does the researcher specify attributes of the setting of the research, acknowledge the possible contribution of the setting to research outcomes, and present the findings of similar research across a range of settings?
Influence of the researcher. Does the researcher specify their attributes and role in the observed situations? Does the researcher specify their possible contributions to research outcomes?
Social distance. Does the researcher attempt to minimize errors that could occur because of literacy, language, and cultural and power differences between the researcher and respondents?
Specification of inferences. Does the researcher specify how inferences are made, based on the data? What biases, if any, do you identify in the inferences?
Suitability of measures. Does the researcher use measures that seem suited to and sensitive to the situation being researched?

and evaluate design, analysis, and interpretation using an anti-racist and anti-oppressive perspective" (p. 10). Just as theory may be biased toward the experiences of members of dominant groups, so too may research be biased. The results may be misleading, and the interpretation of results may lead to false conclusions about members of marginalized groups. Bias can occur at all stages of the research process:

Theories and research about human behavior are boundless and constantly growing. Active readers must question what they read.

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- Funding sources, governmental agencies, and other vested interests have a strong influence on which problems are selected for research attention. For example, for more than 20 years, between 1996 and 2017, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stopped funding research into firearm injuries and deaths. The result was that public health funding for this issue almost totally dried up (Frankel, 2017).
- Bias can occur in the choice and definition of variables for study. For example, although epidemiological research has consistently found racial disparities in physical and mental health, it is only in recent years that epidemiologists have begun to explore the role racism, both structural and interpersonal, plays in the consistent finding that African Americans have poorer health and more disease than their white peers (Bailey et al., 2017; Garcia, 2022; Goosby et al., 2018; Paradies et al., 2015). When studying marginalized social groups, it is essential to examine the oppressive contexts of their lives.

- Bias can occur in choosing the sample to be studied. A biased sample of an underrepresented group may be used (e.g., it is not uncommon to make Black/white comparisons on a sample that includes middle-class whites and low-income Blacks). Because there are fewer of them, members of underrepresented groups may not be included in sufficient numbers to demonstrate the variability within a particular identity group. Some groups may be reluctant to participate in research because they don't trust the motives of the researchers.
- Bias can occur in data collection. The validity and reliability of most standardized measuring instruments have been evaluated by using them with white, non-Hispanic male respondents, and their cultural relevance with members of racialized groups, women, impoverished persons, or members of other groups is questionable. Language and literacy difficulties may arise with both written survey instruments and interviews. Researchers should keep in mind that interview responses are influenced by similarities and differences in characteristics of the interviewer and the respondent (Hilton et al., 2020).
- Bias can occur in interpretation of the data because empirical research typically fails to produce uncontestable results (Firestein, 2012). It is important to consider the social locations of the researchers making the interpretation.

As with theory evaluation, there is no universally agreed-upon set of criteria for evaluating research. We recommend the nine criteria presented in Table 1.3 for considering the credibility of a research report. These criteria can be applied to either quantitative or qualitative research. The contributing authors and I want you to know that in preparation of this book, we have collectively reviewed hundreds of research reports. Ideally, we would share with you our evaluation of each research report used in our analysis, but that would make for a book of immense length. Please know, however, that we make every effort to think critically about the research cited; on occasion, we will call your attention to problematic issues in the research. One major problem in existing research is that it has too often studied racialized and other marginalized groups without studying the oppressive social structures and interactions that frame their lives. That has led to a deficit approach to such groups, providing individual-level explanations and interpretations (Kornbluh et al., 2021). Such research asks, "What is wrong with marginalized people?" rather than "What is wrong with the oppressive social structures and social systems within which marginalized people live?" In this edition of the book, we have made renewed effort to seek out anti-oppressive, antiracist research to frame our understanding of human behavior.

Critical Thinking Questions 1.5

If I drew a line on the floor with objective reality at one end and subjective reality at the other end, where would you place yourself on the line to demonstrate your own understanding of human behavior?

Objective Reality _____ Subjective Reality

And if I drew another line with determinism at one end and voluntarism at the other end, where would you place yourself on this line?

Determinism _____ Voluntarism

And if I drew a third line with harmony, unity, and social cohesion on one end and conflict, domination, coercion, and exploitation at the other end, where would you place yourself on this line to demonstrate your theory about what happens in human social interaction?

Harmony, Unity _____ Conflict, Domination, Social Cohesion Coercion, Exploitation

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The multidimensional approach outlined in this chapter suggests several principles for social work engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation—for both prevention and remediation services.

- Be aware of your own implicit and explicit biases as you work to improve your capacity for anti-oppressive, antiracist social work practice.
- For successful social work engagement, allow people to tell their own stories and pay attention to how they describe the pattern and flow of their person–environment configurations.
- In the assessment process, collect information about all the critical dimensions of the changing configuration of person and environment.
- In the assessment process, attempt to see the situation from a variety of perspectives. Use multiple data sources, including the person(s), significant others, and direct observations.
- Use multidimensional sources of information about critical dimensions of the situation to develop a dynamic picture of the person–environment configuration.
- Link intervention strategies to the dimensions of the assessment.
- In general, expect more effective outcomes from interventions that are multidimensional, because the situation itself is multidimensional.
- Pay particular attention to the impact of human rights violations and social, racial, economic, and environmental injustice.
- Learn methods for disrupting racism and other forms of oppression in social structures and interpersonal relationships.
- Develop and use practice methods that promote equity and social inclusion.
- Allow the unique stories of people and situations to direct the choice of theory and research to be drawn upon.
- Use scientific knowledge to suggest tentative hypotheses to be explored in the unique situation.
- Give attention to multiple dimensions of person–environment configurations in practice evaluation.

KEY TERMS

Antiracism
Biological embedding
Critical thinking
Dimension
Diversity
Empirical research
Epigenetics
Equity
Globalization
Intersectionality
Linear time
Multidetermined behavior
Multidimensional
Oppression
Positionality
Privilege
Qualitative methods of research
Quantitative methods of research
Racialized groups
Science
Social inclusion
Theory
Time orientation

ACTIVE LEARNING

1. We have used multiple dimensions of person, environment, and time to think about Joshua's story. If you were the social worker at the refugee resettlement agency that sponsored his family's resettlement, you would bring your own unfolding person–environment–time story to that encounter. With the graphic in Figure 1.1 as your guide, write your own multidimensional story. What personal dimensions are important? What environmental dimensions? What time dimensions? What might happen when these two stories encounter each other?
2. Select a social issue that interests you, such as child maltreatment or addiction. List five things you "know" about this issue. Think about how you know what you know. How would you go about confirming or disproving your current state of knowledge on this topic?

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2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Elizabeth D. Hutchison, Leanne Wood, and Cory Cummings

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **2.1** Recognize one's own cognitive and emotional reactions to a case study.
- **2.2** Identify the major themes of seven perspectives on human behavior: systems, critical, social constructionist, psychodynamic, developmental, learning, and humanistic-existential.
- **2.3** Analyze the strengths and limitations of each theoretical perspective.
- **2.4** Identify the merits of a multitheoretical approach to human behavior and practice.
- **2.5** Apply knowledge of seven theoretical perspectives on human behavior to recommend guidelines for social work engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation.

A CASE STUDY ABOUT HUMAN BEHAVIOR THEORY

The pandemic and its impacts provide an opportunity to apply and deepen our understanding of multiple theoretical perspectives.

Case Study 2.1: COVID-19 in the Family

Mariana Rodriguez took a job in laundry services at the nursing home in her small California town in October 2019 soon after her 52nd birthday. She had been working part-time at an assisted-living facility, but her husband Daniel, age 57, was unable to work after a recent heart attack and the family needed the health insurance provided to staff at the nursing home. She and Daniel lived in a 1,300-square-foot house with three bedrooms and one bathroom, along with two of their children, Sofia and Mateo. Sofia was in the second year at community college, and Mateo was in the 10th grade. Another daughter, Camila, lives with her husband, Juan, in an apartment a few blocks away. Mariana's pay at the nursing home was much less than what Daniel had received in his landscaping job, and money was tight. They were trying not to dip into the small savings account that they had carefully built.

When the first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in California in late January 2020, Mariana was not sure what to think of it. She heard so many stories, and some of her friends and relatives were convinced the media and some politicians were exaggerating the situation. When a statewide stay-at-home order was issued, Camila and Juan, both hair stylists, were not able to work. Sofia and Mateo had to quickly find a way to stay involved with their educational programs from home, and Sofia was no longer able to work part-time at the salon where Camila and Juan worked. Daniel and the children begged Mariana to quit her job, where she was considered an essential worker. Mariana said, "I must work; the family depends on my paycheck. Don't worry. I won't get sick."

There was confusion at the nursing home about what precautions the staff needed to take. Masks and other protective equipment were scarce, and some administrators and a number of the staff were not convinced of the necessity for them. In early May 2020, Mariana became so fatigued at work one day that she couldn't deliver laundry to the resident rooms. She tested positive for COVID-19 and was sent home. Over a few hours, she developed a high fever and a harsh cough and stayed in bed. She tried to stay separate from the rest of the family, but social distancing was hard to do in a small house with one bathroom. Over the next week, Daniel, Sofia, and Mateo also tested positive. Daniel was transported to the hospital with a severe breathing problem and needed to be on a ventilator. Mariana was hospitalized two days later, but she responded well to treatment. Sofia and Mateo had milder symptoms and were able to stay at home, with Camila, neighbors, relatives, and friends delivering food to the front door.

Mariana was filled with guilt that she had brought COVID-19 into the house and was despondent that she could not visit Daniel or take care of Sofia and Mateo. The medical team kept her informed about Daniel's condition, and the news was not good. From discussions she had with Daniel after his heart attack, she knew that he did not fear death but was concerned about what would happen to her and their children if he died. Mariana was able to leave the hospital after 10 days of treatment, and

before she left, the medical team brought her a hospital iPad so that she could say goodbye to Daniel. When she returned home, she asked Sofia, Mateo, and Camila to make FaceTime calls to their father. Daniel died 5 days after Mariana was discharged from the hospital. The family turned to the parish priest to see what type of funeral rituals could be planned during the pandemic and were advised that the traditional community ritual was not possible.

They were overcome with grief and yet had some concrete problems to solve. Because Mariana had not been at her job for a full year before becoming ill, she was not eligible for sick leave. The last of the savings went to pay the mortgage and utilities. Mariana's sisters volunteered to feed the family until the small life insurance policy on Daniel paid out. The landscaping company where Daniel was employed for many years loaned the family money for Daniel's burial, which they were able to repay in 2022 after the federal government began a program that reimbursed eligible families for COVID funerals. Camila, Juan, and Sofia were able to contribute a little to the expenses of Mariana's household.

Mariana, still fatigued and grieving, returned to work 10 days after Daniel died. When she pulled into the parking lot at the nursing home, she felt her heart racing and was lightheaded when she got out of the car. She felt fearful at work for the next month and tried to stay away from other people as much as possible. At first she thought her physical symptoms were caused by COVID-19, but upon reflection, she realized they did not occur anywhere but at work. When she told her supervisor that she got dizzy, had trouble breathing, and trembled every time she had to go near the resident room where she thought she had contracted COVID, the supervisor agreed not to send her to that section of the nursing home for a while. As the nursing home administration became more careful about worker safety, Mariana began to feel less fear at work and the symptoms gradually disappeared.

On August 21, 2020, California hair salons were able to reopen with some health precautions. Camila and Juan were able to return to work, and Sofia was able to resume her part-time work at the salon. Mateo struggled with remote learning, but with the help of Sofia and a cousin, he was able to get back on track. He was happy when outdoor sports were once again allowed and he could resume playing with the high school soccer team. He was sad, however, because his dad had always been his soccer mentor and had never missed one of his games. Juan made an effort to fill in for Daniel in that role.

The financial situation stabilized a bit when Sofia increased her hours working at the salon and Mateo was able to work full-time in the summer and part-time during the school year at the landscaping company where Daniel had worked. The family was learning to get by without Daniel, but Mariana continued to feel guilty about bringing COVID-19 home and became worried that her deep sadness was lasting so long. She didn't want to burden the children with her sadness, so in early September 2021, after talking with the nursing home social worker, she began to attend a grief support group at the hospital. In those conversations, Mariana talked about her guilt and sadness and recalled that when she was a child, her grandmother had contracted influenza from her and died. This was something that she had never given conscious thought to, but she realized that she had always carried some guilt about that. After a few sessions with the support group, Mariana decided to talk with the parish priest about planning a Día de los Muertos celebration for all the people who had died from COVID-19 in their largely Mexican American parish. She knew that she had never had the chance to fully grieve the loss of Daniel or to celebrate his life with a loving community.

MULTIPLE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH

As you think about the details of the unfolding story of Mariana Rodriguez and her family, you may discover that you have some informal theory or theories of your own about what they have been through and how they are coping now. If we asked you what caught your attention as you read the story, we would begin to learn something about your theory or theories of human behavior as you have developed it or them so far. There is much information in the case material as presented, but the case may have raised questions for you as well and left you wanting more information. What you see as gaps in the information might also tell us something about your theory or theories. Theories help us organize vast and multifaceted information.

The purposes of this chapter are twofold: first, to help you identify and refine your own theory or theories of human behavior and, second, to help you think critically about commonly used formal theories of human behavior that have been developed by behavioral science scholars and used to guide social work practice.

Social work has a long tradition of being guided by a person and environment construct for understanding human behavior. Different theories have been considered essential to understanding person and environment in different time periods, but theory has always been an important resource for social work practice in all settings. In its 2022 Educational Policy Statement, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) reiterated the important role that theory plays in social work practice, noting the way that theory supports the development of four social work competencies. It states that "social workers understand theories of human behavior and person-in-environment and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge" to facilitate

- engagement with (Competency 6),
- assessment of (Competency 7),
- intervention with (Competency 8), and
- evaluation of practice with (Competency 9)

"individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities" (CSWE, 2022, pp. 11–13).

Although different theories have been considered essential knowledge for social workers in different periods of time, there is general agreement that contemporary social workers must use a range of theories that draw on a number of disciplines to help us understand the practice situations we encounter and to see the possibilities for change. As we have come more and more to recognize that human behavior is multidimensional, we have also recognized the need for multiple disciplines and a multitheoretical framework to understand it (Berzoff et al., 2022; Sapolsky, 2017). There are many theories from which to draw: general theories of human behavior, as well as theories designed to understand specific dimensions of person and environment covered in this book. There are also a number of ways of grouping existing theories into categories or perspectives. We have organized them into seven broad perspectives: systems perspective, critical perspective, social constructionist perspective, psychodynamic perspective, developmental perspective, learning perspective, and humanistic-existential perspective. An overview of the important principles, major concepts, and related theories of each perspective is presented in Table 2.1. This table can be helpful to review as you continue to learn more about human behavior.

TABLE 2.1 ■ Important Principles, Major Concepts, and Related Theories of Seven Theoretical Perspectives

Theoretical Perspectives	Important Principles	Major Concepts	Related Theories
Systems	● Human behavior is the outcome of interactions within and among systems of interrelated parts. ● Each person is involved in multiple interacting systems. ● Social systems can provide both support and challenge for human behavior and development. ● Humans are embedded in systems that include other humans as well as nonhuman actors, such as animals, nature, planetary systems, and technology. ● Systems have boundaries that may be relatively open or closed.	● Interactions ● Interrelated parts ● Feedback mechanisms ● Closed system ● Open system ● Interdependence ● Mutual influence ● Holistic ● Risk factors ● Protective factors ● Social networks ● Social capital ● Complexity ● Actants ● Cyborg ● Anthropocene ● Autopoietic	● General systems theory ● Ecological theory ● Bioecological perspective ● Risk and resilience theory ● Social network theory ● Actor–network theory ● Theories of the Anthropocene ● Autopoietic systems theory

Theoretical Perspectives	Important Principles	Major Concepts	Related Theories
Critical	● Exploitation and domination are central features of the capitalist economic system. ● Contemporary patterns of exploitation and domination are a continuation of 18th- and 19th-century colonialism. ● Members of nondominant groups, such as those based on gender, class, and race, live their lives at the intersection of multiple identities. ● Race and racism are central organizing features of social life in the United States. ● Racism and other forms of oppression must be challenged.	● Injustice ● Pursuit of justice ● Exploitation ● Dominance ● Alienation ● Colonialization ● Neoliberalism ● Global South ● Global North ● Race and racism ● Intersectionality ● Privilege ● Whiteness ● Microaggressions ● Western imperialism ● Indigenous knowledge	● Marxist economic theory ● Neo-Marxist critical theories ● Feminist theories ● Postcolonial theories ● Southern theory ● Critical race theory ● Intersectionality theories ● Racial formation theory ● White privilege theory ● Microaggression theory ● Indigenous theory of Western imperialism
Social constructionist	● Social reality is constructed and constantly reconstructed as humans interact. ● People construct meaning, a sense of self, and a social world through interactions with each other. ● As they interact, humans develop symbols to which they attach meaning. ● There is no singular objective reality but rather multiple realities that are created in different contexts. ● Social interaction is grounded in language customs as well as cultural and historical contexts. ● Binary language customs produce social hierarchy and power structure.	● Social reality ● Social construction ● Social interactions ● Meaning ● Sense of self ● Shared meanings ● Symbols ● Impression management ● Social construction of race ● Language ● Binary opposition language ● Social construction of sexuality and gender ● Queer ● Standpoint ● Multiple realities ● Entrainment	● Symbolic interaction theory ● Structuralism ● Poststructuralism ● Queer theory ● Postmodern theories ● Standpoint theory ● Affect theory
Psychodynamic	● Internal processes motivate human behavior. ● Unconscious as well as conscious mental activity serve as motivating forces in human behavior. ● Early childhood experiences are central in the development of the self. ● Attachment relationships with others are absolute human needs. ● Individuals frequently use defense mechanisms to cope with internal and external threats.	● Needs ● Drives ● Emotions ● Mental states ● Eros/Thanatos ● Conscious ● Preconscious ● Unconscious ● Id ● Ego	● Drive theory ● Topographical theory ● Structural model of the mind ● Psychosexual stage theory ● Ego psychology ● Object relations theory ● Attachment theory ● Self-psychology ● Relational and intersubjective theories

(*Continued*)

TABLE 2.1 ■ Important Principles, Major Concepts, and Related Theories of Seven Theoretical Perspectives (*Continued*)

Theoretical Perspectives	Important Principles	Major Concepts	Related Theories
		• Superego • Psychosexual stages • Unfolding human capacities • Ego defense mechanisms • Mastery • Adaptation • Survival • Object relations • Tripolar self • Emotional connectedness	
Developmental	• Human development occurs in defined, age-graded stages. • Each stage of life is based on a complex interaction of biological, psychological, and social processes. • Individual development must be understood in the context of culture and historical trends. • There is much diversity in life course trajectories. • Advantage and disadvantage are accumulated over the life course.	• Developmental stages • Developmental tasks • Roles and statuses • Epigenetic principle • Psychosocial crisis • Basic strength • Core pathology • Historical trends and events • Timing of lives • Linked lives • Human capacity for choice making • Diversity • Developmental risk and protection • Cumulative advantage/ disadvantage	• Freud's theory of psychosexual stages • Jung's theory of stages of life • Piaget's theory of cognitive stages • Kohlberg's and Gilligan's theories of moral development • Erikson's psychosocial theory • Life span or life cycle theory • Life cycle models for specific groups • Theory of transgender identity development • Life course perspective
Learning	• Human behavior is learned when individuals interact with the environment. • Human behavior is learned through different mechanisms of learning, including association of environmental stimuli, reinforcement, observation and modeling, and personal beliefs and expectations. • Human behavior is learned through a combination of conditioning and cognitive methods of learning. • There is a limit to rationality in cognitive learning. • Humans engage in both implicit and explicit cognition.	• Respondent conditioning • Association of stimuli • Unconditioned stimulus/ conditioned stimulus • Unconditioned response/ conditioned response • Exposure-based psychotherapy • Instrumental conditioning • Reinforcement • Positive reinforcers • Negative reinforcers • Behavioral extinguishment • Beliefs • Expectations • Self-efficacy	• Classical conditioning • Operant conditioning • Bandura's social cognitive theory • Social exchange and rational choice theories • Cognitive load theory • Dual process theory • Learned helplessness • Cognitive behavioral therapy • Dialectical behavioral therapy • Cognitive processing therapy

Theoretical Perspectives	Important Principles	Major Concepts	Related Theories
		• Efficacy expectation • Agency • Costs and benefits • Cognitive load • Fast and slow thinking • Implicit and explicit cognition • Implicit bias	
Humanistic-existential	• Humans have the capacity to make choices, search for meaning, and constantly strive for personal growth. • Human behavior is best understood from the internal frame of reference of the person and not from external evaluation. • Each person is unique, has worth, and should be treated with dignity. • Each person is responsible for the choices they make within the limits of freedom. • Human suffering and power imbalances must be acknowledged and addressed.	• Human conscious experiences • Internal frame of reference of the person • Human agency • Search for meaning • Unique • Motivation • Hierarchy of needs • Physiological needs • Safety needs • Love and belongingness needs • Esteem needs • Self-actualization needs • Self-understanding • Self-directed behavior • Formative tendency • Actualizing tendency • Authenticity • Unconditional positive regard • Empathic listening • Freedom • Responsibility • Alienation • Fear of death • Learned optimism • Suffering • Power imbalances • Critical consciousness	• Maslow's theory of human motivation • Transpersonal psychology • Roger's person-centered theory • Fromm's humanistic psychoanalysis theory • May's existential psychology theory • Positive psychology • Critical humanism • Ubuntuism

We have selected these seven perspectives for a number of reasons. Each has a wide range of applications across dimensions of human behavior and is used in empirical research. Each has been reconceptualized and extended over time to keep current with rapid knowledge development. Each paid little attention to diversity, and most paid little attention to issues of oppression, equity, and inclusion in early versions, but all have evolved over time to address diversity, human rights, injustice, and the pursuit of justice. Since the last edition of this book, each of the perspectives has taken a much more critical approach to understanding societal arrangements and become much more intentional

in addressing issues of racism and other forms of oppression. This is a much more rapid theoretical revision than we have seen at any time since we first began work associated with this book in the mid-1990s. Each of the perspectives was developed by European or American theorists but in recent years have begun to be influenced by thinking in other regions of the world. Some of the perspectives had multidisciplinary roots in their early versions, and each has benefited by collaboration across disciplines in more recent refinement and elaboration. Some blurring of the lines between perspectives has been occurring for some time. Theorists are increasingly being influenced by each other as well as by societal changes and have begun to borrow ideas from each other and to build new theory by combining aspects of existing theory. As you can see, theory, like other aspects of human behavior, is ever-changing.

Each of the perspectives presented in this chapter is composed of a number of diverse theories. We present the important principles of each perspective and not a detailed discussion of the various theories within the perspective. Although we trace the development of each perspective over time, we pay particular attention to some of the recent extensions of the perspectives that seem most useful in contemporary times. We draw special attention to instances where new research is supporting premises of the early root theories as well as recent theoretical revisions. If you are interested in a more in-depth look at these theoretical perspectives, there are many resources to help you do this. We introduce the perspectives in this chapter, and you will see variations of them throughout subsequent chapters, where theory and research about specific dimensions of person and environment are explored.

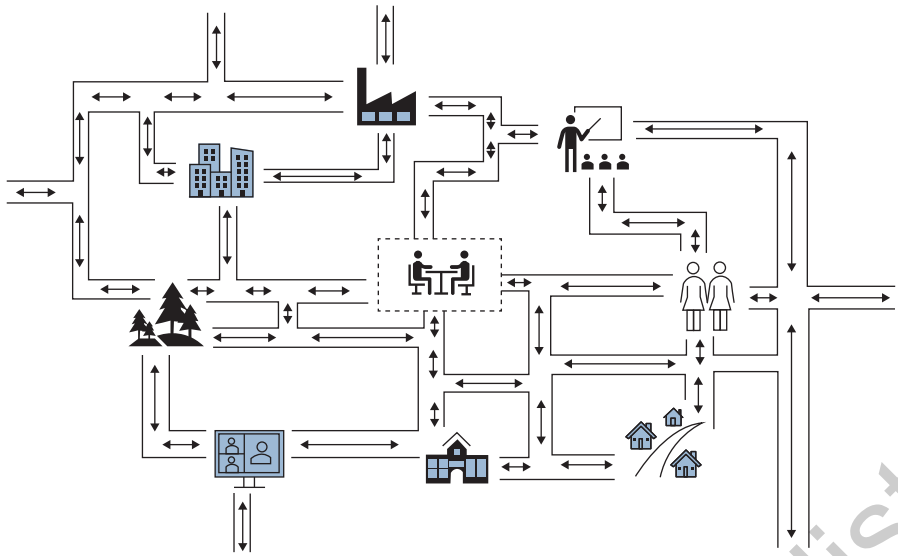
In this chapter, in addition to presenting an overview of ideas, we analyze the scientific merit of the perspectives and their usefulness for social work practice. The five criteria for critical understanding of theory identified in Chapter 1 provide the framework for our critical analyses of the perspectives: coherence and conceptual clarity; testability and empirical support; comprehensiveness; consistency with social work's emphasis on anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion; and usefulness for social work practice.

Systems Perspective

When you read the case study at the beginning of this chapter, you may have thought of it as a story about a family system—a story about Mariana Rodriguez, her husband Daniel, and their three children, Camila, Sofia, and Mateo—even though Mariana appears as a central figure in the story telling. You may have noted how intertwined the lives of Mariana, Daniel, Camila, Juan, Sofia, and Mateo are and the impact each had and is having on the overall wellbeing of the family. They are also connected to people far beyond their immediate family, connected in a global pandemic. Prominent in the story is how COVID-19 spread rapidly in their small house, crossing the boundary from Mariana's work system into the family system. We see the way the family interacted with a number of other institutions and social systems as they coped with the challenges COVID-19 brought to their family: a hospital system, school systems, employing organizations, government assistance programs, and a network of neighbors, relatives, and friends. The Catholic parish of which they are members has served as a spiritual resource to the family and also provided some concrete services, such as meal delivery and funeral planning. We also are aware of the important role that nonhumans play in the story of Mariana Rodriguez and her family: the SARS-CoV-2 virus, masks and other protective equipment, diagnostic tests, medical treatments, and electronic communication devices. These are some of the ideas that the systems perspective suggests for understanding what has happened and is happening with Mariana Rodriguez and her family.

The **systems perspective** sees human behavior as the outcome of interactions within and among systems of interrelated parts. It focuses on the interconnectedness of elements of the social and physical worlds. The roots of the systems perspective are very interdisciplinary, and there are many theoretical variations. The perspective has been influenced by contributions from biology, cultural anthropology, economics, engineering, mathematics, physics, political science, psychology, and sociology. Figure 2.1 provides a visual representation of the systems perspective, and Table 2.1 lists the important principles, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

FIGURE 2.1 ■ Systems Perspective



Social workers were attracted to the systems perspective in the 1960s, and *general systems theory* was the dominant theoretical perspective in the social work literature during the 1960s and 1970s. This theory was based primarily on the work of biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, who defined systems as "sets of elements standing in interrelation" (von Bertalanffy, 1969, p. 38). von Bertalanffy proposed that any element is best understood by considering its interactions with its constituent parts as well as its interactions with larger systems of which it is a part. For example, Mariana Rodriguez and members of her family are best understood by considering the interactions among the family members as well as the interactions the family has with other systems. von Bertalanffy identified two types of systems: closed systems and open systems. A *closed system* is isolated from other systems in its environment. An *open system* is in constant interaction with other systems. He emphasized that *feedback mechanisms*—processes by which elements of the system affect each other in a reciprocal way—produce both stability (homeostasis) and change within and across systems. Socially and geographically isolated families and communities could be considered examples of relatively closed systems. Some web-based social networks are examples of comparatively open systems. The family of Mariana Rodriguez seems to be a comparatively open system that was able to receive the resources needed to manage their COVID-19 crisis.

In the 1980s, *ecological theory*, also known as *ecosystems theory*, became popular across several disciplines, including social work. This theory comes from the field of ecology, which focuses on the relationships and interactions between living organisms and their environments. Interdependence and mutual influence are emphasized. The environment exerts influence on an individual, family, or social group, but individuals, families, and groups can also have an impact on external systems. Social workers who promoted the ecological perspective called for a *holistic* view of practice situations that considers the multiple environmental influences involved (Germain & Gitterman, 1996). The ecological perspective extended general systems theory by considering the important role of physical environments in human behavior, and recent systems theorizing has expanded upon this idea.

More recently, social workers have drawn on an extension of Urie Bronfenbrenner's *bioecological perspective* to understand individual behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). As it evolves, the bioecological approach includes many and varied attempts to incorporate ongoing neuroscience research into theorizing about the ways that biological factors are intertwined with psychological and sociocultural factors in the creation of human behavior. This approach considers gene–environment interactions, the impact of the environment on brain development, and the intertwined nature of biology, cognition, and emotion. One theoretical approach often used in social work is *risk, protection, and resilience theory*, which is an extension of the ecological perspective. It uses concepts from epidemiology and

public health to explain the complexity of influences on human behavior. This theory proposes risk factors and protective factors in both the person and the environment. **Risk factors** are conditions and circumstances that increase the likelihood of a harmful outcome of person and environment interactions, and **protective factors** are conditions and circumstances that support a positive outcome (see Jenson & Fraser, 2016). In the past decade or so, biomedical researchers have expanded on the ecological risk, protection, and resilience model to propose a theory that views human behavior as developing from the biological embedding of conditions in the social and physical environments (Nist et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2022). While most of the research on risk, protection, and resilience has focused on individual wellbeing, the approach has also been used at the community level to examine health equity (Plough, 2021).

Social network theory is a systems theory that focuses on the ties between actors in social networks connected either directly or indirectly by interpersonal relationships, social interactions, and an exchange of resources (Borgatti et al., 2018; Cook, 1987). Yang and Horak (2019) note that the Korean word for network is *inmaek,* which "literally means people entangled like vines" (p. 397). The actors in networks may be individuals but they may also be groups, communities, or organizations. Social networks are typically presented visually, with members of the network—individuals, groups, or organizations—represented as points. Lines are drawn between pairs of points to demonstrate a relationship between them. Arrows are often used to show the flow of exchanges in a relationship. These graphic displays illuminate such issues as network size, density of relationships, strength of relationships, reciprocity of relationships, and access to power and influence. *Social capital theory* is an outgrowth of social network theory. Social networks provide **social capital**, both direct and indirect connections to others who are potential sources of a number of types of resources (Horak et al., 2019). Social network theory has stimulated considerable empirical research.

Social network theory focuses on relationships between and among human actors. In contrast, influenced by scientific inquiry in a number of disciplines, recent systems theorizing emphasizes the nonhuman elements involved in human behavior and broadens understanding of the complexity of interactions from which human behavior emerges. Taken as a whole, these new theories are attempting to explain the *complexity* of contemporary life, acknowledging the roles that nonhuman animals, technology, and the natural world play in human behavior. The following discussion highlights two of these recent system theories, actor–network theory and theories of the Anthropocene as well as another recent systems theory that takes a different approach to understanding systems boundaries, Luhmann's systems theory.

Actor–network theory (ANT; Haraway, 2008, 2016; Latour, 2007, 2017) extends social network theory to look beyond human relationships. The basic premise of this theory is that societies are not made up of humans alone. Societies are networks made up of both human and nonhuman actors, including such things as animals, viruses, plants, electrons, gravity, climate, and computers. Social life includes collaborations between humans and nonhuman entities. ANT refers to all of these entities as *actants,* which exert force on other actants and have the capacity to modify, even transform, one another. ANT theorists suggest that our study of networks should decenter humans and recognize the important roles that other entities play in network exchanges. They decry the humanistic assumption that humans have more value than other actants. They call attention to the important role that material entities—such as keyboards, computer screens, websites, and medical technologies—play in human relationships, suggesting that these entities are more than resources for humans; they are also important actants in network interactions. Ritzer and Stepnisky (2022) note that ANT can be used to understand the influence that the virus SARS-CoV-2 and the related disease COVID-19 exerted on societies around the world. It was an actant that changed everyday face-to-face relationships, prompting such innovations in human behavior as the wearing of masks and staying 6 feet apart. Government, medical and scientific professions, and the pharmaceutical industry were important actants in the global response to COVID-19.

Social network theorist Donna Haraway (1991, 2016) challenges the idea that there are clear boundaries between humans, technology, and the natural world and introduces the term *cyborg* to refer to a cybernetic organism that is a hybrid of human and machine. Technology of many types is so pervasively used to extend human abilities—to travel, communicate, fight wars, learn, do business,

and live in comfort—that we are all effectively cyborgs. Actants such as Siri, Alexa, self-driving cars, assistive robots, and computer algorithms act with an autonomy once thought possible only of humans. Haraway (1991, 2008, 2016) suggests that humans are put together in bits and pieces over time through relationships with technology and other nonhuman elements, such as companion animals and aspects of the natural world, such as sunlight.

In recent years, interdisciplinary *theories of the Anthropocene* have received considerable attention (see Chernilo, 2017; Ellis, 2018). The **Anthropocene** is described as the current geological era in which collective human activity has become the dominant influence on climate and the natural environment. Like ANT, theories of the Anthropocene decenter humans and argue that humans must abandon the self-important idea that human societies can be separated from nature. These theories take a more global perspective than ANT. They emphasize the way that human societies are embedded in and dependent on the natural environment and focus on the global problem of human-caused changes to the planetary ecosystem. They call attention to the great acceleration of population growth and the capitalistic economic system that depends upon endless growth in consumerism. They also take a critical view of how these circumstances are damaging the natural world and benefitting wealthy members of societies while passing the risks on to economically marginalized groups, communities, and countries. They argue that we need new theories that help us understand nature on its own terms and where humans fit in the ecosystem. They recommend a *world ecological perspective* that examines how societies shape and are shaped by the natural environment. Theories of the Anthropocene call for social workers to consider whether it is possible to promote human and community well-being without working to protect the well-being of the planetary system in which human lives are embedded (M. D. Allen, 2020).

Actor–network theory and theories of the Anthropocene challenge the idea that there are clear boundaries between humans, nonhuman animals, technology, and the natural world. In this way, they can be seen as proposing very open systems with highly permeable boundaries. In contrast, German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (2011) proposes a systems theory that suggests that in highly complex societies, systems must find a way to reduce complexity to make life more manageable. They do this by developing cultures and structures that clearly differentiate one system from other systems. Systems are open to interaction with other systems, but they are operatively closed, meaning that system behavior is influenced only by the system's operations—its language, culture, and processes—and not by the language, culture, and processes of other systems. The environment can affect the system only by causing it irritations or disruptions, but the system will have its own conditions for responding to these irritations. Luhmann argues that systems are *autopoietic*, meaning they are self-created and reproduced. For example, think about social workers who work in child welfare services. They assess child safety issues in the context of their social work knowledge of child development and family dynamics, and in the process, they often interact with medical professionals and the court system. When interacting with those two systems, they must recognize that those systems use their own often different language, culture, and processes to think about child safety. Luhmann has made some good observations about how human social systems try to manage complexity and, when working across social system boundaries, social workers will need to understand the language, cultures, and processes of these other professional systems. At the same time, it is important for social workers to recognize the nonhuman elements involved in human behavior and consider the permeable boundaries of human, nonhuman animals, technology, and the natural environment.

The pieces of this globe come together to form a unified whole—each part interacts with and influences the other parts—but the pieces are interdependent, as suggested by the systems perspective.

Critical Analysis of the Systems Perspective

In terms of *coherence and conceptual clarity*, some concepts associated with the systems perspective have been criticized as vague and somewhat ambiguous. While the concepts in some versions of the perspective continue to be highly abstract, overall recent systems theorizing has coherence and conceptual clarity. Considering *testability and empirical support*, a long tradition of research supporting a systems perspective can be found in anthropology and sociology. The systems perspective has been greatly strengthened in recent years with research in neuroscience, epidemiology, and environmental science. Social network analysis is used to analyze many types of networks and has research evidence supporting its validity (see Ahmed et al., 2020; Falcone et al., 2020).

The systems perspective is clearly devoted to the ideal of *comprehensiveness.* Different versions of the perspective address different system elements, and some versions are more comprehensive than others. Bioecological theories and research are shedding light on the complex interactions of various biological systems with each other and with psychosocial processes. Both the bioecological theories and theories of the Anthropocene include time dimensions. Actor–network theory makes an important contribution by calling attention to the nonhuman elements—technology and the natural world—involved in human behavior, and theories of the Anthropocene focus on the planetary ecosystem. *Anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion* are not the explicit focus of systems theorizing. However, bioecological research contributes to understanding of human diversity, and the risk, protection, and resilience research has begun to explore racism and other forms of oppression as a risk factor for racialized and other oppressed groups (see Z. Bailey et al., 2017; Goosby et al., 2018). Social network analysis has great potential for exploring patterns of social inclusion and exclusion (Young et al., 2020). Theories of the Anthropocene give some attention to social, economic, and environmental justice (see Langemeyer & Connolly, 2020).

As noted in Chapter 1 in this book, social work has been guided by an ecological person-in-environment framework for over 6 decades. This attests to the perspective's *usefulness for social work practice.* Systems thinking is consistent with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2021) ethical principle "Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships." That said, the systems perspective is perhaps more useful for assessment and practice evaluation than for directing social work engagement and interventions. The greatest value of the systems perspective is that it can be used at any level of practice, including individual, family, group, organization, community, or society. It also has merit because it surpasses other perspectives in suggesting that we should widen the scope of assessment and intervention and expect better outcomes from multidimensional interventions. Bioecological theory and research cue social workers to the neurological and other biological mechanisms involved in human behavior. Social network theory provides tools for analyzing the social networks of individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Actor–network theory breaks ground for social workers by recommending attention to nonhuman actants—such as technology, companion animals, and the natural environment—in the situations they encounter in practice. Luhmann's autopoetic systems theory is helpful when social workers are engaged in advocacy; it reminds us that to be effective advocates, we must make the effort to understand the language, culture, and processes of the social systems we target with our advocacy efforts.

Critical Thinking Questions 2.1

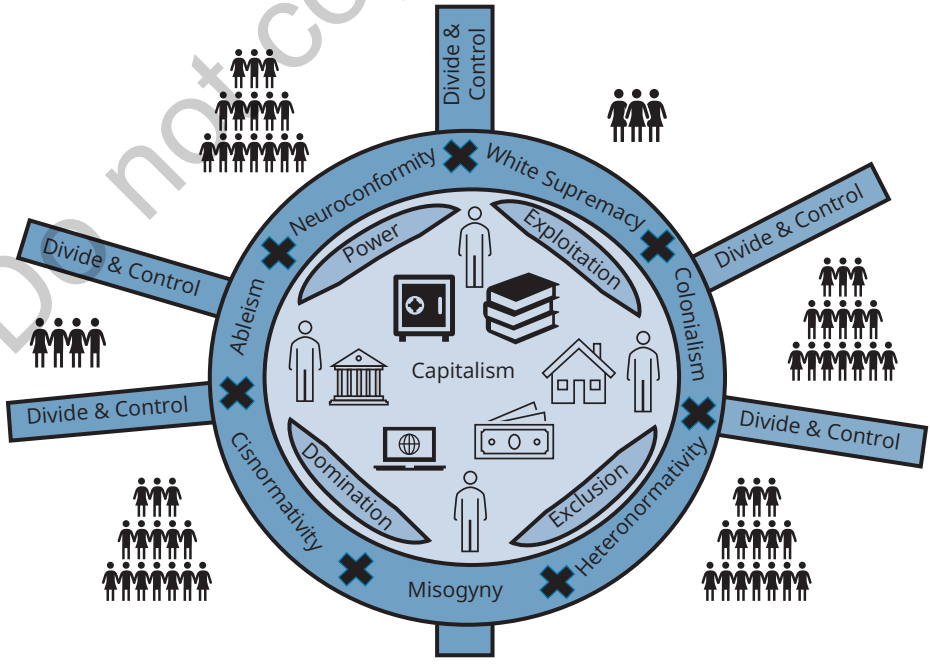
As you read the story of the COVID-19 crisis faced by Mariana Rodriguez and her family, what aspects of their situation caught your attention? What would the systems perspective draw your attention to? What more would you like to know? Through the systems lens, how would you explain their story to someone else? What types of social capital were available to Mariana Rodriguez and her family from the social networks of which they were a part? The systems perspective focuses on the interconnectedness of nonhuman and human intertwined elements of the physical and social world. How did the COVID-19 pandemic help you to think about that interconnectedness?

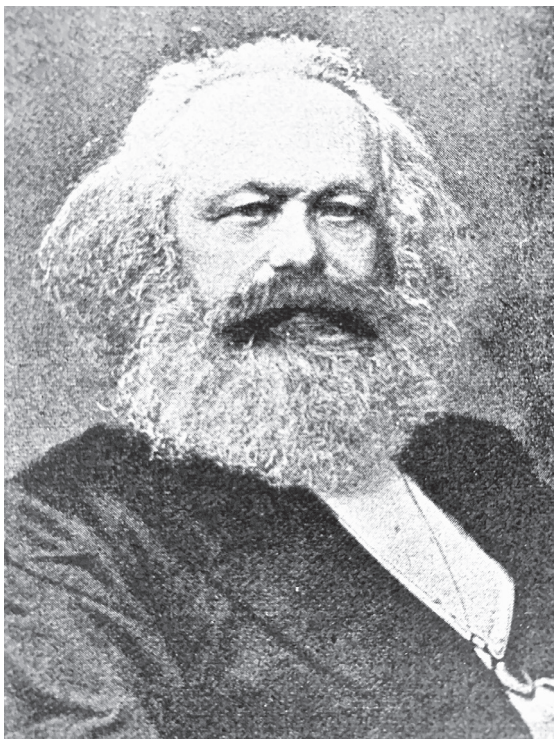
Critical Perspective

When we think about Mariana Rodriguez and her family, we note the precarious financial and health situations they faced during the worst of the COVID-19 epidemic. A pandemic like COVID-19 is a universal problem across geography, race, gender, and class, but not all are affected equally. The pandemic story of Mariana Rodriguez and her family is a story of the intersection of race, gender, and economic inequality. During the first wave of the pandemic, people of color suffered more job loss than white workers and were more likely to be among "essential" workers whose work could not be carried out remotely. Like Mariana Rodriguez, nearly half of Black or Hispanic health care workers earn minimum or less than minimum wage. One in five Black and one in six Hispanic workers could work remotely from home, compared to one in three white workers (Tiako et al., 2021; Powell, 2021). People of color were more likely to work in jobs that required interacting with the public, which presented more exposure to the virus, especially if they were working in health care settings. They were hospitalized at a rate of about four times the rate of white workers. One in every three jobs held by women was deemed "essential," and women like Mariana Rodriguez were overrepresented among low-wage "essential" workers, many of whom did not have sick leave or health insurance. While wealthy families could escape highly contagious areas or, when infected, quarantine in separate spaces of large homes, families like Mariana's typically live in smaller spaces with no such luxury. In the early days of the pandemic, the federal government was weak in enforcing worker safety and slow to promote availability of personal protective equipment (Tiako et al., 2021; Powell, 2021). These are some of the observations suggested by the critical perspective about the experiences of Mariana Rodriguez and her family with COVID-19.

The **critical perspective** focuses on injustice and the pursuit of justice. There are many versions of the critical perspective; in this section, we introduce Marxian and neo-Marxian theories, feminist theories, postcolonial theories, and theories of race and racism. Figure 2.2 provides a visual representation of the critical perspective, and Table 2.1 lists the important principles, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective. The roots of contemporary critical theories are usually traced to the works of Karl Marx (1887/1967; 1932/1964), which focused on exploitation and domination of workers as central ingredients in the capitalist economic system. For Marx, exploitation and domination lead to a perversion of human relationships and to workers becoming alienated from their own work and from their true nature. Marx proposed, however, that workers are capable of recognizing the exploitation and achieving *class consciousness,* or awareness of one's place in a system of social classes.

FIGURE 2.2 ■ Critical Perspective





Karl Marx

iStock.com/clu

Marxist theory evolved over time, and newer versions are often referred to as *neo-Marxist theory.* Neo-Marxist theorizing includes some theorists who criticize the economic determinism proposed by Marx. Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1987) and other *critical theorists* argued that as capitalism underwent change, people were more likely to be controlled by culture and their consumer role than by their work position. They argue that human lives have become dominated by the culture industry, which is controlled by mass media. Critical theorists suggest that the culture industry plays a major role in turning workers into consumers, calling attention to the role of the advertising industry in exploiting consumers. Other neo-Marxists continue to focus on the economic system, calling attention to the exploitation and domination in the globalized capitalist economy. Wallerstein (2004) argues that the *core* geographical area (North America and Western Europe) dominates the capitalist world economy and exploits the rest of the global capitalist system. Sassen (2014) contends that global capitalism is now based on "predatory formations" that are producing a brutal form of inequality based on expulsion and exclusion. Some communities stand in the way of extraction of natural resources and the production of profit, and these communities are expelled and excluded from contemporary social and economic systems. Economists Banerjee and Duflo (2019) call these "left behind" communities. Left behind communities exist in Africa, Latin America, and central Asia but also in increasingly isolated rural and urban communities in North America and Europe. Sassen (2014) names six forms of contemporary expulsion: poverty, outmigration, foreclosures, unemployment, displacement, and imprisonment.

Feminist theories originated during an era of binary gender conceptualization; such theories focus on male domination of the major social institutions and present a vision of a just world based on gender equity. As feminist theories have evolved over time, they have raised several basic questions about the organization of social life, and the answers to these questions have produced different varieties of feminist theory. Lengermann and Niebrugge (2022) trace the development of feminist theory, suggesting that it has moved through the following sequence of questions being raised:

1. And what about the women? Where are the women in any situation being reported? What are their contributions to the situation? If they are not present in the situation, why not? This is a question about inclusion.
2. Why is women's situation the way it is? What social forces are involved in the marginalized way women are situated in the world?
3. What about the differences among women? Feminist and critical race theorists have developed *intersectionality theory*, which recognizes numerous vectors of oppression and privilege, including not only gender but also class, race, physical disabilities, global location, sexual orientation, and age (see Crenshaw, 2021).
4. How can we change and improve the social world so as to make it a more just place for all people?
5. How and why does gender inequality persist in the modern world?
6. What is really being understood by the category "gender"? This question has arisen as the concept of gender as binary has been problematized.

Postcolonial theories focus on the ongoing impact of 18thand 19th-century colonialism on the social, cultural, political, and economic development of both the colonizing and colonized nations. *Colonialism* was a process by which primarily European nations and the United States created empires

and occupied and dominated overseas nations, sometimes by administrative rule from a distance and sometimes by establishing permanent settlements in colonies. The colonizers stripped the colonized territories of political and economic sovereignty and constructed a hierarchy in which colonized people were treated as inferior in legal, social, and cultural terms (Steinmetz, 2014). To maintain dominance, the colonizers racialized people they were colonizing as inferior people who, in their minds, rightfully belonged at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This perspective observes that Western societies have created an image of themselves grounded in their encounter with colonized people, an image that nourishes and sustains Western privilege and power. The end of the colonial era did not destroy the power structures established by colonialism. Many postcolonial theorists argue that we now live in a neocolonial world in which a philosophy of *neoliberalism* puts great faith in the rationality of a free market and opposes any form of collectivism, state planning, or safety net for those who are economically disadvantaged, using the argument that any governmental involvement would hurt economic growth. Neoliberalism became prominent at the end of the colonial era, ensuring that those who held power during the colonial era were well situated to continue to hold power (see Go, 2013).

Southern theory, one version of postcolonial theory, has been developed in the Global South to critique existing social and behavioral theory and research, arguing that Southern societies have been studied using Global North concepts and research methods and this has led to a colonizing of knowledge (Connell, 2007; Connell et al., 2017). These theorists argue that Indigenous knowledge has been discounted as primitive and irrational. Southern theory has called for alternative theoretical concepts and a respect for Indigenous knowledge. Some Southern theorists are synthesizing Northern theories and Indigenous philosophy to form new theory. An example of this will be presented in the discussion of the humanistic-existential perspective.

Because of the historical relationship between colonialism and the social construction of race, *theories of race and racism* call attention to the postcolonial perpetuation of racial domination as well as to ongoing resistance to that domination. **Critical race theory (CRT)** is the best-known theory of race and racism, largely because it has been targeted in recent years by the political right in the United States as a theory that should be eliminated from public school curricula (even though it was seldom, if ever, taught in public school curricula). CRT was developed in the 1980s by a group of legal scholars who concluded that racism is a permanent part of U.S. society, and law is not a neutral tool that can end it (Bell, 2021). CRT has been summarized as having six basic tenets (Bell, 2021; Delgado, 2017):

- Race is a social construction, not a biological phenomenon. It "represents a perceived set of shared phenotypical characteristics that are assigned meaning and value by society" (Bell, 2021, p. 109).
- Racism is a regular part of U.S. society and racial hierarchy was codified in the founding documents of the country.
- The racial hierarchy places white people at the top and Black people at the bottom, with other people of color falling between white and Black people. White people receive both psychological and material benefit from their whiteness.
- There is not one "Black experience." Black individuals live their lives at the intersection of multiple identities (intersectionality), such as those related to class and gender.
- People of color have a unique and valuable perspective on their lives, but most of the science about race has been written from a white, Eurocentric perspective.
- Scholarship on race and racism should use "personal stories, allegories, metaphors, analogies, and other related methods of storytelling" (Bell, 2021, p. 111).

Scholars from racialized groups other than Black and African American have proposed variations of CRT to consider the distinct ways that these groups are racialized. These variations include AsianCrit (Qin et al., 2022), LatCrit (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001), and TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005). Proponents of AsianCrit, LatCrit, and TribalCrit agree that race is a social construction and see their theories as supplementary and complementary to CRT. AsianCrit, also known as Asianization, emphasizes the

way Asian Americans are cast as a monolithic group of "overachieving model minorities, perpetual foreigners, and threatening yellow perils" (Museus, 2014, p. 23). LatCrit theory calls attention to language, immigration, and ethnicity in the racialization of Latinx people and also to the intersection of racism, sexism, and classism (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). TribalCrit highlights the way that colonization processes continue to privilege European American knowledge and power structures, and it argues that material gain for white people and assimilation of Indigenous people are driving goals.

Omi and Winant (2015, 2021) present a *theory of racial formation* that proposes that race and racism are central organizing features of social life in the United States. Race is a dominant category that shapes history, culture, and social structure. Like CRT, Omi and Winant note that race is a social construction, not a biological reality. Race is connected to racial identity at the micro level and is embedded in the economic, cultural, and political institutions at the macro level. People do not have race but rather are racialized. *Racialization* is the process of assigning meaning and value to perceived phenotypical characteristics. The process of racialization that began with colonialism gives superior value to whiteness and inferior value to people of color. Race is both stable and unstable. It is a constant dominant category and yet different groups have been cast as Black at some historical times and white at other times. Omi and Winant propose that *racist racial projects* create and reproduce structures of racial domination. *Antiracist racial projects* challenge and resist structures of racial domination. They argue that racial conflict is persistent at the macro and micro levels but passes through periods of both rapid change and inertia. Racism can be challenged through social movements, and racial identity can be a foundation for demands for equity and inclusion.

Amico et al. (2021) propose a *theory of white privilege* (discussed in Chapter 1 in this book), which examines what white people are experiencing as people of color are experiencing racism. They argue that racism cannot be understood without understanding whiteness, the power bestowed on those considered white. Being white means to be advantaged in relation to those not considered white. Lipsitz (2006) argues that white people are possessive of their white status and manipulate people of color to compete for white approval. Amico et al. (2021) suggest that an important aspect of whiteness is a lack of awareness of the role that race plays in societal power arrangements. They suggest that the important elements of white privilege are the invisible opportunities received, presumption of white innocence, white ethnocentric educational curricula, residential and social isolation of white people from people of color, and enforcement of privilege through social structure and social institutions.

Sue (2010) presents a theory that calls attention to how **microaggressions**—brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages and insults to people of color or members of any other marginalized identity group—create alienation for members of the marginalized group. Microaggressions are a form of covert racism and oppression that is often difficult to detect. Sue and colleagues (2021) also identify microintervention strategies for disarming and dismantling individual and systemic racism. Recent critical theories of race and racism have incorporated the work of cognitive psychologists, who examine implicit bias, a concept examined in the section on the learning perspective in this chapter.

North American Indigenous scholars are ambivalent about existing theories of human behavior, considering them inherently connected to Western imperialism (Simpson & Smith, 2014). They are modifying Western concepts to better reflect Indigenous perspectives. The work of Glen Coulthard (2014) is one example of such scholarship. The basic premise of Coulthard's theory is that settler colonialism subjected and continues to subject Indigenous North Americans to enormous physical and cultural violence: plagues, stolen lands, forced relocation, cultural and language destruction, and removal of children from communities. Coulthard insists that concepts such as cultural recognition, reconciliation, and multiculturalism do not liberate Indigenous people from colonialism but instead serve to obscure Western government efforts to maintain settler–colonial systems of domination. Like the Southern theorists, Coulthard calls for a resurgence of theorizing based on Indigenous knowledge, not only of cultural symbols but also of land and nature.

Critical Analysis of the Critical Perspective

In terms of *coherence and conceptual clarity,* most concepts of the critical perspective are straightforward—injustice, exploitation, alienation, domination, inequality, exclusion—at least at the abstract level. Like all theoretical concepts, however, they become less straightforward when we begin to define

them for the purpose of measurement. In general, theories in the critical tradition are expressed in language that is relatively accessible and clear, but like any theoretical perspective, they introduce new concepts that must be learned. Considering *testability and empirical support,* critical theories have developed, in the main, through attempts to codify persistent themes in history. A preferred research method is empirical research that looks at large-scale patterns of history. As with other methods of research, critics have attacked some interpretations of historical data from the critical perspective, but historical analyses are some of the most influential works in contemporary sociology. All versions of the critical perspective encourage storytelling and other qualitative forms of empirical investigation to provide understanding of the lives of members of oppressed and marginalized groups.

In terms of *comprehensiveness,* the greatest contribution of the critical perspective is that it addresses dimensions of human behavior not found in other perspectives. Many versions of the critical perspective focus on large-scale social institutions and social structures, such as economic and political institutions, even global ones. In the contemporary era, critical theorists integrate processes at the societal level with those at the community, small-group, and family levels. They suggest that we should recognize exploitation, domination, and conflict as a central process in social life at all levels. In terms of individual psychology, critical theories propose that oppression of nondominant groups leads to a sense of alienation rather than belonging. Most critical theories do consider dimensions of time involved in ongoing systems of oppression. They are particularly noteworthy for analyzing behavior in historical context.

With the critical perspective's focus on injustice and the pursuit of justice, it more than any other perspective presented in this chapter helps us think about *antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.* Intersectionality theory, which recognizes that individuals have overlapping memberships in a variety of status groups, is particularly useful for considering human diversity. The critical perspective is strong in *usefulness for social work practice.* It is essential to the social justice mission of social work and has been instrumental in recommending practice strategies for confronting microaggressions, elevating the voices of marginalized members of society, and challenging interpersonal and systemic racism. It shines a spotlight on how domination and oppression affect human behavior; it illuminates processes by which people become estranged and discouraged. A major strength of the critical perspective is that it discourages taking a deficit approach to members of racialized and other marginalized groups, recognizing the historical, cultural, economic, and political context of behavior. It encourages social workers to consider the meaning of their power relationships with clients, particularly nonvoluntary clients. Empowerment approaches to practice at the individual and group level are recommended to connect "social and economic injustice and individual pain and suffering" (J. Lee & Hudson, 2017, p. 146). Social movement theories, which are based in the critical perspective, have implications for the mobilization of historically marginalized groups.

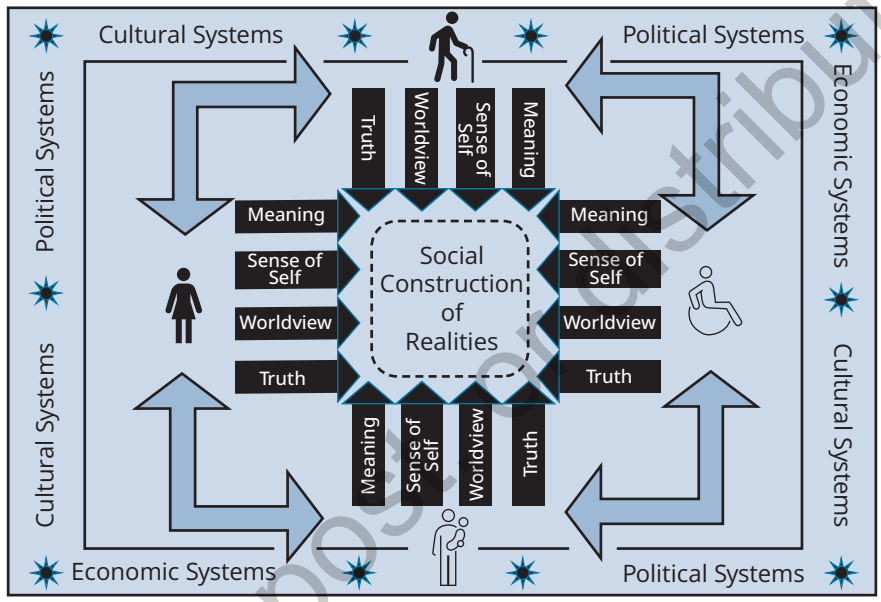
Social Constructionist Perspective

When a *novel* virus hits the world population, it is expected that people will be confused about what it will mean for them. In the early days of the pandemic, Mariana Rodriguez recognized that not all the people she knew shared the same meaning about the newly identified virus. Her husband and children were concerned about her health and safety and encouraged her to leave the job where she was vulnerable to exposure to the disease. On the other hand, some of her relatives, neighbors, friends, and coworkers thought the media and some politicians were exaggerating the dangers of the novel virus. As the pandemic hit her own community, Mariana was surprised at the deep divide that had developed about its meaning for social life. Masks became symbols of that divide. Mariana knew that she had been classified as an "essential" worker, a classification that was socially constructed, and like many essential workers, she struggled to understand what it means to be essential and yet undervalued, even disposable. As she struggled to reconstruct a life without Daniel, Mariana realized that her grief process had been short-circuited by the inability to participate in shared traditional death rituals. These are some ideas observed by the social constructionist perspective about the COVID-19 experience of Mariana Rodriguez and her family.

To understand human behavior, the **social constructionist perspective** proposes that social reality is constructed and constantly reconstructed as humans interact with each other.

People construct meaning, a sense of self, and a social world through their interactions with each other. They learn, through their interactions with each other, to think about the world and their place in it. People interact with each other and the physical world based on *shared meanings* or shared understandings about the world. This perspective asserts that people develop their understandings of the world and themselves from social interaction, and these understandings shape their subsequent social interactions. A visual representation of this way of thinking about human behavior is presented in Figure 2.3, and Table 2.1 lists the big ideas, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

FIGURE 2.3 ■ Social Constructionist Perspective



The early roots of the social constructionist perspective come from **symbolic interaction theory**, which proposes that as humans interact, they develop symbols to which they attach meaning. Words are symbols, but so are actions, tattoos, masks, national flags, confederate monuments, crosses, rosaries, clothing and fashion styles, and the types of homes we build. Symbols can carry very different meanings for different people, and conflicts can arise about the meaning they carry. In the United States, conflicts have arisen about the meaning of confederate monuments and the act of standing during the national anthem. A mask came to symbolize safety and respect to some people and unnecessary loss of freedom to other people. The symbolic interactionist would be interested in how ideological differences developed about the meaning of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the symbolic interactionist, society is constructed by human beings engaging in (symbolic) interaction, and the self is constructed through interactions situated in historical and social contexts (Mead, 1934/1962). Individuals have multiple and dynamic selves created by their interactions with multiple groups in multiple settings (McVeigh, 2016).

Social constructionists disagree about how constraining the environment is. Some see individual actors in social interactions as essentially free, active, and creative (Gergen, 1985). Others suggest that individual actors are always performing for their social audiences, based on their understanding of community standards for human behavior (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Goffman, 1959). Although this idea of human behavior as performance has been around for a while, it is taking on new meaning in the current world of proliferating communication technology, which provides us with many modalities for performing for our audiences, for engaging in what Goffman refers to as *impression management*. The dominant social constructionist position is probably the one represented by Schutz's (1967) phenomenological sociology. While arguing that people shape social reality, Schutz also suggests that individuals and groups are constrained by the preexisting social and cultural arrangements constructed by their predecessors.

The social constructionist perspective and its central concept "social construction" gained prominence with sociologists Berger and Luckmann's 1966 book *The Social Construction of Reality.* The concept of social construction was quickly diffused through a number of academic disciplines, but it also gained popular usage outside of academic settings. We have noted that both critical race theory and racial formation theory focus on the social construction of race. Racial formation theory proposes that although race is a stable social construction in U.S. society, assignment to racial groups has been flexible over time, with some groups, such as Jews and immigrants from Finland, Italy, and Ireland, being categorized as not-white at some points and white at others, depending on the needs of people in power. This is consistent with the symbolic interactionist proposal that reality is constantly being constructed and reconstructed. As evidence of popular usage of the social construction concept, Knoblauch and Wilke (2016, p. 56) report that a December 2015 Google search of the term "social construction of reality" yielded almost 10,000,000 hits.

Some social constructionists focus on the important role of *language*, one type of symbol, in the social construction of reality. Language is used to label our experiences and to develop classification systems of behaviors and categories of social identities. Social constructionists differ in their analysis of how constraining language is on human behavior. *Structuralism theory* argues that meanings, the mind, and the social world are shaped by the structure of language. They call attention to the influence of the use of **binary oppositions** in language structures, where one thing is understood by comparing it to its binary opposite: bad-good, female-male, life-death, us-them (Layton, 2006). The structuralists believe that human cognition favors the simplicity of binary conceptualizations. In contrast, *poststructuralist theorists* believe that language cannot constrain people. Derrida (1998) proposes that language is disorderly and unstable, taking on different meaning in different contexts. Consistent with poststructuralist theory, scholars in the Global South argue that language has been colonized and represents the interests of cultural elites in the Global North. They contend that language is embedded in economic, political, and cultural systems; is never neutral; is often alienating and oppressive; and is resisted (Deumert, 2021; Rudwick & Makoni, 2021; Useem, 2020). Deumert (2021) argues that language can also be used to imagine alternative futures, that "language is key to political freedom and liberation" (p. 109).

Poststructuralist theorists also challenge the structuralist contention that binary opposition is an essential characteristic of social reality. They propose that in the West, reality has been constructed through linguistic binaries, with one element in the binary structure always viewed as inferior to the other. Binary opposition is an example of how language produces social hierarchy. Binary oppositions are used by people with power to reinforce the existing power structure and preserve their own status. In this way, poststructuralism is consistent with the critical perspective. Poststructuralists also argue that binary opposition is an oversimplification of social reality and masks the complexity of social life and human behavior.

In the poststructuralist tradition, *queer theory,* one of the most influential social theories of the past two decades, proposes that sexuality and gender are linguistic creations rather than natural realities (Piontek, 2006). They are constructed, experienced, and performed in language. Queer theory pushes for a move away from the binary male/female, homosexual/heterosexual binaries, arguing that sexuality and gender are not fixed and stable and do not determine who we are. They are social constructions that create power and inequality, but they are fluid and always open to transformation. Butler (2004) argues that linguistic binaries of sexuality and gender overlook the many identities that are constructed through mixing and remixing linguistic binary categories. Although queer theory focuses on the social construction of sexuality and gender, theorists in this tradition challenge all categories of socially constructed identities and the hierarchies built on them. Queer theory proposes that no area of social life is immune from the influence of sexuality and gender; therefore, queer theory is not just a theory of sexuality and gender but a theory of social life.

Both neuroscience research and cognitive psychology research (see Kahneman, 2011; Sapolsky, 2017) indicate that categorizing and identity building are an inherent part of human cognition, but the importance of queer theory is that it reminds us of the critical role that culture and power relations play in shaping these cognitions.

Postmodern theories, like closely related poststructuralism, are skeptical of theoretical explanations that claim to be valid for all groups and all cultures and call attention to the multiple social

realities created by culture and other social systems. Two adaptations of postmodern theory are discussed here: standpoint theory and affect theory. *Standpoint theory* argues that what people know and believe is shaped by where they "stand" in society, their geographies, cultures, socioeconomic statuses, races, genders, and so on. No two people have exactly the same standpoint, and we must recognize our own standpoints, be reflective about them, and be curious and open to learn about the unique standpoints of others. At the core of standpoint theory is the belief that not all standpoints are equally valued and that marginalized people must live with a *bifurcation of consciousness* (from one's own perspective as well as the perspective of dominant standpoints), while dominant group members often enjoy the privilege of remaining oblivious to nondominant standpoints. Like poststructuralism, standpoint theory is a blend of the social constructionist and critical perspectives. It was first developed as feminist standpoint theory, but Dorothy Smith (2005) began to focus not only on gender but also on the exclusion and oppression of other standpoints, such as those based on class, race, sexual orientation, and able-bodiedness.

Affect theory is a significant departure from other postmodern theory because it calls attention to the independent role that biology and matter play in the construction of reality (see Blackman & Venn, 2010). It calls for breaking down the artificial boundaries between the natural and social sciences, noting that both biology and social processes play important roles in creating human reality. In affect theory, *affect* refers to a nonconscious, automatic form of emotion. Emotion is what happens to affect once it undergoes the social processes that make it conscious. Affect theorists are interested in the way that human bodies affect each other as they interact, calling attention to a process of *entrainment* identified by neurologists—a process in which the nervous and hormonal systems of interacting people are brought into alignment (Brennan, 2004). Some psychodynamically oriented social workers have written about how the disembodiment involved in remote communications during COVID-19 interfered with the process of entrainment (Hershberg & Sandmeyer, 2021). Like the ANT discussed earlier as a systems theory, affect theory takes seriously the important role of nature and other nonhuman elements in human behavior.

Critical Analysis of the Social Constructionist Perspective

In terms of *coherence and conceptual clarity,* social constructionism, both the original phenomenological and symbolic interactional concepts as well as the contemporary poststructuralist and postmodern conceptualizations, is often criticized as vague and unclear. And, yet, the rapid diffusion of the concept of social construction across academic disciplines and its popular use outside of academic settings suggest that it is intelligible to both scholars and the general public. Over the past few decades, a great diversity of theorizing has been done within this broad theoretical perspective, and there is much fragmentation of ideas. In recent theorizing, social theorists in the critical and social constructionist perspectives have borrowed ideas from each other and blurred the boundaries between these two perspectives. There is inconsistency among the various streams of the constructionist perspective about how constraining history and social structures are on human interaction and how free humans are to reconstruct their social interactions.

Considering *testability and empirical support,* the social constructionist perspective has made a great contribution to scientific inquiry by calling attention to the limitations of positivist research methods to explain all of human behavior and for pointing out the possibilities for bias in those research methods. Social constructionists propose alternative research methodology that focuses more on narrative and storytelling. Social constructionism has stimulated a trend in the behavioral sciences to use a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to accommodate both objective and subjective reality. This is providing a richer picture of human behavior. Affect theory, the newest theory discussed here, has incorporated findings from the natural sciences, and many ideas of the theory are well supported by empirical research.

Looking at the range of theories in the social constructionist perspective, it gets relatively high marks in *comprehensiveness.* Until the development of affect theory, social constructionism had paid little attention to the role of biology in human behavior. In some versions of social constructionism, cognitive processes are central, and the social construction of emotions is considered in others. With the emphasis on meaning making, social constructionism is open to the role of religion and

spirituality in human behavior. With its emphasis on social interaction, the social constructionist perspective is strong in attention to the social environment. Unlike earlier social constructionist theories, poststructural theories, queer theory, and standpoint theory call attention to the macro world of social institutions and social structure. Time and the role of history are respected in the social constructionist perspective, with many authors drawing attention to the historical era in which behavior is constructed.

Recent versions of the constructionist perspective have much to offer for understanding *antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.* The emphasis on multiple social realities is useful for considering the diverse variations in human behavior. Critical race theories consider the history of the social construction of race and its relationship to contemporary racism. Poststructuralism, queer theory, and standpoint theory are strong in their understanding of the processes of social exclusion and inclusion, particularly in the use of language to build hierarchies and social exclusion.

Although the social constructionist perspective does not provide direct guidelines for intervention, the perspective does have *usefulness for social work practice.* In the social constructionist perspective, the social work relationship begins with developing an understanding of the meaning the client—individual, family, small group, community, or organization—makes of the situation and how that meaning has been developed in social interactions over time. It is highly relevant for engagement and assessment, but it is also useful for social work intervention. The social construction of meaning and identity can be interrogated to inform such interventions as cognitive behavioral therapy, narrative therapy, and solution-focused therapy. The perspective suggests that a goal of practice is to help clients see more realities in their story lines, with other possible interpretations of events. The social constructionist thesis that self, meaning, and reality are constantly reconstructed and even transformed through social interaction makes it a particularly useful approach for work with families, small groups, communities, and organizations. Poststructuralism and queer theory are useful for encouraging both social worker and client to think critically about prominent social categories, particularly linguistic binary categories. At the level of families, groups, communities, and organizations, the social constructionist perspective recommends engaging discordant groups in sincere discussion of their disparate constructions of reality and to negotiate lines of action. This is the goal of restorative justice projects.

Critical Thinking Questions 2.2

What do theories in the critical perspective add to your understanding of the story of Mariana Rodriguez and her family? Do you think it helps to think about the family through this lens? Why or why not? Do you think this lens helps us as analyze events like COVID-19? Why or why not? How does the social constructionist perspective help you to think about the great division that occurred in meaning making about COVID-19 safety guidelines and vaccinations—a divide that occurred in local communities, the nation, and around the world? What influenced the meaning you made of safety guidelines and vaccinations?

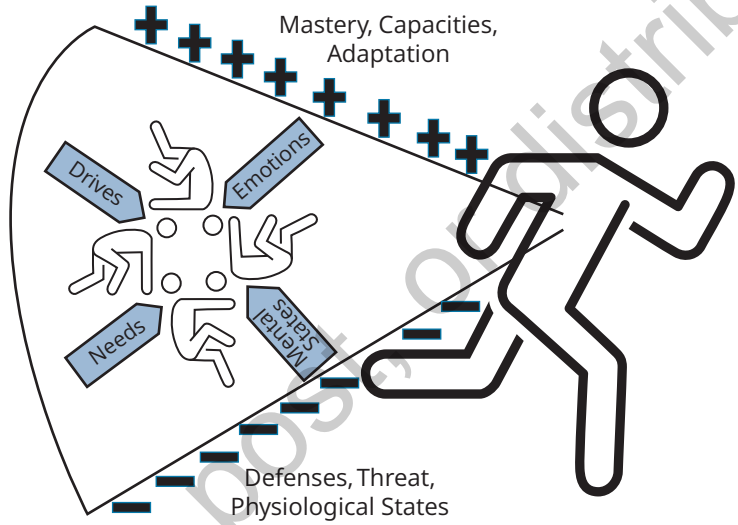
PSYCHODYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Mariana Rodriguez and her family faced a highly stressful situation involving a novel viral pandemic. Like most families during the pandemic, they needed to quickly make many adaptations to their daily routines, and they faced changes in their physical and social environments. They faced financial hardship and the loss of husband and father roles in their family system while also worrying about their personal safety. Their lives were impacted by environmental forces as well as by biological and psychological forces. It appears Mariana and her children were motivated by survival and adaptation instincts as well as a strong drive to maintain their attachment relationships with each other. Each member of the family developed new capacities as they adjusted to life without Daniel. We take note of Mariana's physiological symptoms of anxiety when she returns to work and consider how she feels unsafe in that setting. We might wonder about the defense mechanisms used by each family member to cope with Daniel's death and the anxieties stirred by the loss of such an important attachment figure. In the grief support group,

Mariana became aware of guilt she had carried about her grandmother's death, something she had never given conscious thought to before. These are some of the observations that come to mind when we think of Mariana Rodriguez and her family from a psychodynamic perspective.

The **psychodynamic perspective** focuses on how internal processes, such as needs, drives, emotions, and mental states, motivate human behavior. The perspective has evolved over the years, moving from the classical psychodynamic emphasis on innate drives and unconscious processes toward greater emphasis on the adaptive capacities of individuals and their interactions with the environment. The origins of all psychodynamic theories are in the work of Sigmund Freud. More recent formulations of the perspective include ego psychology, object relations theories, self psychology, and relational and intersubjective theories. Figure 2.4 presents a visual representation of the psychodynamic perspective, and Table 2.1 lists the important principles, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

FIGURE 2.4 ■ Psychodynamic Perspective



To trace the evolution of the psychodynamic perspective, it is essential to begin with its Freudian roots. Sigmund Freud proposed that human behavior is driven by strong biological instinctual forces that operate largely outside of awareness. Freud looked at the human personality from a number of interrelated points of view; the most notable are his drive or instinct theory, topographical theory, structural theory, and psychosexual stage theory. Freud revised each of these approaches to understanding human personality over time, and different followers of Freud have attended to different aspects of his theoretical works, further revising each of them over time.

- *Drive or instinct theory.* This theory proposes that human behavior is motivated by two basic instincts: *thanatos*, the drive for aggression or destruction, and *eros*, the drive for life (through sexual gratification).
- *Topographical theory of the mind.* Topographical theory proposes three states of mind: *conscious* mental activities of which we are fully aware; *preconscious* thoughts and feelings that can be easily brought to mind; and *unconscious* thoughts, feelings, and desires of which we are not aware but which have a powerful influence on our behavior.
- *Structural model of the mind.* This model proposes that personality is structured around three parts: the *id*, which is unconscious and strives for satisfaction of basic instincts; the *superego*, which is made up of conscience and ideals and is the censor of the id; and the *ego*, which is the rational part of personality that mediates between the id and the superego.
- *Psychosexual stage theory.* This theory proposes a five-stage model of child development, based on sexual instincts. Freud emphasized the importance of childhood experiences on personality development.

Let's turn now to some of the roads the psychodynamic perspective has taken from its Freudian roots. *Ego psychology* focuses on unfolding human capacities as individuals interact with social and physical environments (Schamess & Shilkret, 2022). Ego psychologists see a bigger influence of external forces on human behavior than proposed by Freud. Although they see a large contribution of conscious activity to human behavior, they emphasize the ego's use of unconscious defense mechanisms to keep intolerable threats from conscious awareness. White (1959) proposes that humans are driven as much by an instinct for mastery as by sexual and aggression instincts. *Control-mastery theory* suggests that adaptation and survival instincts are the primary motivations for human behavior (Silberschatz, 2005). Erik Erikson, who will be discussed in the section on the developmental perspective, is considered an ego psychologist.

Object relations theories study the relationships and interactions individuals have with other people (objects) and are particularly concerned with the mental representations of *the self* and *the other* that are developed from these relationships and interactions (Flanagan, 2022a). More specifically, they are interested in how others become a part of the self. In object relations theories, attachment relationships with others are absolute human needs (Bowlby, 1969). Some object relations theorists stress the need for humans to balance attachment to others with the ability to be separate (Winnicott, 1958, 1960). Object relations theorists are interested in the defenses used to cope with anxieties that arise in relationships.

Self psychology focuses on the kinds of life experiences that contribute to a mature self (Flanagan, 2022b). Heinz Kohut (1978) proposed a *tripolar self* who must have three needs met to develop a healthy, cohesive self. First, the grandiose self needs to be validated and made to feel special. Second, the developing self needs to have a strong admirable person whom they can idealize and with whom they can merge and feel safe. Third, the developing self needs to feel that there are others who are similar to oneself, a need that Kohut called twinship. Kohut (1978) was interested in disorders of the self that develop when these needs are not met, disorders such as the understimulated self, the overstimulated self, the fragmented self, and the overburdened self.

Relational and intersubjective theories propose that the basic human drive is for relationships with others. The self is understood to develop and mature through emotional connectedness in mutually empathic relationships. Human connectedness is emphasized, human diversity acknowledged, and human difference is normalized rather than pathologized (Berzoff, 2022). Influenced by postmodern and queer theories, relational and intersubjective theories see the self as fluid, multiple, discontinuous, and influenced by language—rather than as fixed and singular as in self psychology. Multiple selves are sometimes harmonious but often are not.

Recently, social workers who practice from a psychodynamic perspective have taken a critical eye to issues of diversity, race, and racism. Berzoff et al. (2022) recommend that an intersectionality lens should be used to recognize the great diversity represented in social work practice situations. Malamed (2021, p. 149) argues that "racism is a pathology that resides in White people . . . borne of Whites' narcissistic fragility." This analysis is usually put in the context of Melanie Klein's theory of "splitting" as an object relations defense mechanism (see Rasmussen & Garran, 2022; Woods, 2020). Splitting is "the process by which the good and bad or positive and negative aspects of the self and others are experienced as separate or kept apart" (Flanagan, 2022b, p. 111). Hershberg and Sandmeyer (2021, p. 439) suggest that in the United States, African Americans are stamped as "the devalued others." Woods (2020) suggests that white people often engage in a radical splitting of the idealized self from degraded others and that issues of race can prompt such severe anxiety in white people as to block the capacity to think. Malamed (2021) proposes that white people project their fears and forbidden desires on to people of color and argues that psychotherapy with white people must interrogate the meaning of whiteness and challenge the ethic of white supremacy. Malamed further argues that awareness of social justice issues is necessary for emotional maturation in white people. Self psychologist Walls (2006) proposes that the constant othering and exclusion of people of color and other marginalized groups denies their need to be validated, and such ongoing invalidation requires a double consciousness that views "oneself through the eyes of one's oppressor" (p. 131).

From the early Freudian roots, the psychodynamic perspective was embodied (Hershberg & Sandmeyer, 2021). Freud was a neurologist who saw biological instinctual forces as the primary

motivators of human behavior. Freud recognized the reciprocal relationship between body and mind, but he did not have the tools to study the biological mechanisms involved with cognition and emotion, tools later developed by neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists. Recent research in these fields is giving credence to some of the inclinations of both Freudian and neo-Freudian theory while filling in the gaps related to biological mechanisms. Here are some examples of that research.

First, both neuroscience and cognitive psychology research suggest that Freud was correct to propose that much of human behavior is based on unconscious emotional and cognitive processes. The limbic systems are central to the emotions that fuel behavior (Rolls, 2019). The limbic systems indirectly regulate autonomic bodily functioning and hormone release, and autonomic and hormonal conditions feed back to the brain to influence behavior, mostly unconsciously. Much research of the limbic systems has focused on the amygdala, two almond-shaped clusters of neurons that serve to rapidly appraise stimuli and mobilize responses to stress. It is the brain region involved in feeling afraid and anxious, and the region most involved in generating aggression (Hoban et al., 2018). As any warning system should, the amygdala works so fast that it responds in advance of a conscious awareness of danger. Research by cognitive psychologists indicates that much of human behavior is based on activity that is outside of awareness; although they do not use this language, it appears that they are suggesting both preconscious and unconscious activity (Bursell & Olsson, 2021; Kahneman, 2011).

Second, ego psychologists were correct to recognize the role of both unconscious and conscious processes and both emotion and cognition in human behavior. Neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky (2017) argues that the distinction between thought and feeling is a false dichotomy. The cortex is the "gleaming, logical, analytical crown jewel" of the brain (p. 28). Most sensory information flows into there to be decoded, but some sensory information takes a shortcut, bypassing the cortex and going straight to the amygdala. Lots of axonal projections connect the cortex with the amygdala, and the limbic systems and cortex stimulate as well as inhibit each other. They collaborate and coordinate, and they also "bicker" and undermine each other. This sounds very much like what Freud meant by ego. Emotions filter what gets remembered. When the amygdala wants to mobilize behavior, it seeks approval from the frontal cortex, which is the site of working memory, executive functioning (which includes organizing thoughts and actions, prioritizing tasks, and making decisions), emotion regulation, and impulse control. However, if the amygdala is sufficiently aroused by fear, it produces a faster but less accurate response by bypassing the frontal cortex. It is situations like this, when the amygdala is hijacked by fear, that a cell phone may be seen as a gun. Sapolsky (2017) calls the frontal part of the cortex the superego of the brain.

Third, neuroscientists identify the neurotransmitter dopamine as central to understanding reward, pleasure, and particularly the pursuit of pleasure (Speranza et al., 2021). It may be implicated in behaviors that some psychodynamic theorists have thought of as id activity.

Fourth, the psychodynamic approach is correct in asserting that early childhood experiences play an important role in behavior across the life course. There is strong evidence from several disciplines that early life experiences shape the structure and functions of the brain in ways that influence behavior throughout the life course. One example is the intersection of research on neurobiology, attachment, and trauma (see Shapiro, 2022).

Fifth, proponents of the emerging polyvagal theory are investigating how physiological states are associated with stress reactions (see R. Bailey et al., 2020; Kolacz et al., 2019; Porges & Porges, 2022; Sullivan et al., 2018). Polyvagal theory proposes that for survival, humans need to feel safe and safely connected to others. The theory identifies three distinct neural platforms in the autonomic nervous system (ANS) that are involved in the perception of threat and safety: the sympathetic system and two branches of the vagus nerve in the parasympathetic system. When faced with perceived threat, the sympathetic system responds with fight or flight, the dorsal vagal responds by freezing and conserving resources, and the ventral vagal responds by self-soothing and seeking connection with others. Polyvagal theory proposes that neuroception, a neurophysiological response that does not involve cognitive processing, plays a central role in the ANS's ability to assess danger in the environment. Research on polyvagal theory is in the early stages, and recent research focuses on the biological mechanisms that connect traumatic stress to both gastrointestinal and psychiatric disorders (Kolacz et al., 2019).

Critical Analysis of the Psychodynamic Perspective

In terms of *coherence and conceptual clarity,* Freud's original concepts and propositions were not entirely consistent; they evolved over time. Ego psychology, object relations, self psychology, and relational and intersubjective theorists strengthened the logical consistency of the psychodynamic perspective by expanding and clarifying definitions of major concepts. The different strains of the perspective put different emphases on conscious and unconscious activity and internal versus external influences on motivation. Theories in the psychodynamic perspective are sometimes criticized for the vague and abstract nature of their concepts but perhaps no more than most other theoretical perspectives.

Considering *testability and empirical support,* much empirical work has been based on the psychodynamic perspective, and research in other disciplines provides support for some of the propositions of the perspective. Recent long-term longitudinal studies support the importance of childhood experiences but also indicate that personality continues to develop throughout life. There is growing evidence of the supremely important role that attachment plays in shaping development over the life course. Neuroscience research is indicating the important role of emotion in human behavior, explicating the brain mechanisms involved in emotion and suggesting that both genetics and life experiences shape the emotional brain (Davidson & Begley, 2012). Early life experiences are important in this process, but the brain is "plastic" and can be changed by ongoing life experiences and mental activity.

In terms of *comprehensiveness,* early psychodynamic theories were primarily concerned with internal psychological processes. Freud assumed that biology determines behavior, and recent psychodynamic theorists have incorporated new developments in neurological sciences into their formulations (see, e.g., Berzoff et al., 2022). With the exception of Carl Jung, early psychodynamic theorists were not interested in the spiritual aspects of human behavior, but some psychodynamically oriented clinicians have made attempts to include an examination of spirituality and religion in psychodynamic clinical practice (see Nagai, 2007; Shafranske, 2009). As for environments, close personal relationships play an important role in most post-Freudian theorizing, but the economic, political, and historical environments of human behavior receive little attention. As for time, the early focus of the psychodynamic perspective was on how people change across childhood. Theories in the psychodynamic perspective continue to pay little attention to time in human behavior.

Until recently, psychodynamic theorists and clinicians paid little attention to issues of *antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.* Human diversity is a major theme in relational and intersubjectivity theories, and as noted, psychodynamically oriented social workers have recently been drawing on concepts from object relations theories and self psychology to write about antiracist social work practice. This is an important contribution to psychodynamic theorizing.

For the most part, theories in the psychodynamic perspective developed as clinical theory and the perspective is strong in *usefulness for social work practice* in clinical practice with individuals, families, and groups. In general, however, the psychodynamic perspective does not suggest practice principles at the level of communities, organizations, and social institutions. In clinical practice, theoretical concepts can be used for engagement, assessment, intervention, and practice evaluation. Practice principles common to all versions of the psychodynamic perspective include the centrality of the professional–client relationship, the curative value of expressing emotional conflicts and understanding past events, and the goals of self-awareness and self-control. Several research projects have found psychodynamic psychotherapy to be effective and the benefits of such therapy to increase with time (see Shedler, 2010). Supported by recent neuroscience research, the psychodynamic perspective reminds social workers that many emotions and cognitions happen at the unconscious, automatic level and are not easily accessed for conscious exploration. This is especially true of traumatic memories. As psychodynamic theorists embrace neuroscience research, the perspective continues to be useful for understanding how trauma is stored and processed (Basham, 2022). Given our commitment to evidence-based practice, social workers should be aware of empirical evidence of the potential benefits of a number of adjunct non-talking, somatic interventions for trauma-related mental health disorders,

including eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR; Fereidouni et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2018), neurofeedback (Reiss et al., 2019; van der Kolk et al., 2016), and yoga (Reinhardt et al., 2018). One systematic review of the efficacy of creative arts therapies for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) found that art therapy and music therapy may have potential for reducing the symptoms of PTSD (Baker et al., 2018). Polyvagal theory is being used to develop both biological and interpersonal interventions to stimulate and improve functioning in the vagus nerve (see R. Bailey et al., 2020). Such interventions include electrical stimulation of the vagus nerve (Yagi et al., 2020), yoga (Sullivan et al., 2018), and group therapy (Flores & Porges, 2017). Mindfulness meditation has been found to build better connections between the amygdala and prefrontal cortex (see Davidson & Begley, 2012) and to improve stress reactivity and anxiety symptoms associated with anxiety disorders (Blum et al., 2021). Not all of these intervention methods are used by social workers, but social workers can work collaboratively with practitioners who are trained in them.

Developmental Perspective

Another way to think about Mariana Rodriguez and her family is to view their situation in terms of life stages, the developmental tasks they face, and their roles and statuses. In middle age, Mariana suddenly became the primary wage earner for her family. Her husband, Daniel, developed a compromising health problem when he was just at the peak of his earning power and hoping to consolidate the family finances for a comfortable old age. He became very ill and died before he could do that. Sofia and Mateo faced disruptions in their educational and social lives at a time when identity, relationship building, and developing skills for future careers were important parts of their developmental process. Camila and Juan had their careers temporarily disrupted as they were taking on adult roles. Daniel was lost to the family at a time when they had expected he would still be there to support and guide them. These are some aspects of the story of Mariana Rodriguez and her family suggested by the developmental perspective.

The focus of the **developmental perspective** is on how human behavior unfolds across the life course, how people change and stay the same over time. Human development is seen to occur in defined stages based on a complex interaction of biological, psychological, and social processes. Each new stage involves new tasks and brings changes in social roles and statuses. A visual representation of these ideas is presented in Figure 2.5, and Table 2.1 lists the important principles, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

The developmental perspective focuses on how human behavior unfolds across the life course.

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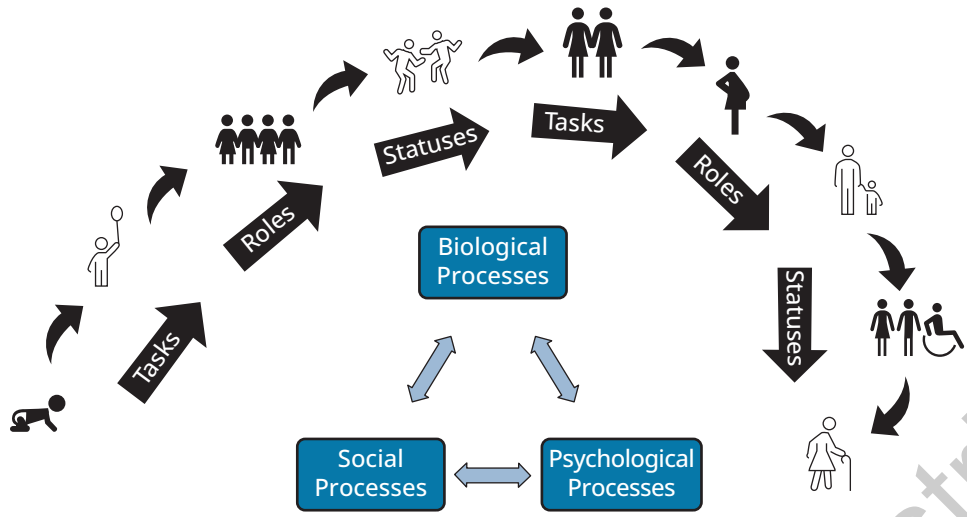
FIGURE 2.5 ■ Developmental Perspective



The developmental perspective is perhaps the oldest perspective discussed in this chapter. Early ideas of life stages are found in Eastern and Western religious philosophies, proposed in the Talmud and by Sanskrit scholars. A great number of developmental theories have been developed since the beginning of the 20th century, many of which focus on a specific aspect of human behavior. Freud proposed a theory of psychosexual stages, Jung a stages of life theory, Piaget a theory of cognitive stages, Erikson a theory of psychosocial stages, Kohlberg and Gilligan theories of stages of moral development, and Fowler a theory of faith stages. In addition, there are a vast number of related theories that use a developmental framework to focus on one particular developmental phase. Examples include theories of perspective taking in middle childhood, theories of sexual identity development in adolescence, and theories of emerging adulthood.

Early psychology-based developmental theories focused on the inner life at age-graded stages, but recent multidisciplinary theories have expanded the focus to put greater emphasis on the social forces involved in life stage development. Early theories looked for universal patterns in life stages, and more recent theorizing has paid more attention to diversity in life stage development.

Erikson (1963) has been the most influential developmental theorist to date because his model of life span development includes adult as well as child stages of development. Erikson (1963) proposed an **epigenetic model of human development**, in which the psychological unfolding of personality takes place in sequences influenced by biological, psychological, and social forces. Healthy development depends on the mastery of life tasks at the appropriate time in the sequence. Erikson divided the life cycle into eight stages, each with a special psychosocial crisis, basic strength, and core pathology. *Life span* or *life cycle theory*, based in psychology, has continued to build on the work of Erikson's psychosocial theory of development (see Newman & Newman, 2018). Although life span theorists tend to agree with the epigenetic principle, there is also growing agreement that the stages are experienced in a more flexible way than Erikson proposed, with cultural, economic, and personal circumstances leading to some differences in timing and sequencing. More stages have been added to life span theories as longevity increases in wealthy nations.

Early life span theorists, including Erikson, saw their models of development as universal, applying equally well to all groups of people. This idea has been the target of much criticism, with suggestions that the traditional models are based on the experiences of European American, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class men and do not apply as well to members of other groups. This criticism has led to a number of life cycle models for specific groups, such as women (Borysenko, 1996); gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons (e.g., Cass, 1996; Troiden, 1989; Weinberg et al., 1994); and Black Americans (Cross et al., 1991). For example, Lev (2004) proposes a six-stage model of transgender identity development:

- Stage 1: Awareness
- Stage 2: Seeking information/reaching out
- Stage 3: Disclosure to significant others

- Stage 4: Exploring identity and transition
- Stage 5: Exploration—transition issues/possible body modification
- Stage 6: Integration and pride

It is important to remember that the models noted in the previous paragraph should be placed in the historical time in which they were developed. Life span theories have been criticized for failing to deal with historical time and the cohort effects on human behavior that arise when groups of persons born in the same historical time share cultural influences and historical events at the same period in their lives.

The criticisms of life span theories for their failure to recognize diversity in life course journeys and their failure to appreciate the important role of changing historical times in human behavior have helped to stimulate the development of the multidisciplinary *life course perspective* (LCP). This relatively new perspective conceptualizes the life course as a social rather than psychological phenomenon that is nonetheless unique for each individual, with some common life course markers or transitions related to shared social and historical contexts. This perspective is discussed in depth in Chapter 10 of this book.

LCP research has explored many dimensions of human diversity and their impact on life course trajectories. Although early LCP researchers focused on large-scale longitudinal research projects, recent LCP researchers have used narrative and other qualitative research methods to develop deeper understanding of diverse groups by recording their experiences in their own voices. LCP theorists have begun to modify the perspective to extend its capacity to reflect the experiences of members of marginalized groups. Two examples are critical race life course perspective (DiAquoi, 2018) and feminist life course theory (Calderone et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2018).

With its focus on developmental risk and protection, the LCP emphasizes how advantage and disadvantage accumulate over time. **Cumulative advantage** involves the accumulation of increasing advantage as early advantage positions an individual for later advantage. **Cumulative disadvantage** is the accumulation of increasing disadvantage as early disadvantage positions an individual for later disadvantage. The LCP proposes that social institutions and societal structures develop mechanisms that ensure increasing advantage for those with early life advantage and increasing disadvantage for those who struggle (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009). Researchers have applied the concepts of cumulative advantage and cumulative disadvantage to study health disparities related to class and race (Pais, 2014), financial assistance from midlife parents to adult children (Padgett & Remle, 2016), the earnings trajectories of individuals (Gabay-Egozi & Yaish, 2019), criminal career trajectories (Mowen & Brent, 2016), the victimization trajectory of transgender women (Hereth, 2021), and evolving patterns of inequality among late-life adults (Crystal et al., 2016).

Critical Analysis of the Developmental Perspective

In terms of *coherence and conceptual clarity,* classical developmental theory's notion of life stages is internally consistent and conceptually clear. Theorists have been able to build on each other's work in a coherent manner. The life course perspective has developed considerable coherence and clarity about the major concepts. Considering *testability and empirical support*, many of Erikson's ideas have been employed and verified in empirical research. Social work aspires to engage in evidence-informed practice, and the LCP was developed from empirical research and continues to be refined by ongoing research. Most of the early LCP research used large-scale longitudinal research methods, following the same people over an extended period of time. The benefit of longitudinal research is that it clarifies whether differences between age groups are based on developmental differences or whether they reflect cohort effects from living in particular cultures at particular historical times. There is a growing body of longitudinal research in the life course tradition that suggests that age-graded differences in behavior reflect both developmental factors and historical trends (see Elder & Giele, 2009). The LCP is a leading perspective driving longitudinal study of physical and mental health behaviors and outcomes. Life course researchers have recently begun to use qualitative methods of research to understand the meanings people attach to events in their lives.

The developmental perspective gets relatively high marks for *comprehensiveness.* Both the life span and the life course streams recognize human behavior as an outcome of complex interactions of biological, psychological, and social factors, although most theorists in both streams pay little attention to the spiritual dimension. The traditional life span approach pays limited attention to the political, economic, and cultural environments of human behavior, and the life course perspective pays less attention to psychological

factors than the psychologically based life span approach. Both approaches attend to the dimension of time, in terms of linear time, but the life course perspective attends to time in a more comprehensive manner by emphasizing the role of historical time in human behavior. Indeed, the developmental perspective is the only one of the seven perspectives discussed here that makes time a primary focus.

As the developmental perspective evolved over time, it paid more attention to *racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.* The early life span models were looking for universal stages of human development and did not attend to issues of diversity. More recent life span models have paid more attention to diversity, and diversity of pathways through life is a major theme in the LCP. The LCP recognizes patterns of advantage and disadvantage in life course trajectories, and life course researchers have done considerable work on the accumulation of advantage and disadvantage over the life course. LCP research on cumulative advantage and cumulative disadvantage shows that not all people start from the same place and reinforces the idea that antiracist, anti-oppressive social work must focus on equity and inclusion. Critical race life course theory and feminist life course theory move the LCP to more clearly articulate issues of racism and other forms of oppression.

The developmental perspective gets relatively high marks for *usefulness for social work practice.* It is often used for assessment purposes in social work practice to evaluate biological, psychological, and social development of individuals. The LCP suggests that individuals must always be assessed within familial, cultural, social, economic, and historical contexts. The developmental perspective can also aid indirectly in the identification of potential personal and social developmental resources. Developmental research provides robust evidence that what happens throughout the life course is strongly influenced by what happens in the early years. Societal health is associated with public policies that support early development, and social workers can play an important role in promoting supportive public health and child and family policies. With its emphasis on life stories that unfold over time, the LCP is a particularly good fit with narrative approaches to practice. Narrative approaches can be used with families, small groups, communities, and organizations as well as with individuals. Overall, the developmental perspective can be viewed as optimistic. Most people face difficult transitions, life crises, and developmental or other challenges at some point, and many people have been reassured to hear that their struggle is "typical." The developmental perspective is particularly useful for suggesting how to engage people of specific life phases, particularly children and adolescents, and for indicating stage-appropriate interventions. Because the developmental perspective sees individuals as having the possibility to rework their inner experiences as well as their relationships, clients may be assisted in finding new strategies for getting their lives back on course. Life course research also has abundant implications for social policy and for practice evaluation.

Critical Thinking Questions 2.3

Both the psychodynamic and developmental perspectives provide stage theories of human behavior, but they put different emphases on the importance of childhood experiences. How important do you think Mariana Rodriguez's childhood experiences are to her current situation? The psychodynamic perspective sees emotion as holding a central place in human behavior. What emotions do you experience as you read the story of Mariana Rodriguez and her family? Do you think these emotions have any relationship to your own life course experiences? Psychodynamically oriented social workers have recently used concepts from object relations theories and self psychology to think about antiracist social work practice. What are your reactions to their analyses as discussed in this chapter?

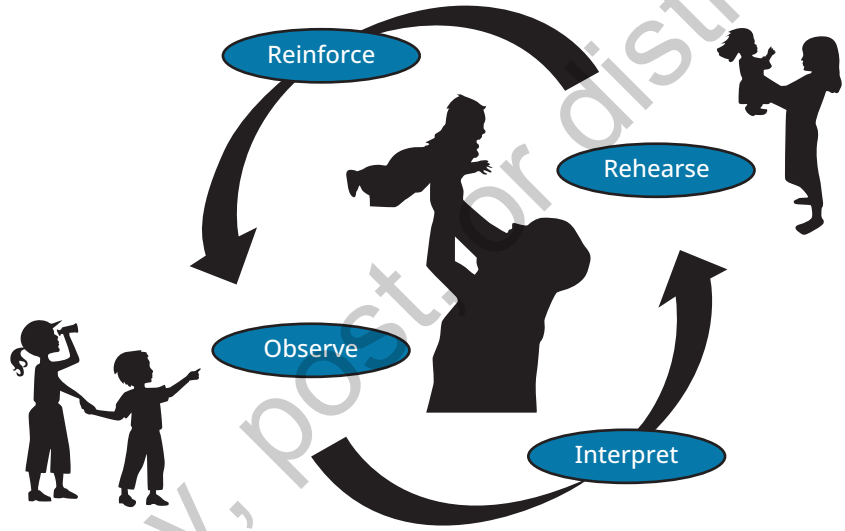
Learning Perspective

When Mariana Rodriguez returned to work after recovering from COVID-19 and burying her husband, she had physical symptoms that are associated with anxiety and panic. For the first few days back at work, she thought that these symptoms meant that she was not fully recovered from COVID-19, but upon reflection, she realized that they only occurred at work and became much more severe when she was in the vicinity of a particular room. We can speculate that the symptoms were learned responses, based on an association of certain physical spaces and sensory stimuli with the COVID-19 crisis her family had recently experienced. Another way to think about what happened to Mariana when she returned to work is that her fast-thinking system of cognitive learning led to automatic responses to certain environmental

cues, which she was able to override over time with awareness, introspection, and analysis. It appears that Mariana had a belief in her own personal competence to have her supervisor understand the fears she was having at work, to find support in her grief process, and to seek parish assistance to provide a collective day of mourning and celebration of community members who died with COVID-19. These are some ideas about Mariana Rodriguez's situation suggested by the learning perspective.

Theories in the **learning perspective** focus on how human behavior is learned when individuals interact with their environments. There are disagreements among the different streams of learning theory, however, about the processes by which behavior is learned. Over time, three major versions of learning theory—classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and theories of cognitive learning—have been presented, proposing different mechanisms by which learning occurs. Recent research finds that learning often involves an integration of conditioning and cognitive strategies (I.-S. Lee et al., 2021). The general themes of the learning perspective are represented visually in Figure 2.6, and Table 2.1 lists the important principles, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

FIGURE 2.6 ■ Learning Perspective



Classical conditioning is traced to an experiment Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov performed with dogs.

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Classical conditioning theory, also known as *respondent conditioning*, sees behavior as learned through association, when a naturally occurring stimulus (unconditioned stimulus) is paired with a neutral stimulus (conditioned stimulus). This approach is usually traced to a classic experiment by Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov, who showed, first, that dogs naturally salivate (unconditioned response) to meat powder on the tongue (unconditioned stimulus). Then, a ringing bell (conditioned stimulus) was paired with the meat powder a number of times. Eventually, the dogs salivated (conditioned response) to the ringing of the bell (conditioned stimulus), even when it was not paired with the meat powder. In other words, an initially neutral stimulus comes to produce a particular behavioral response after it is repeatedly paired with another stimulus of significance. Biomedical research indicates that many bodily functions and bodily responses, such as pain and placebo effects, are affected by classical conditioning (see Babel, 2019; I.S. Lee et al., 2021). Neuroscience research has found that fear responses in the amygdala and other parts of the brain are trained through classical conditioning (Hwang et al., 2022; Morriss et al., 2021; Sapolsky, 2017).

Research indicates that classical conditioning plays a role in understanding many problems that social work clients experience. For example, among people with substance abuse disorders, the environmental contexts routinely associated with the alcohol or other substance intake that preceded the pharmacological effects of the substance can become cues for craving and relapse (Valyear et al., 2017). These environmental contexts can include people, locations, and sensory information such as smells. Although fear is central to human survival, persistent pervasive fear interferes with human functioning. Conditioned fear responses are involved in panic disorder, phobias, social anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Lebois et al., 2019). After a traumatic experience, the body and the brain are conditioned to reexperience the traumatic situation when exposed to sights, sounds, smells, and other sensory stimuli associated with the original traumatic experience (van der Kolk, 2014). The classical conditioning approach looks for antecedents of behavior—stimuli that precede behavior—as the mechanism for learning. Classical conditioning ideas form the basis for exposure-based psychotherapy and other attempts to inhibit and extinguish pervasive fear responses. Because of research that indicates that most people experience trauma in their lifetime but only a small percentage (8–9%) experience PTSD, some researchers are studying the factors involved in individual differences in responses to classical conditioning (see M. T. Allen et al., 2019; Morriss et al., 2021).

Operant conditioning theory, also known as *instrumental conditioning,* sees behavior as learned through reinforcement. It is built on the work of two American psychologists, John B. Watson and B. F. Skinner. In operant conditioning, a behavior occurs and is reinforced by the environment; the reinforcement increases the probability that the behavior will occur again. A classic experiment demonstrated that if a pigeon is given a food pellet each time it touches a lever, over time, the pigeon learns to touch the lever to receive a food pellet. This process is known as *shaping*, a process through which gross approximations of a desired behavior are rewarded, followed by rewards for successive approximations to shape the final behavior. The operant conditioning approach looks for consequences—what comes after the behavior—as the mechanism for learning behavior. *Positive reinforcers* are positive consequences of the behavior, such as food, water, sex, or social approval. We use positive reinforcers, such as smiles or praise, to reward behaviors we find pleasing in hopes of strengthening those behaviors. *Negative reinforcers* involve the removal of an aversive consequence. For example, an adolescent cleans their room to avoid parental complaints. Avoiding the complaints reinforces the room-cleaning behavior. Operant conditioning principles are applied in therapeutic attempts to extinguish problematic behaviors such as smoking. It is not always easy to determine which consequences are reinforcing for a particular person, and research indicates that people vary in their sensitivity to reinforcement (Cui et al., 2015).

A number of theories of cognitive learning have been proposed. We have chosen four for this discussion: Bandura's social cognitive theory, social exchange and rational choice theories, cognitive load theory, and dual process theory. Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory of learning suggests that humans have the flexibility to learn by observation, modeling, rehearsing, beliefs, and expectations. In this view, the learner is not passively manipulated by elements of the environment but can use cognitive processes to learn behaviors. Humans can observe behaviors of others and model their own behavior on what they have observed, taking into account the characteristics of the model and the consequences of the modeled

behavior. Observational learning has been found to play a central role in the development of social skills and cultural knowledge. Social work skills are often developed by observing a model, and social work clients often use the social work practitioner as a model for learning new skills. Neuroscience research indicates an important role for the lateral prefrontal cortex in observational learning (Kang et al., 2021).

Bandura (1977, 1986) proposes that beliefs and expectations are driving forces for learning. He suggests that **self-efficacy** (a sense of personal competence) and **efficacy expectation** (the expectation that one can personally accomplish a goal) play an important role in motivation to learn. Bandura (2001, 2002) has extended the theory of self-efficacy to propose three models of **agency** (the capacity to intentionally make things happen): *personal agency* of the individual actor; *proxy agency*, in which people reach goals by influencing others to act on their behalf; and *collective agency*, in which people act cooperatively to reach a goal. Improvement in self-efficacy is sometimes a goal of individual and group psychotherapy (Cusack et al., 2019). Some practice situations call for social workers to act as proxy agents (advocates), and collective action is the most effective way to bring about change on a large scale.

Social exchange and *rational choice theories* integrate ideas from operant conditioning and social cognitive theory. Exchange and choice theories see human behavior as based on rational analysis of the costs and benefits (rewards and punishments) of particular actions and different relationships (Coleman, 1990; Homans, 1958). Viewed through this theoretical lens, humans are rational actors who make strategic decisions based on values, goals, expectations, and the history of reinforcements.

Two theories developed by cognitive psychologists, cognitive load theory and dual process theory, present a challenge to social exchange and rational choice theories by proposing limits to the rationality of human decision-making and learning. *Cognitive load theory* proposes three parts of memory that are used in learning and decision-making: sensory memory, long-term memory, and working memory. Sensory memory and long-term memory hold information for long periods of time for later recall. Working memory is where processing of information happens, but only a limited amount of information can be held in working memory at one time. People experience cognitive overload when the demands for decision-making exceed the capacity of working memory. Cognitive overload interferes with problem solving and learning. It has been implicated in medical errors and impasses in social policy negotiations (Harris & Santhosh, 2022; Stone, 2012).

Dual process theory proposes that there are two systems of human cognition, one system that is fast, automatic, unintentional, and operates outside awareness and another system that is slow, deliberate, analytical, and operates within awareness (Evans, 2008; Kahneman, 2011). This theory receives support from neuroscience research that finds different neural pathways for fast and slow thinking (Bursell & Olsson, 2021). In dual process theory, the fast-thinking system is known as implicit cognition. Implicit cognition is influenced by language structures and based on memories of past social experiences that are not remembered but which have created automatic associations, attitudes, and stereotypes. Explicit cognition occurs in working memory and is accessible to awareness, introspection, analysis, and control (Kahneman, 2011). Implicit bias is an example of fast thinking and is an automatic, favorable, or unfavorable mental representation of people belonging to a social category. It is a social cognition operating outside of awareness, based on attitudes and stereotypes learned over time that often involve a preference for the in-group over an out-group (Banji et al., 2021). Implicit biases persist even when they are discordant with explicit biases.

Critical Analysis of the Learning Perspective

In terms of *coherence and conceptual clarity,* the learning perspective gets high marks for conceptual clarity; concepts are very clearly defined in each of the streams. Although there are disagreements about the mechanisms of learning among the various streams of the behavioral perspective, within each stream, ideas are logically developed in a consistent manner. Considering *testability and empirical support,* learning concepts are easily measured for empirical investigation because theorizing has been based, in very large part, on laboratory research. This characteristic is also a drawback of the learning perspective, however, because laboratory experiments, by design, eliminate much of the complexity of person–environment interactions. In general, however, all streams of the learning perspective have attained a high degree of empirical support.

Overall, the learning perspective sacrifices multidimensional *comprehensiveness* to gain logical consistency and testability. Little attention was paid to biology in early theorizing, but in his later work, Bandura (2001, 2002) recognized the role of biology in human behavior. Even so, biological research provides some of the best evidence for the learning perspective. Cognition and emotion are not included in theories of classical and operant conditioning, but they do receive attention in social cognitive theory. Spiritual factors are considered unmeasurable and irrelevant in classical and operant conditioning theories. Although environment plays a large role in the learning perspective, the view of the environment is quite limited in classical and operant conditioning. Operant conditioning theories search for the one environmental factor, or *contingency*, that has reinforced or has the possibility of reinforcing one specific behavior. The identified contingency is usually in the micro system (such as the family) or sometimes in the meso system (e.g., a school classroom), but these systems are not typically put in social, economic, political, or historical contexts. Bandura's cognitive social learning theory acknowledges broad systemic influences on the development of gender roles, and dual processing theory recognizes both micro and macro influences on implicit cognition. In conditioning theories, time is important only in terms of the juxtaposition of stimuli and reinforcement. Social exchange and rational choice theories recognize the history of reinforcements, and dual process theory emphasizes the way implicit cognition is created over time.

Early theorizing in the learning perspective receives low marks for addressing *antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.* Recent theorizing about and empirical measures for implicit bias have made an important contribution to the understanding of the persistence of racist attitudes and stereotypes as well as unfavorable implicit biases about other marginalized groups. It is important for social workers to recognize that we all have implicit biases that are created over time and operate outside of awareness, even when they conflict with newly learned explicit cognition. The best antidote to harmful implicit biases is to slow down and allow time for explicit cognition to function. In terms of diversity, Sapolsky (2017) suggests that conditioning theorists were often right about human behavior but were wrong in one big way: They failed to acknowledge that we are not all born the same and the same training will not produce the same results in all humans. Researchers have begun to tackle this issue with empirical investigation of individual differences in responses to classical conditioning and sensitivity to reinforcement (M. T. Allen et al., 2019; Cui et al., 2015; Morriss et al., 2021). Bandura's (2002) conceptualization of proxy agency and collective agency has implications for social reform, equity, and inclusion. Operant conditioning theory recommends rewards over punishment, but it does not account for the coercion and oppression inherent in power relationships at every system level. It is quite possible, therefore, for the professional behavior modifier to be in service to oppressive forces. On the other hand, Bandura (1986) notes that persons in nondominant positions are particularly vulnerable to **learned helplessness**, in which a person's prior experience with environmental forces has led to low self-efficacy and expectations of efficacy. Maier and Seligman (2016) analyzed the neural circuitry of learned helplessness.

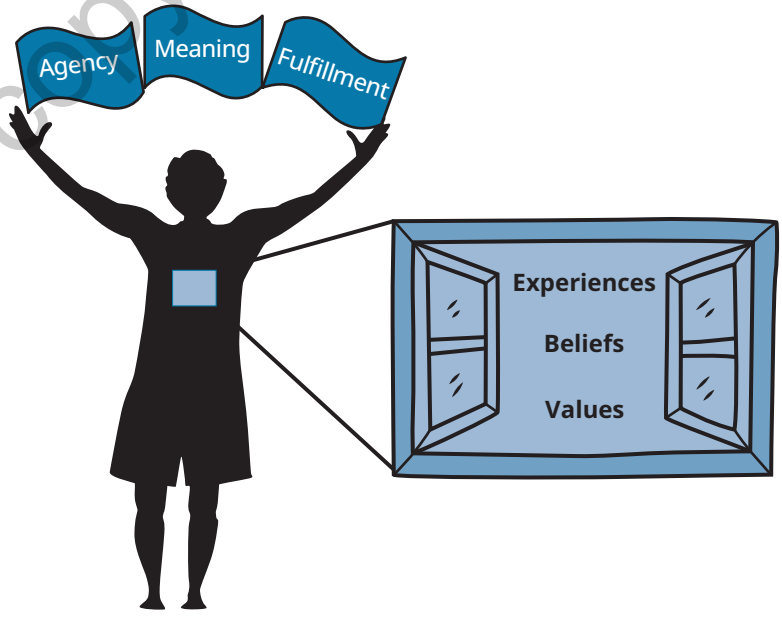
A major strength of the learning perspective is the ease with which learning principles can be extrapolated for intervention, giving it high marks for *usefulness for social work practice.* Classical and operant conditioning interventions are used to extinguish or modify problematic behaviors. Parent training programs often teach parents how to make more effective use of reinforcements to strengthen positive behaviors and weaken negative behaviors in their children. Cognitive theories of learning, with their attention to beliefs, expectations, and fast and slow thinking, are useful for social work engagement and assessment. Social workers often model how to enact new behaviors for their clients. Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) has been found to produce lasting favorable results for many human problems (Thomlison & Thomlison, 2017). Dual processing theory can be used to assess the implicit and explicit cognitions involved in depression and substance use disorders and to guide cognitive behavioral interventions for these situations (see Haeffel et al., 2007; Keough et al., 2016; Li & Dobson, 2021). Dialectical behavior therapy involves the learning of adaptive coping related to dysregulation in emotional, interpersonal, self, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions (Cooper et al., 2022). Cognitive processing therapy, which helps clients learn skills to challenge their trauma-related beliefs and cognitive distortions, has been found to have long-term benefits for reducing symptoms of PTSD (Cooper et al., 2022; Iverson et al., 2015). Bandura's (2002) conceptualization of proxy agency and collective agency has implications for advocacy and collective antiracist, anti-oppressive action.

Humanistic-Existential Perspective

Like many families, Mariana Rodriguez and her family were motivated by many needs during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their basic physiological and safety needs were compromised when they tested positive for the disease. During Mariana's and Daniel's hospitalizations, the close-knit family was unable to provide each other the kind of daily love and belongingness to which they had been accustomed. However, they appreciated the compassion and support from the medical community and from their Catholic parish. The changes that needed to be made after Daniel's death were painful and frightening, but Mariana and her children found the courage, will, and perseverance to make the necessary adjustments. When Mariana experienced anxiety and panic at work, she had confidence that her supervisor would respect her version of what was happening and that they could work together to minimize the challenge. Mariana was motivated to be a strength for her family and to take the steps needed to take responsibility and accountability for her grief process. She was fortified by the positive regard and empathic listening she experienced in the grief support group and felt empowered to help create a culture of collective grief and celebration of life for her community. As she reflected on Daniel's death, she revisited conversations in which he had told her he was not afraid of death and questioned her own death fears. These are some of the ideas the humanistic-existential perspective suggests for understanding what has happened and is happening with Mariana Rodriguez and her family.

The humanistic-existential psychological perspective is often called the "third force" of psychology, because it was developed in reaction to the determinism found in early versions of both the psychodynamic (behavior as intrapsychically determined) and learning (behavior as externally determined) perspectives. It is a phenomenological approach that focuses on human conscious experiences, how the person experiences the world internally. It proposes that human behavior is best understood from the internal frame of reference of the person rather than from external evaluation. The **humanistic-existential perspective** proposes that humans have the capacity to make choices (human agency), search for meaning, and constantly strive to become the best version of themselves that they can be. This perspective asserts that each individual is unique, has worth, and should be treated with dignity. The main ideas of the humanistic-existential perspective are presented visually in Figure 2.7, and Table 2.1 lists the important principles, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

FIGURE 2.7 ■ Humanistic-Existential Perspective



The most influential early contributors to humanistic psychology are Abraham Maslow (1950, 1970, 1971) and Carl Rogers (1973, 1978, 1986). Maslow proposed a *theory of motivation*. He considered motivation to be complex, both conscious and unconscious or unknown to the person.

He acknowledged that some behavior is not motivated but driven by such influences as conditioned reflexes, maturation, and drugs. Maslow proposed that people are constantly motivated by one need or another and presented a **hierarchy of needs** in which higher-level needs cannot emerge in full motivational force until lower needs have been at least partially satisfied. Physiological needs are at the bottom of the hierarchy, and the need for self-actualization is at the top:

- *Physiological needs:* food, water, oxygen, maintenance of bodily functions
- *Safety needs:* physical security, stability, dependency, protection
- *Love and belongingness needs:* affection, intimacy
- *Esteem needs:* self-respect, confidence, competence, reputation
- *Self-actualization:* self-fulfillment, realization of potential

Maslow (1950) was particularly interested in self-actualizing people and was critical of the emphasis on psychopathology in psychoanalytic theory. After engaging in a number of case studies, Maslow identified some characteristics that self-actualizing people possess. They can detect lack of authenticity in others; are less afraid of the unknown than other people; accept themselves, others, and nature; are spontaneous, simple, and natural; are interested in problems outside of themselves; have a purpose for living; and can find joy in solitude and privacy. Maslow is considered one of the founders of *transpersonal psychology*, which he labeled as the "fourth force" of psychology.

Rogers (1973, 1978, 1986) proposed a *person-centered theory.* Rogers believed that humans have vast internal resources for self-understanding and self-directed behavior. The person-centered theory has two basic assumptions: the formative tendency and the actualizing tendency. The *formative tendency* assumes that all matter has a tendency to evolve from simpler to more complex forms. Human consciousness evolves from a primitive unconsciousness to a highly developed awareness, including self-awareness. The *actualizing tendency* assumes that organisms have a tendency to move toward fulfillment of their potential. Rogers thought that the actualizing tendency is not limited to humans; animals and plants also have an inherent tendency to grow toward genetic potential. Rogers also suggested that humans have a tendency to resist change, to fight against new ideas, and find change painful and frightening. However, humans are willing to learn and change when certain interpersonal conditions are met to support the actualizing tendency. The conditions that must be met are involvement with a partner who is authentic and exhibits empathy and unconditional positive regard. These are the ideal interpersonal conditions under which people come to use their internal resources to become more fully functioning. Rogers was particularly interested in the capacity of humans to change in therapeutic relationships and presented a detailed theory of client-centered psychotherapy that focused on the necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic growth (authenticity, unconditional positive regard, and empathic listening), stages of therapeutic change, and the desired outcome of a higher level of positive regard. Rogers emphasized the dignity and worth of each individual.

Existential psychological theory considers the balance between freedom and responsibility in human lives, the human search for meaning, and the uniqueness and value of each person. It posits that the human essence is the power to continually redefine oneself through the choices that are made. Personal growth results from staying in the immediate moment, and each person is responsible for who they are and become. An issue that sets existentialism apart from other versions of humanistic theory is the suggestion that suffering is a necessary part of human growth. Echoing Erich Fromm's (1947) humanistic psychoanalysis theory, Rollo May's (1967, 1981) existential psychology theory provides an example of this focus on suffering. May emphasizes the human suffering that comes from *alienation* and describes three types of alienation: losing touch with the natural world (unwelt), lack of meaningful interpersonal relations (mitwelt), and alienation from one's authentic self (eigenwelt). Healthy people adapt to the natural world, relate to others as fellow humans, and have self-awareness about what their experiences mean to them. May proposed that self-awareness must include an awareness of one's own mortality. Life becomes more meaningful when we confront the eventuality of our death, and fear of death often leads people to live defensively (May, 1958). The idea of fear of death is the focus of contemporary

terror management theory (TMT) and related research. TMT proposes that human awareness of death makes humans vulnerable to terrifying death anxiety (Harvell & Nisbett, 2016).

Maslow is said to have coined the term *positive psychology* when he used it as a chapter title in his 1954 book, *Motivation and Personality.* As we know it today, *positive psychology* undertakes the scientific study of people's strengths and virtues and promotes optimal functioning of individuals and communities (Lopez et al., 2019). Martin Seligman (1998, 2002), one of the authors of the concept of learned helplessness, has been at the forefront of positive psychology, contributing the important concept of **learned optimism**, the idea that optimism, hope, and joy can be learned and cultivated. Positive psychologists focus on prevention of mental health disorders and other problems of living and suggest this is best accomplished by enhancing human strength and competence. They have identified a set of human strengths that promote well-being and buffer against mental illness, including optimism, courage, hope, perseverance, honesty, a work ethic, and interpersonal skills (Lopez et al., 2019). The positive psychology approach is drawing on both Western and Eastern worldviews. A focus on hope is rooted in Western thinking about individualism, whereas emphasis on balance, compassion, and harmony comes more from Eastern collectivist thinking. The strengths perspective and solution-focused approach to social work are rooted in positive psychology, and Kam (2021) proposes an empowerment-participation-strengths (EPS) model for social work practice.

In recent decades, the humanistic-existential perspective has received criticism on several fronts. Sociological posthumanists criticize the perspective for putting humans at the center of the world and elevating the importance of humans over nature and other nonhuman elements. The perspective has also been criticized for its individualistic nature, suggesting that it is not a good fit for non-Western communal cultures. Another criticism is that the perspective ignores the role of oppressive social structures in human consciousness and behavior and has been used to make decisions about who is worthy of being called human.

Currently, we are seeing a resurgence of the humanistic-existential perspective in a more radical, critical form known as *critical humanism* (Plummer, 2021). Critical humanism focuses attention on the suffering and power imbalances in the world and calls for acknowledgment of the suffering and active work to develop solutions to alleviate it. It emphasizes the need to work toward reducing and repairing suffering and alienation caused by all types of dehumanization, exploitation, domination, and oppression embedded in contemporary social life. It is interested in building connections to the earth and all of the human and nonhuman beings that occupy it. The approach to consciousness in critical humanism draws on Freire's (1970) theory of *critical consciousness*, which is the ability to recognize and analyze economic, political, and social systems of inequality and to commit to taking actions against these systems (see Bañales et al., 2019; Conlin et al., 2021; Zaidi et al., 2017). Critical humanists disapprove of diagnostic psychological labels and categories that create a "medicalization of injustice" (Saleem et al., 2021).

In the discussion of the critical perspective, we noted that some theorists in the Global South are creating new theories out of the synthesis of Indigenous knowledge and theories from the Global North. Here is an example of that synthesis. Robert Chigangaidze (2021a, 2021b) proposes a synthesis of African Ubuntu philosophy and the humanistic-existential theoretical perspective and recommends the ubuntufication of social work. *Ubuntuism* is

> an African philosophical framework that is characterized by interconnectedness of all things and beings; the spiritual nature of people; their collective/individual identity and the collective/inclusive nature of family structure; oneness of mind, body, and spirit; and the value of interpersonal relationships. (Chigangaidze et al., 2022, p. 320)

Ubuntu originated with the Bantu people of South Africa and is known by different names across the continent of Africa. It is rooted in the sayings, "I am a person because you are, I am because I share and participate" and "I am because of others" (Chigangaidze, 2021a, p. 148; Chigangaidze et al., 2022, p. 320). Chigangaidze (2021a) identifies the following concepts as crucial to the synthesis of ubuntuism and the humanistic-existential perspective: self-awareness, self-determination, human dignity, connectedness and wholeness of life, pursuit of social justice and human rights, motivation, social inclusion and social cohesion, spirituality, and death as an inevitable reality.

Critical Analysis of the Humanistic-Existential Perspective

In terms of *coherence and conceptual clarity,* theories in the humanistic perspective are often criticized for being vague and highly abstract, with concepts such as uniqueness, personal freedom, self-actualization, and phenomenological experiences. The same evaluation can be made of many concepts from the emerging critical humanism with the exception of critical consciousness, which is clearly and consistently stated. However, Rogers's person-centered theory and recent positive psychology approaches are clear and coherent. Theorists in the humanistic-existential perspective, in general, have not been afraid to sacrifice coherence to gain what they see as a more complete understanding of human behavior. Over time, theorists have worked to refine and clarify the major concepts.

In terms of *testability and empirical support,* concepts from the humanistic-existential perspective can be rated average for generating research. Self-actualization continues to be a popular concept to research (see Kaufman, 2020; Krems et al., 2017; Ortiz, 2020). Rogers began a rigorous program of empirical investigation of the therapeutic process, and such research has provided strong empirical support for his conceptualization of the necessary conditions for the therapeutic relationship: unconditional positive regard, empathic listening, and authenticity (see Lynch et al., 2019; Ryan & Ryan, 2019; Smith et al., 2021). A scale has been developed for measuring critical consciousness (Diemer et al., 2020). The positive psychology movement is focusing on producing empirical support for the role of human strengths and virtues in human wellbeing (see Chaves et al., 2017; Singh, 2016). Some researchers have suggested that neuroscience research is calling the notion of free will (human agency) into question, arguing that it provides clear evidence that human behavior is determined by the gene–environment interactions that shape the brain (Kurzweil, 2012). Other neuroscientists provide evidence that humans have the power to "live our lives and train our brains" in ways that shift emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (Davidson & Begley, 2012, p. 225). That is a high endorsement for some of the tenets of the humanistic-existential perspective.

The humanistic-existential perspective is low to moderate in *comprehensiveness.* The internal life of the individual is the focus of the classical humanistic-existential perspective, and it is strong in consideration of both psychological and spiritual dimensions of the person. It makes important contributions by its approach to motivation and by introducing the meaning of death to the understanding of human behavior. With its emphasis on a search for meaning, the humanistic perspective is the only perspective presented in this chapter to explicitly recognize the role of spirituality in human behavior. In addition, Maslow recognizes the importance of satisfaction of basic biological needs. Early humanistic-existential theorists noted the importance of relationships with other people and relationships with nature, and these ideas have become more prominent in critical humanism. Critical humanism is concerned with largescale systems of dehumanization and oppression. The positive psychology movement has begun to examine positive environments that can promote human strengths and virtues, including school, work, and community environments (Lopez et al., 2019).

Although the classical humanistic-existential perspective was concerned about dehumanization, it receives low marks for direct attention to *antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.* However, the client-centered approach to intervention promotes the dignity and worth of all and gives value to the lived experiences of all, including members of oppressed and marginalized groups. The focus on alienation provides tools for considering the impact of racism and other forms of oppression on individuals, communities, and societies. In recent years, the humanistic-existential perspective has been used to understand diversity. For example, positive psychology has been promoted as a helpful way to understand Islamic psychology and Muslim wellbeing (Pasha-Zaidi, 2021). Ortiz (2020) analyzes how self-actualization should be understood in collectivistic cultures, achieved through relationships and the honoring of collective values.

The humanistic-existential perspective gets high marks for *usefulness for social work practice.* It was developed by psychotherapy practitioners and is being revised by critical humanists devoted to the advancement of human rights and promotion of justice. The EPAS of the CSWE (2022) includes language that is consistent with the humanistic-existential perspective: "Social workers value the importance of human relationships . . . use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills . . .

demonstrate respect for client self-determination" (p. 11) and "engage in practices that advance human rights to promote social, racial, economic, and environmental justice" (p. 9). The perspective provides guidelines for engaging with authenticity, unconditional positive regard, and empathic listening. The perspective is strong in recommendations for engaging with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities but also useful for assessment and intervention. With its emphasis on the individual drive for growth and competence, it recommends a "strengths" rather than deficit approach to practice (see Corcoran, 2022; Saleebey, 2012). The emphasis on motivation has served as the impetus for the development of the motivational interviewing approach to practice (Corcoran, 2016; Iarussi, 2020). Appreciative inquiry is an organizational model that focuses on identifying the positives and dreams of what might be realized or achieved (Lewis et al., 2016). Positive psychology is popular in clinical work and proposes guidelines for developing positive environments in schools, workplaces, and communities.

Critical Thinking Questions 2.4

Both theories of cognitive learning and theories in the humanistic-existential perspective emphasize the important role of *human agency*, the capacity to intentionally make things happen, in human behavior. Other theories in the learning perspective and most of the other perspectives discussed here put less emphasis on human agency. Now that you have examined seven theoretical perspectives, how much agency do you think humans have over their behavior, in general? Explain. How much agency do you think Mariana Rodriguez has?

THE MERITS OF MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

You can see that each of these perspectives puts a different lens on the unfolding story of Mariana Rodriguez and her family. Although they all are seeking to understand human behavior, different aspects of behavior are emphasized. No one theory will ever tell the whole story of human behavior, but each of these perspectives tells an important partial story—a partial story that will be particularly helpful in some situations. You can also see that each of the seven perspectives has been used to guide social work practice over time. Some of the perspectives are particularly useful for suggesting how to engage with client systems, some are especially useful for assessment, some are particularly strong for suggesting social work interventions, and some can be used to guide practice evaluation. It was suggested in Chapter 1 that each situation can be examined from several perspectives and that using a variety of perspectives brings more dimensions of the situation into view. Cognitive psychologists have provided convincing evidence that all of us, whether new or experienced social workers, have biases that predispose us to do too little thinking rather than too much about the practice situations we confront. We are particularly prone to ignore information that is contrary to our hypotheses about situations. Consequently, we tend to end our search for understanding prematurely. One step we can take to prevent this premature closure is to think about practice situations from multiple theoretical perspectives.

We have provided an overview of seven theoretical perspectives in this chapter and discussed some of the theories related to them. In the rest of this book, you will encounter other theories related to these perspectives, theories used to understand specific dimensions of person and environment.

To be competent professionals, we must view the quest for adequate breadth and depth in our knowledge base as an ongoing, lifelong challenge and responsibility. As we worked to revise this chapter, we were challenged to rethink our own understanding of human behavior, and we were excited and sometimes awed to see the extent to which recent events have spurred theorists, researchers, and clinicians to reevaluate the ways they have been approaching the study of human behavior. You can become an important part of this ongoing reflection and revision. With the current state of knowledge about human behavior, recognizing the ever-evolving state of such knowledge, we recommend these seven theoretical perspectives for social work engagement, assessment, intervention, and practice

evaluation. Different perspectives will be more or less useful in different types of practice situations. We believe that many practice situations would benefit from using these multiple theoretical perspectives in an integrated fashion in order to see the many dimensions—the contradictions as well as consistencies—in stories like the one of Mariana Rodriguez and her family. We encourage you to be flexible and reflective in both your thinking and your doing throughout your career. We remind you, again, to use general knowledge such as that provided by theoretical perspectives only to generate hypotheses to be tested in specific situations, not as facts inherent in every situation.

Critical Thinking Questions 2.5

At the beginning of the chapter, we wonder what drew your attention when you read the story of Mariana Rodriguez and her family. Which perspectives seem more closely aligned with what caught your attention upon first reading the story? Which perspectives provided you with useful new ways to think about the story? Were there issues or ideas you noticed that did not seem to be addressed by any of the perspectives?

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The seven perspectives on human behavior discussed in this chapter suggest a variety of principles for social work practice:

- Engage clients by listening to how they see their situations, what kinds of changes they would like to see, and what methods they would like to use to accomplish those changes. Be aware of the potential for significant differences between your assessment of the situation and the client's own assessment. Focus on strengths rather than pathology; recognize the possibility of learned hopefulness as well as learned helplessness.
- Strive to understand how clients view their situations. Engage clients in thinking about the environments in which their constructions of self and situations have developed. When working in situations characterized by differences in belief systems, assist members in engaging in sincere discussions and in negotiating lines of action.
- In assessment, consider any recent system changes that may be affecting the client system. Assist families and groups in renegotiating unsatisfactory system boundaries. Develop networks of support for persons experiencing challenging life transitions.
- In engagement and assessment, consider power arrangements and forces of oppression and the alienation that emanate from them. Assist in the development of advocacy efforts to challenge patterns of dominance, when possible. Be aware of the power dynamics in your relationships with clients.
- Consider the patterns of exchange in the social support networks of individual clients, families, and organizations, drawing on network maps and other assessment tools when useful. Assist individuals, families, groups, organizations, and other systems in renegotiating unsatisfactory patterns of exchange, when possible.
- Analyze policy through the lens of diverse theoretical perspectives; recognize the role of both reason and emotion in the policymaking process.
- Assist clients in expressing emotional conflicts and in understanding how these are related to past events, when appropriate. Help them develop self-awareness and self-control, where needed. Assist clients in locating and using needed environmental resources.
- Consider the familial, cultural, and historical contexts influencing the timing and experience of developmental transitions. Recognize human development as unique and lifelong.

- Consider the variety of processes by which behavior is learned. Be sensitive to the possibility of learned helplessness when clients lack motivation for change. Consider issues of social justice and fairness before engaging in behavior modification.
- Be aware of your own fast and slow thinking and implicit and explicit cognitions.

KEY TERMS

Agency
Anthropocene
Binary oppositions
Critical perspective
Critical race theory (CRT)
Cumulative advantage
Cumulative disadvantage
Developmental perspective
Efficacy expectation
Epigenetic model of human development
Feminist theories
Hierarchy of needs
Humanistic-existential perspective
Learned helplessness
Learned optimism
Learning perspective
Microaggressions
Protective factors
Psychodynamic perspective
Risk factors
Self-efficacy
Social capital
Social constructionist perspective
Symbolic interaction theory
Systems perspective

ACTIVE LEARNING

1. Reread the family case study (Case Study 2.1) at the beginning of the chapter and review the important principles of the seven theoretical perspectives as presented in Table 2.1. Choose three specific important principles that you think are most helpful in thinking about Mariana Rodriguez and her family. For example, you might choose this principle from the systems perspective: Each person is involved in multiple interacting systems. You might also choose this principle from the humanistic-existential perspective: Humans have the capacity to make choices, search for meaning, and constantly strive for personal growth. Likewise, you might choose another specific principle from any of the perspectives. The point is to choose the three principles that you find most useful. In a small group, compare notes with three or four classmates about which principles were chosen. Discuss why these particular choices and not others were made by each of your classmates.
2. Choose one of the theoretical perspectives described in this chapter. Spend a few minutes thinking about how you would describe that perspective to a class of sixth graders. Prepare an outline of the presentation you would make to the sixth graders. Post or otherwise share your outline for your classmates to review and provide feedback.
3. Choose a current event or recent news story. Read the story carefully and then think about which of the seven theoretical perspectives discussed in this chapter is most reflected in the story.