

The Merrill Social Work and Human Services Series

7TH EDITION

# HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

*Shifting Paradigms in Essential Knowledge  
for Social Work Practice*

JOE M. SCHRIVER



SEVENTH EDITION

# Human Behavior and the Social Environment

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SHIFTING PARADIGMS IN ESSENTIAL  
KNOWLEDGE FOR SOCIAL WORK  
PRACTICE

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SHIFTING PARADIGMS IN ESSENTIAL  
KNOWLEDGE FOR SOCIAL WORK  
PRACTICE

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# Preface

This text begins with a presentation of the basic purposes and foundations of social work and social work education and their relationship to human behavior and the social environment (HBSE). Next, a conceptual framework for thinking about both traditional and alternative ways in which knowledge about human behavior and the social environment is created and valued is outlined. The book then uses the notions of enduring, emerging, and contemporary theories, perspectives, and practice models to organize and present content relevant to HBSE.

The traditional and alternative paradigm framework is an organized but flexible way of understanding the relationship of theories of human behavior and the social environment used in social work practice to critical concerns of the social work profession. This approach assesses theories on their reflection of dimensions of traditional and alternative paradigms including (1) positivistic versus interpretive approaches to creating and valuing knowledge, (2) masculine versus feminist/queer worldviews, (3) Whiteness versus diversity, (4) competitive versus collaborative worldviews, and (5) privilege versus oppressions. These dimensions are not either/or propositions but are reflected to different degrees in the theories, perspectives, and practice models we explore in this book. To visually demonstrate which of the traditional and alternative paradigm dimensions are reflected in the theories we examine in the text, a matrix is presented at the beginning of Chapters 3–12. The matrix compares theories, perspectives, and practice models presented in the chapter for their inclusion of elements of traditional and alternative paradigm dimensions.

Chapters are presented about each of the social system levels required of professional social work education by the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) of the Council on Social Work Education. Knowledge for practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and in global contexts as well as content on the interaction among these systems are presented.

## New to the Edition

This, the seventh edition of this book, represents the most comprehensive and in-depth revision since its original publication almost 25 years ago in 1995. These revisions, which include all chapters, are an effort to include some of the most pressing and exciting issues concerning social work and human behavior in dynamic interaction with the larger physical and social environments of today and tomorrow.

The most significant changes in this edition include:

- **New organization:** The book has a new organization and format addressing each theory, perspective, and practice model consistently. Each theory is presented by addressing its background or history, its definition, the components that make up the theory, and examples of criticism of the theory.
- **Technology:** The inclusion of new content on technology and its powerful impact on both social work and on the people we serve. Chapter 1, Social Work in a Digital World: A New Paradigm?; Chapter 2, Technology and Paradigms; Chapter 7, Technology and Identity Development; Chapter 8, Technology and Families; Chapter 9, Technology

and Groups in Social Work; Chapter 10, Technology and Organizations; Chapter 11, Virtual Community; and Chapter 12, Technology and International Social Work.

- **Critical thinking:** Extensive new content on and illustrations of critical thinking in Chapter 1.
- **Neuroscience:** A new chapter (Chapter 6) as well as integration with other chapters. Chapter 6 focuses on the relationship of neuroscience and trauma in social work practice. It presents efforts in social work and other disciplines to develop evidence-based interventions that address the complex interplay of brain development and the experience of trauma.
- **Identity, diversity, and development:** A new chapter (Chapter 7) is devoted to identity development, human diversity, and oppression in the context of our developing personal and social identities.
- **Queer theory and critical Whiteness studies:** New content in Chapter 2
- **Evidence-based practice:** Theories and evidence-based practice (EBP) interventions are more closely connected. In Chapter 3 EBP is presented in detail and trauma theory and trauma-informed social work practice are presented in Chapters 6 and 8.
- **Current events:** More inclusion of current events from a social work perspective.
- **Environmental Social Work:** The rapidly expanding area of environmental social work is addressed in Chapter 12.
- **Illustrations:** More examples and illustrations of the use of theories, perspectives, and practice models in social work practice.



# Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Ananda Newmark for his valuable contribution to this edition. Ananda provided the new material covering technology and its impact on social work practice and the people the profession serves. This subject is essential to the practice of social work in the 21st century.

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# Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE) and Paradigms

## INTRODUCTION

### Who Should Use This Text and How Should It Be Used?

Instructors in both undergraduate and graduate social work education programs can use this text to help their students gain an understanding of human behavior and the social environment (HBSE) content. The text is designed to meet the requirements of the Council on Social Work Education for HBSE content at either the undergraduate or graduate level. Since the implementation of the Council on Social Work Education 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), the inclusion of HBSE content in this text is essential for helping students understand the expectations for meeting several of the Competencies necessary for effective social work practice (Competency 6: Engagement, 7: Assessment, 8: Intervention, and 9: Evaluation). In addition, other required Competencies are supported by the content of this text, including ethical and professional behavior; critical thinking; human diversity; social, economic, and environmental justice; research; and policy practice.

At the undergraduate level, the text may work best in programs with a two-course HBSE sequence designed to provide content on HBSE from a multi-systems perspective (individual, family, group, organization, community, and global systems). At the foundation graduate level, the text can be effectively used as the text in a single HBSE course or a two-course sequence designed to provide basic content across system levels and, in the case of graduate programs, prior to delivering advanced HBSE content.

The purpose of human behavior and the social environment content in social work education is to provide us with knowledge

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able to:

- Analyze social work concerns and issues using critical thinking.
- Describe the significance of perception in relation to client systems.
- Identify the basic purposes, core values, and assumptions underlying the social work profession.
- Describe the nine core competencies of the social work profession.
- Explain the purpose of human behavior and the social environment in the social work curriculum.
- Define the concepts of paradigm and paradigm shift as well as describe the history of major paradigm shifts in approaches to understanding the world.
- Describe the role of both science and art as foundations of social work.

for practice. We need to continually look at this content for how to apply what we are learning about human behavior and the social environment to social work practice and to our lives. As we move through the material in this text, we may struggle to integrate what we are learning here with what we have learned and are learning from our own and others' life experiences, from our other social work courses, and from our courses in the liberal arts and sciences. We will try to weave together all these important sources of knowing and understanding into an organic whole that can help us become life-long learners and guide us in our social work practice. Part of what we will learn as we move through the text is the importance of recognizing and owning our personal biases and values so that they do not negatively impact our practice with client systems. The next section explains the author's efforts to accomplish this personally.

### **A Note about Bias from Author Joe Schriver**

I should make it explicit that I am biased. I recognize the contributions of traditional perspectives and approaches to creating and valuing knowledge, but I believe that we as humans will not realize our collective and individual potential for well-being if we do not embrace alternative perspectives and worldviews such as those presented in this text. Therefore, while traditional perspectives and paradigms are presented in this text and clearly have value, the reader should keep in mind that I generally find many of these perspectives incomplete in their representation of *all* people and their lived experiences. I believe that the perspectives used to define and describe "normal" or "optimal" human behavior and experiences too often represent the beliefs and experiences of only a privileged few. These privileged few too often include only those who have the power, good fortune, ability, gender, color, wealth, or the sexual orientation/identity consistent with and reflected in traditional perspectives and worldviews.

The reader should also be aware that, though in many respects this text is a critique of traditional paradigm thinking, I am a product of the traditional institutions that create and enforce those traditional perspectives and worldviews. I also share many of the characteristics of the "privileged few." Therefore, writing this text and its subsequent editions has required me to repeatedly question, examine, and expand my own worldview. With this seventh edition, I continue what I now believe is a life-long journey.

For future (and current) social workers, I contend that a critical approach in our efforts to understand human behavior and the social environment, while respecting the human dignity and rights of all persons, is essential for effective professional practice. One only need look at the current political climate in the United States to see policies and actions that could be considered a direct affront to the most basic social work values: inherent worth and dignity of and a commitment to social, economic, and environmental justice for all humans, not just the entitled few. Additionally, these affronts to the well-being of the people we serve (denial of the rights of immigrants; voter disenfranchisement; women's rights to make their own decisions about their health; isolation from, even hostility toward, other nations and peoples different from ourselves in terms of culture or religion) cry out for an activist stance on our parts as social workers. We cannot stand idly and comfortably by.

## **Human Behavior and the Social Environment**

### **Person-in-Environment**

The social work profession has long held and generally accepted the principle that social work is guided by a person-in-environment perspective. In other words, we cannot do social work unless we recognize and incorporate into our practice the interrelatedness of the person and

the environment that envelopes that person. This fundamental dimension of the social work paradigm will guide much of our effort in this text to understand “human behavior and the social environment” in the context of social work practice at all system levels (individual, family, group, organization, community, and global). We explore person-in-environment using the PIE (person-in-environment) classification system in Chapter 3.

What do we mean when we refer to environment? When we refer to *environment*, we mean the social and physical context of the surroundings in which human behavior occurs. In addition to the social and physical context, we concur with Caryl B. Germain (1986) that environment also includes such elements as time and space. These unseen but influential aspects of environment are especially important to social workers when working across cultures. Different cultures emphasize very different perspectives on such unseen elements as time and space. For example, members of one culture may arrange their activities and environments according to very precise time schedules. Members of other cultures may arrange their activities in an environment organized by much more natural and less specific divisions of time, such as morning, afternoon, and evening or according to seasonal changes. If we are not aware of alternative perspectives on these unseen but critical environmental characteristics, we risk insult and misunderstanding in our interactions with others.

## Purpose and Assumptions

Moving through the content of this text can be compared to a journey. Before we begin our journey, we place the content and purposes of this human behavior and the social environment (HBSE) text within the context of the purpose of social work as the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) has defined it. CSWE is the organization responsible for determining and monitoring the accreditation standards for undergraduate and graduate (MSW) social work education programs in the United States.

### Purpose

According to the Council on Social Work Education (2015),

The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community well-being. 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 and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons, locally and globally. (p. 5)

The purpose of social work will guide us throughout our journey to understand and apply HBSE content. The purpose emerges from the history of the social work profession and its continuing concern for improving quality of life, especially for vulnerable populations.

### Assumptions

In addition to the purpose of social work, our journey through this text is guided by several very basic assumptions about us and the people with whom we work:

1. How we view the world and its people directly affects the way we will practice social work.
2. The way we view the world and its people already affects the way we behave in our daily lives.
3. Our work as social workers and our lives are not separate from each other.



4. Our lives are not separate from the lives of the people with whom we work and interact.
5. While our lives are interconnected with the lives of the people with whom we work and interact, we differ from each other in many ways.
6. The assumptions we make about ourselves and others are strongly influenced by our individual and collective histories and cultures.
7. Change is a constant part of our lives and the lives of the people with whom we work.

## SOCIAL WORK COMPETENCIES AND HBSE

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The assumptions above reflect and reinforce required knowledge, values, and behaviors necessary to demonstrate social work competence. The CWSE 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards describe the required “knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes” that must be integrated for competent social work practice. The EPAS uses the term “holistic competence” to indicate the integration of components above through the social worker’s “critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgment” to demonstrate competence in “unique practice situations” (CSWE, 2015, p. 21). We now explore the required competencies in relation to the assumptions we just made.

*Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior* includes the following expectations closely linked to several of the assumptions concerning the need to recognize and manage our personal values and beliefs:

- Social workers recognize personal values and the distinction between personal and professional values.
- [Social workers] also understand how their personal experiences and affective reactions influence their professional judgment and behavior.
- [Social workers] use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations.
- [Social workers] use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior (CSWE, 2015, p. 7).

*Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice* includes the knowledge, values, and behaviors supported by the assumptions above in its recognition of the importance of diversity and differences in our work.

- Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity.
- [Social workers] apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.
- [Social workers] apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse clients and constituencies (CSWE, 2015, p. 7).

*Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice* is supported by the above assumptions in its focus on human rights, oppression, and theories of human need and social justice.

- Social workers understand that every person regardless of position in society has fundamental human rights such as freedom, safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care, and education.

- Social workers understand the global interconnections between oppression and human rights violations, and are knowledgeable about theories of human need and social justice and strategies to promote social and economic justice and human rights.
- [Social workers] apply their understanding of social, economic, and environmental justice to advocate for human rights at the individual and system levels (CSWE, 2015, pp. 7–8).

*Competency 4: Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice* reflects much of what is necessary to understand, critically evaluate, and apply theories of HBSE. For example, to meet our expectations for understanding HBSE, it is essential that we grasp the research processes necessary to understand, critique, and apply the theories we learn about in this course.

- Social workers understand quantitative and qualitative research methods.
- Social workers understand that evidence that informs practice derives from multidisciplinary sources and multiple ways of knowing.
- [Social workers] apply critical thinking to engage in analysis of quantitative and qualitative research methods and research findings.
- [Social workers] use and translate research evidence to inform and improve practice, policy, and service delivery. (CSWE, 2015, p. 9)

Social work competencies that directly include HBSE content are those addressing each component necessary for effective social work practice. These include the following CSWE competencies:

*Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities*

*Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities*

*Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities*

*Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities*

To achieve these competencies, we must

- “[U]nderstand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge to facilitate engagement with clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.”
- “[A]pply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to engage with clients and constituencies.” (CSWE, 2015, p. 9)

As indicated in the earlier description of holistic competence, it is not sufficient to understand HBSE theories. We must also be able to critically evaluate each theory for its usefulness in a specific practice context. For example, does a theory of individual development created using able-bodied, male-only study samples apply equally to practice with women with developmental disabilities? This is not to say the theory would necessarily be completely rejected because of the original sample. However, the social worker would probably need to dig a bit deeper: Has the theory been successfully applied to populations of women with disabilities in the past? Have new studies been done since its creation with samples, including women with disabilities? With what results? Only after evaluating the theory for its appropriateness in a specific context do we then use the theory in engaging, assessing, intervening, or evaluating outcome of our work with client systems.

## Core Values

In addition, the content of this text is grounded in the core values of the social work profession as identified in the National Association of Social Workers (2008) Code of Ethics:

- Service
- Social justice
- Dignity and worth of the person
- Importance of human relationships
- Integrity
- Competence

These values are and have historically been the underpinning for all social work education and practice.

Our journey through this text is guided by some basic concepts, skills, and perspectives that must come together to competently practice social work. Next, we explore perspectives on critical thinking and its importance for social workers.

## Critical Thinking

Efforts to understand and teach critical thinking have a long history in many disciplines. Varied disciplines, including social work, have focused on the importance of good critical thinking in problem solving to ensure multiple and innovative ways of thinking about and solving the problems our client systems face.

According to Peter Facione, “Critical thinking is thinking with a purpose” (Brechin, Brown, & Eby, 2000, and Facione, 2000, cited in Tilbury, Osmond, & Scott, 2009, p. 33). Facione (2015, p. 2) suggests that, “At one level we all know what ‘critical thinking’ means—it means good thinking, almost the opposite of illogical, irrational, thinking.” According to Facione,

Critical thinking is skeptical without being cynical. It is open-minded without being wishy-washy. It is analytical without being nitpicky. Critical thinking can be decisive without being stubborn, evaluative without being judgmental, and forceful without being opinionated. (p. 25)

To think critically is a complex process and involves the use of “surface structure” and “deep structure” knowledge of a problem or issue to be resolved. In addition, to be a successful critical thinker requires both “domain knowledge” and practice in its use. Good critical thinking also involves self-regulation of our thinking processes. It requires an attitude or disposition consistent with principles of critical thinking. Finally, critical thinking includes moral or ethical choices (Facione, 2015; Willingham, 2007).

Critical thinking is more than skills. Daniel Willingham actually argues that critical thinking is not a skill or a set of skills that can be used regardless of context. Rather, it is a different kind of skill that requires an integration of “processes of thinking” with sufficient knowledge (facts) of what you are thinking about (i.e. solving a specific problem) with what is referred to below as “domain knowledge” such as what facts you currently have about the problem, what more do you need to know about the problem, its history, context, etc. as we see in the discussion below (Willingham, 2007, p. 17). It includes a moral and ethical aspect as well. Critical thinking includes what experts refer to as *dispositions* or attitudes. Examples of these dispositions include:

- Inquisitiveness with regard to a wide range of issues
- Concern to become and remain well-informed

- Trust in the processes of reasoned inquiry
- Self-confidence in one's own abilities to reason
- Open-mindedness regarding divergent world views
- Flexibility in considering alternatives and opinions
- Understanding of the opinions of other people
- Honesty in facing one's own biases, prejudices, stereotypes, or egocentric tendencies (Facione, 2015, p. 11).

Facione suggests these dispositions result in outcomes including "civic engagement, concern for the common good, and social responsibility" (p. 15). He also argues that good critical thinking is essential to a functioning democracy. All of these dispositions are consistent with the core values of social work.

To illustrate the "dispositions" of good critical thinking, Facione describes the attitudes or dispositions of good critical thinkers using descriptive statements such as:

"I hate talk shows where people shout their opinions but never give any reasons at all."

"Figuring out what people really mean by what they say is important to me."

"I hold off making decisions until I have thought through my options."

"Rather than relying on someone else's notes, I prefer to read the material myself."

"I try to see the merit in another's opinion, even if I reject it later."

"Even if a problem is tougher than I expected, I will keep working on it."

"Making intelligent decisions is more important than winning arguments." (2015, p. 12)

How many of the statements above are characteristic of statements you might make?

In thinking about good critical thinking, it is also important to consider the attitudes and consequences of non-critical thinkers or even of persons hostile to the idea of critical thinking. Facione suggests a non-critical thinker might be characterized as someone who:

- Is not interested in the facts
- Mistrusts reasoning as a way of finding things out or solving problems
- Holds his or her own reasoning abilities in low esteem
- Is close-minded, inflexible, insensitive
- Denies his or her own biases
- Jumps to conclusions or delays too long in making judgments
- Is never willing to reconsider an opinion (2015, p. 11).

Someone hostile to critical thinking may make statements like:

"I prefer jobs where the supervisor says exactly what to do and exactly how to do it."

"No matter how complex the problem, you can bet there will be a simple solution."

"I don't waste time looking things up."

"I hate when teachers discuss problems instead of just giving the answers."

"If my belief is truly sincere, evidence to the contrary is irrelevant."

"Selling an idea is like selling cars, you say whatever works." (Facione, 2015, p. 12)

The consequences of non-critical thinking or hostility to critical thinking are quite dire for both individuals and societies. Facione provides a glimpse of what life might be like in such a world.

Imagine your life and the lives of your friends and family placed in the hands of juries and judges who let their biases and stereotypes govern their decisions, who do not attend to the evidence, who are not interested in reasoned inquiry . . . Without critical thinking people would be more easily exploited not only politically but economically.

So, given a society that does not value and cultivate critical thinking, we might reasonably expect that in time the judicial system and the economic system would collapse. And, in such a society, one that does not liberate its citizens by teaching them to think critically for themselves, it would be madness to advocate democratic forms of government. (2015, pp. 24–25)

Facione further argues for the practical nature of teaching and learning that stresses critical thinking. For example, he suggests that a sincere search for the truth and open-mindedness about issues is a countermeasure to terrorists who seek to control what people think through “indoctrination, intimidation, and the strictest authoritarian orthodoxy” (2015, p. 26). These are important things to think about in light of efforts by domestic terrorists and white supremacist groups in the United States to recruit new members and to control the thinking of their members and followers, even to the point of inciting violence against non-white people and communities.

To think critically is hard work. Willingham suggests one reason that critical thinking is difficult is that it requires thinking at two levels of a problem simultaneously: surface structure and deep structure. He suggests our tendency is to over-focus on the surface structure of a problem and under-focus on the deep structure of the problem. In short, Willingham suggests that “the surface structure of the problem is overt, but the deep structure of a problem is not.” He often uses as examples word or thought problems to illustrate the two levels of thinking. He provides this example:

A treasure hunter is going to explore a cave up on a hill near a beach. He suspected there might be many paths inside the cave so he was afraid he might get lost. Obviously, he did not have a map of the cave; all he had with him were some common items such as a flashlight and a bag. What could he do to make sure he did not get lost trying to get back out of the cave later? (2007, p. 11)

How might you go about ensuring you could find your way out of the cave if you were the treasure hunter? “You were correct if you said that the solution is to carry some sand with you in the bag, and leave a trail as you go, so you can trace your path back when you’re ready to leave the cave” (Willingham, 2007, p. 11).

The sample of college students who were presented with the problem included both American and Chinese college students. Almost 75% of the Americans answered correctly, while only about 25% of the Chinese did. Why might this have been the case? Willingham suggests the Americans were more successful because they had “deep structure” knowledge about the problem because they knew the story of Hansel and Gretel and their use of breadcrumbs to mark the trail so they wouldn’t get lost. The Chinese students did not have access to this source of deep knowledge (Willingham, 2007).

Another way to help us think critically is to rely on *metacognition* or metacognitive strategies. These strategies allow us to call up past knowledge in small bits about past problems that can be applied to a current problem. For example, Willingham, 2007 (p. 13) suggests that something as simple as reminding yourself to “look for a problem’s deep structure” or to be sure to always “consider both sides of an issue” when you face a new problem can support your continuing growth in critical thinking. He also notes that metacognitive strategies, while helping to steer your thoughts and allowing you to self-regulate your thinking processes in problem solving, do not tell you how to actually solve the problem. To do this you need significant domain knowledge.

In addition to surface and deep structure knowledge about a problem and the use of metacognitive strategies, success in critical thinking is also dependent on “domain knowledge.” Domain knowledge is simply knowing a lot of things about a particular area of knowledge or discipline of study. Willingham (2007) refers to this as learning to think a particular way, for

example, like a scientist. Thinking like a scientist involves using the “scientific method.” But generally, thinking scientifically involves “developing a model, deriving a hypothesis from the model, designing an experiment to test the hypotheses, gathering data from the experiment, interpreting the data in light of the model” (pp. 13–15) and drawing conclusions. In addition, scientific thinking requires that the person knows when it is appropriate to use this kind of thinking, the person has acquired sufficient knowledge of the field, and has practiced the use of scientific thinking enough to be able to apply it to new problems.

So how might the concepts of surface and deep structure, thinking like a social worker, domain knowledge, metacognition, and the importance of practice apply to processes of critical thinking in the social work profession? The following brief case study helps illustrate how we can apply these concepts.

A family has been referred to your agency for services. The family includes a single father and two teenage sons. The father dropped out of high school and never finished his General Educational Development (GED) test requirements. Robots are now doing the father’s former job at an air conditioner factory, and he has been out of work for two months. The family is in danger of eviction from their apartment and the father has lost his employer-provided health insurance. One of the sons was recently diagnosed with brain cancer and needs surgery immediately. The father continues to look for work, but at 45 years old he believes he is experiencing ageism in his efforts. He also displays some symptoms of depression. The case has been assigned to you.

First, understanding of the *surface structure* of the situation is gained by reading and understanding the referral and case summary provided to your agency. This provides you with the surface structure knowledge. How do you go deeper and find the *deep structure* knowledge necessary to more fully understand the problem and move toward its solution? This will involve going beyond the case description to more deeply grasp the problem and possible solutions. For example, you might collaborate with the family members to prioritize the multiple problems they are facing, from the most immediate to more long-term issues. You might look for interconnections among the problems. For example, are the symptoms of depression related to the father’s lack of success in finding a job or his son’s recent cancer diagnosis? Or both? Is depression interfering with his performance in job interviews? Are you or others making assumptions about the family or the problems presented? For example, because the father never completed high school, do you infer that he lacks motivation or intelligence? Based on your knowledge of the community, you begin to list possible sources of assistance such as job training, employment assistance, and enrollment in health insurance through the Affordable Care Act for access to medical care for the son and mental health services for the father’s depression.

In doing all these things to assist the family, you are likely to use metacognitive strategies to help you approach the problem in an organized and productive way. For example, you recall from previously acquired domain knowledge (your coursework) that you need to always consider “person and environment” when doing social work. You probably also recall the need to recognize the “interrelatedness” of the various issues presented because you have learned to use a systems perspective as a basic tool. We learn a good deal more about the importance of the person and environment as a fundamental approach to social work practice and about social systems thinking later in the text.

Why were we able to delve into the deep structure knowledge necessary to begin addressing the family’s problems? In part, we were able to because we can “think like a social worker.” That is, we have professional knowledge and skills that we can call on to move toward a solution or solutions for this family. For example, we have knowledge of human behavior and the



social environment that allows us to understand human development and the importance of environmental influences to allow us to “sort” through and prioritize the individual, family, and environmental issues in a systematic and organized manner. We understand and have significant practice using the basic social work processes of assessment, engagement, intervention, and evaluation. We understand the impact of policies (factory automation, health insurance) on individuals and families (job loss, potential homelessness, loss of insurance). We are also knowledgeable about a wide range of community resources we can access to provide assistance in resolving different problems in the case (job training, employment services, housing assistance, completion of GED, information necessary to enroll in health insurance, community mental health professionals who provide services on a “sliding scale” that is based on the client’s ability to pay).

How do we become able to “think like a social worker”? We are in the process of learning to do this right now through our social work courses (HBSE, practice, policy, research, human diversity). Equally important, we have multiple chances to practice using our domain knowledge through required field internships before we move into professional practice. Peter Facione (Facione, 2015) proposed the following helpful five-step model for problem solving referred to by its acronym “IDEAS”: I (Identify the problem); D (Determine what information is need to solve the problem; E (Enumerate the options for solving the problem and assessing their outcomes); A (Assess the information and options for solving the problem, and make a preliminary suggestion for solving it; S (Scrutinize the problem solving process and make adjustments as warranted).

Critical thinking skills are essential to good social work practice. Unless we can think critically about the issues we face in practice, we will not get very far in assisting or even assessing the client systems within which we work and their concerns. However, social work is a complex enterprise made up of the profession’s knowledge, skills, and values, as we noted earlier. In addition, the new CSWE standards add an emphasis on cognitive (thinking) and affective processes (feelings, emotions) as also a major part of social work competence. This means competence is not gained only by incorporating the profession’s knowledge, skills, and values, which are “external” resources we draw from in our work. In addition, cognitive and affective processes add important “internal” or personal resources to our efforts to become competent professionals. These include critical thinking, of course, but also our “affective reactions, and exercise of judgment” as we encounter new practice situations (CSWE, 2015, p. 6). For example, if you are working with a client whose values and ways of living are in conflict with yours—perhaps you are a very religious Christian and your client is an atheist—you must be able to recognize and be self-reflective concerning your own values and attitudes about how to live your life in ways that allow you to avoid imposing your values and way of living on your client system.

## PARADIGMS

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A paradigm is a mental model of the world and how it works that we use to organize information in ways that allow us to make sense of the complexity of the world around us. The term *paradigm* is often used interchangeably with the term *worldview*. Our worldview is simply that—the way we view the world. There are a variety of definitions of paradigm. Here are some examples:

A paradigm is a set of assumptions, concepts, values and practices that constitutes ways of viewing reality for the community that shares them. (*The Free Dictionary*, [www.thefreedictionary.com/paradigm](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/paradigm))

A *paradigm* “is a world view, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world.” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 15)

Paradigms constitute “cultural patterns of group life.” (Schutz, 1944, p. 499)

A world view underlying the theories and methodology of a particular scientific subject.  
(*English Oxford Dictionaries*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/paradigm>)

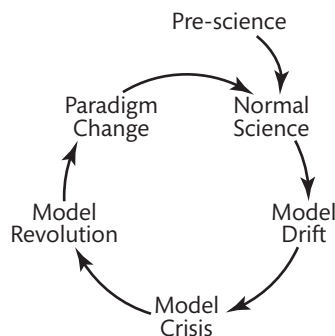
Thomas Kuhn (1962/1970), in his influential book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, defines a paradigm in multiple ways as well, but for our purposes we use Kuhn’s definition of paradigm as “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community” (Walker, 2010, p. 443). In our case, that “given community” is the social work profession. We also use the notion of “worldview” as interchangeable with the term *paradigm*. This term captures the sense of paradigm as a “way of viewing the world.”

Kuhn’s book has been influential in many disciplines beyond the natural sciences over the years since he originally wrote it in 1962. A number of social work scholars have been influenced by Kuhn’s ideas and have incorporated the concept of paradigm as a way of discovering and organizing knowledge about the profession (Finn & Jacobson, 2003; Harington & Beddoe, 2014; Krumer-Nevo & Komem, 2015; Schiele, 2017; Shulman, 2016). We explore some of these approaches to paradigms in social work later in this text.

Kuhn’s (1962/1970) original book focused on how revolutions in natural sciences (for example, physics and astronomy) came about. He was trying to trace the processes that resulted in radical changes or revolutions in traditional approaches to doing and thinking in science and how they came about. For example, he saw the shift from a geocentric (Earth-centered) to a heliocentric (Sun-centered) view of the universe as a revolution or paradigm shift in astronomy and how we view the universe. It is hard for us today to believe that only a little more than 500 years ago scientists (and many of the rest of us) believed Earth was the center and driving force of the universe and that the Sun and the other planets revolved around our planet Earth. The shift to a heliocentric view did not come smoothly and was met with major resistance, yet it prevailed. We will discuss this and other scientific paradigms and paradigm shifts later in the section “Paradigms and History.” First, we take a look at Kuhn’s model of paradigms.

## Kuhn’s Model

Kuhn’s model depicts the lifecycle of a scientific paradigm as a series of steps that move from the time prior to the existence of a paradigm, to the creation of a stable and accepted paradigm, to a type of drift that occurs when the existing paradigm faces new problems it cannot solve, then to a crisis step when unsolvable problems accumulate, and then on to a revolution requiring great energy to create a new paradigm that can resolve the formerly unsolvable problems. Figure 1.1 illustrates the Kuhn Cycle as a model of the scientific paradigm lifecycle.



**Figure 1.1** The Kuhn Cycle

Source: The Kuhn’s Cycle. Copyright © by Thwink.org.



Kuhn put forth a cyclical model he believed captured the lifecycle of a paradigm. The first step in the model, “pre-science,” is actually not a step in the cycle, but the condition existing prior to what he refers to as “normal science,” that is, no organized way of solving a problem of concern to a group. At this point no model (paradigm) exists to address the discipline’s major problems (thwink.org, 2014).

For social work, pre-science existed up to 1898, when Anna Dawes at Columbia University taught the first formal class for those who would become social workers. This was only the beginning; very rapidly other training programs for social workers were developed and the first university-based school of social work was founded, the New York School of Philanthropy (later becoming the Columbia University School of Social Work) (Barker, 1995). Schools of social work continued to develop rapidly across the country, all devoted to solving a range of social problems plaguing the country during the “pre-science” step. Though problems such as poverty, poor health, lack of sanitation, discrimination against new immigrants, child labor, and so on, were clearly visible, it was not until the creation of formal university-based schools of social work that a single discipline existed that focused on these and similar problems. In other words, until we emerged from pre-science we had problems to solve but no organized and consistent way of addressing them.

With the formation of an organized and widespread system of educating new members of the social work profession by providing new social work knowledge, skills, values, and approaches to addressing the problems of concern to us (e.g., poverty), we moved to Kuhn’s “normal science” step. At this point, social work began to develop new knowledge and methods for addressing social problems. For example, the social survey was developed, which was an early approach to understanding the extent and intensity of poverty and its related problems by surveying community members. The survey movement is also an example of the early use of empirical methods and statistical analyses in researching problems. As such, the social survey allowed social workers to assess community needs in more sophisticated ways. Based on knowledge gathered, social workers were able to create programs and policies to intervene to address the needs uncovered by the surveys (Lindsey, 1980). This is simply one example of the “normal science” step. Others include the development of specific methods designed to alleviate problems of concern to the profession, including casework, group work, and community organization, as well as approaches adapted from other disciplines such as psychoanalysis.

The next step of the Kuhn model is “model drift.” Model drift occurs when, at some point in the normal science step, problems begin to appear that the current paradigm cannot solve. These new problems, also called “anomalies,” cannot be explained using the methods, knowledge, skills, and beliefs that make up the paradigm.

Sometimes the paradigm can be adjusted to accommodate the anomaly, but if new problems (anomalies) that cannot be solved using the existing paradigm begin to accumulate, the Kuhn Cycle moves to the “model crisis” step. At this point, a field is thrown into crisis because it can no longer rationally solve the problems facing it. Kuhn suggests that at this point members of the field or discipline use their energy searching for a new paradigm that will be able to solve the new problems they face.

Examples of anomalies in society that created a crisis leading to paradigm change include “the injustice of allowing only men to vote” and the widespread “suffering and injustice of racial discrimination.” Both anomalies were resolved through paradigm change, one in the form of a constitutional amendment (19th Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1920) to allow women to vote and the other in the form of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawing racial discrimination. This was possible because in 1776 the United States chose a liberal democratic form of national government that could accommodate the changes necessary to resolve the anomalies (thwink.org, 2014).

“Model revolution” is the next step in the cycle. This step occurs when model drift leads to model crisis and the members desperately seek a fundamentally new way to view and solve new problems. Model revolution results in a radically new paradigm. Remember the revolutionary paradigm shift or change from an earth-centered worldview to a sun-centered worldview we described earlier; this was the result of model revolution. The concept of “paradigm shift,” discussed next, happens as a result of model crisis that in turn leads to model revolution.

## Paradigm Shift

A *paradigm shift* is “a profound change in the thoughts, perceptions, and values that form a particular vision of reality” (Capra, 1983, p. 30). To express the fundamental changes required of a paradigm shift, Thomas Kuhn uses the analogy of travel to another planet. Kuhn tells us that a paradigm shift “is rather as if the professional community had been suddenly transported to another planet where familiar objects are seen in a different light and are joined by unfamiliar ones as well” (1962/1970, p. 111). The elements of this analogy—travel, another planet or world, viewing both familiar and new objects in a different light—are consistent with our efforts in this text to travel on a journey toward a more complete understanding of HBSE. Our journey takes us to other people’s worlds and it will call upon us to view new things in those worlds and familiar things in our own worlds in new ways and through others’ eyes. As we continue on our journey we should try to appreciate that the process of taking the trip is as important and enlightening as any final destination we might reach.

Paradigms are not mysterious, determined for all time, immovable objects. Paradigms are social constructs created by humans. They can be and, in fact, have been changed and reconstructed by humans throughout our history (Capra, 1983). Kuhn (1962/1970), for example, discusses scientific and political revolutions that result in paradigm shifts and changes. Such changes, Kuhn suggests, come about when a segment of a community, often a small segment, has a growing sense that existing institutions are unable to adequately address or solve the problems in the environment—an environment those same institutions helped create. The actions taken by the dissatisfied segment of the community can result in the replacement of all or parts of the older paradigm with a newer one. However, since not all humans have the same amount of influence or power and control over what a paradigm looks like and whose values and beliefs give it form, efforts to change paradigms involve conflict and struggle (Kuhn, 1962/1970).

Use of the notion of paradigm shift will enable us to expand our knowledge of human behavior and the social environment and to use this additional knowledge in our practice of social work. It can free us from an overdependence on traditional ways of viewing the world as the *only* ways of viewing the world. It can allow us to move beyond these views to alternative possibilities for viewing the world, its people, and their behaviors.

The concept of paradigm shift allows us to make the transitions necessary to continue our journey to explore alternative paradigms and paradigmatic elements that represent the many human interests, needs, and perspectives not addressed by or reflected in the traditional and dominant paradigm. The concept of paradigm shift is also helpful in recognizing relationships between traditional and alternative paradigms and for tracing how alternative paradigms often emerge from traditional or dominant ones. Traditional or dominant paradigms and alternative or possible paradigms for human behavior are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

As we see in the discussion of paradigms and history, different paradigms can be described as different points in a progression of transformations in the way we perceive human behavior and the social environment. The progression from traditional and dominant to alternative and possible that we envision here is one that reflects a continuous movement (we hope) toward views

of human behavior more consistent with the core values of social work and away from narrow perspectives that include only a privileged few and exclude the majority of humans. In some cases, this progression will mean returning to previously neglected paradigms. Such a progression, then, does not imply a linear, forward-only movement. It might more readily be conceived as a spiral or winding kind of movement. The worldviews illustrated in our discussion of history, for example, represented the perspectives almost exclusively of Europeans. Very different worldviews emerged in other parts of the world. Myers (1985), for example, describes an Afrocentric worldview that emerged over 5,000 years ago among Egyptians that posited the real world to be both spiritual and material at once. This holistic perspective found God manifest in everything. The self included “ancestors, the yet unborn, all of nature, and the entire community” (Myers, 1985, p. 35). Many scholars suggest that this paradigm continues to influence the worldviews of many people of African descent today. This Afrocentric paradigm clearly offers an alternative to European humanist or scientific paradigms that emerged during the Renaissance. Such an alternative emphasizing the interrelatedness of individuals and community and their mutual responsibility for one another encompasses much that is valuable and consistent with the core values of social work.

### **Paradigm Shift, Social Work, and Social Change**

The concept of paradigm shift or change has significant implications for us as social workers. If you recall from earlier discussion, the basic purposes of social work include social change or social transformation and call upon us to be involved in and lead social and political action to promote social and economic justice. Social change is also required in our call to enhance human well-being and to work on behalf of oppressed persons denied access to opportunities and resources or power. When we as social workers become a part of the processes of changing paradigms and the institutions that emerge from them, we are in essence engaging in fundamental processes of social change and transformation.

We can use the information we now have about paradigms and paradigm analysis to change or replace paradigms that create obstacles to people meeting their needs and reaching their potential. Since paradigms are reflected throughout the beliefs, values, institutions, and processes that make up our daily lives, we need not limit our thinking about paradigms only to our immediate concerns here about human behavior and the social environment. We can apply what we know about paradigms and paradigm change throughout our education and practice. For us as students of social work, that means we must become aware of the nature of the paradigms reflected throughout all areas of our studies in social work necessary to achieve the nine core competencies required of professional social workers. We certainly also must begin to analyze the nature and assumptions of the paradigms we encounter through our coursework in the arts and humanities (music, theater, visual arts, philosophy, literature, English, languages, religious studies), social sciences (economics, political science, psychology, sociology, anthropology, history), and natural sciences (biology, physics, chemistry, geology, geography), as well as through our own personal histories and life experiences.

Now, how does the paradigm of the social work profession stack up in terms of model drift, anomalies, model crisis, and model revolution? Social work is a young profession compared to the natural sciences of concern to Kuhn such as physics, astronomy, or biology. Because of the profession’s youth, it may not yet be experiencing model crisis. However, social work certainly faces new problems or anomalies that are not easily solved with existing knowledge, skills, or values that make up the social work paradigm. Think about climate change and its effects on the vulnerable populations social workers serve around the world. Think about the migrant

crises and human trafficking resulting from environmental degradation, climate change, political unrest, and civil wars in the Middle East and other parts of the world. Millions of people who have been displaced have become “people without a country.”

These are new or newly recognized problems, especially in their magnitude, facing the profession, but do we have the necessary tools among our current knowledge, skills, methods, and values to effectively tackle them? Given the magnitude of the problems, can traditional methods of casework (work with individuals), group work, or community organization (we explore individual, group, and community systems in detail in later chapters) accommodate these new problems? If not, can we find new approaches to address them? For example, we are seeing a growing interest in environmental social work, or *green social work*, in efforts to *add* these anomalies. Whether the profession can create solutions to solve these new problems (and many others) may very well determine if the profession is moving to model drift, model crisis, or model revolution. We address these anomalies and the profession’s responses later in discussion of sustainable, environmental, and ecological social work as emerging social work paradigm dimensions.

## PARADIGMS AND PERCEPTION

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One of the definitions of *paradigm* we listed earlier is “a world view, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 15). Paradigms shape and are shaped by values, knowledge, and beliefs about the nature of our worlds and are often so “taken for granted” that we are virtually unaware of their existence or of the assumptions we make because of them. In other words, paradigms shape our perception of people and the world around us. In perception, we use our five senses to interpret the world around us as we go through our daily lives. This interpretation is based in large part on the experiences and beliefs we accumulate throughout our lives. As we accumulate new knowledge, experience or understanding, we can change our previous worldviews.

Look at the word depicted below. Like most us, you probably see the word *good*. However, if you look closer at the white space inside the letters you can also see the word *evil*. Because of the way our brains are trained when learning to read the English language, we rarely if ever try to “read” the space inside of letters. Now, though, at least for stylized words that look similar to the word below, your brain may lead you to scrutinize them a bit more closely. This might be the case if, for example, you were presented similarly styled, but different words often.



Adapted from Pretty Cool Perceptions Exercises. Copyright © California State University, Sacramento.

In addition, while we may assume others view the world in the same way we do, this is often not the case. Now look at the picture below.



View this image with some friends and see how many see a stylish young woman. Probably, most will. Does anyone see a sad-looking older woman? Probably not many viewers see the alternate woman's image at first glance. Why do you think most see the young woman but not the older woman?

First, think about you and the friends who viewed the image with you. Were group members all men, all women, or was the group gender-mixed? If women viewed the image, did they respond the same way as men? How old were the group members? If the group included someone in their 70s, might they respond differently? How are women portrayed in media: are we conditioned to “look” for women like the usually young and attractive models in commercials, TV shows, movies, social media, etc.? Thinking about your answers to the questions can help reveal aspects of the paradigm or worldview you hold that resulted in your perception of the image. For example, they may reflect perspectives we hold about women, age, or attractiveness.

## PARADIGMS AND SOCIAL WORK

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Since the first edition of this text in 1995, the concept of paradigm has become widely used in social work and many other disciplines. Some argue that the concept has become merely a “buzzword” used in so many ways it is in danger of becoming meaningless, particularly in the way Kuhn used it as solely the territory of processes of revolutionary change in the natural sciences (Paton, 2014).

In this text, we assert that the concept of paradigm, when applied to social work, continues to be an effective and meaningful approach to gathering and organizing knowledge about the complex terrain of the social work profession. The description of the PAP model that we explore

in some detail in this chapter is but one example of its power to help us systematically gather and organize existing and new knowledge to create new practice paradigms for social work. There are other current examples as well. Shulman (2016) describes an interactional paradigm of social work practice. Schiele (2017) has continued to work on his established Afrocentric paradigm of social work, which we explore more fully later in this text. Harington and Beddoe (2014) provide a “civic practice” paradigm for social work. In short, it seems the concept and its application to social work continues to be quite helpful in understanding and organizing the enterprise that is the discipline and profession of social work.

For social workers, the concept of paradigm, and its power to shape our perceptions, is particularly important. If we can become conscious of the components of our own worldview and realize how it shapes our perceptions every day, we may be better able to appreciate the worldviews of others. This awareness can provide us with tools to use to think about and to understand ourselves, others, and the environments we all inhabit. Furthermore, the notion of paradigm can help us understand our own and others’ roles in creating and re-creating the very meaning of humanness. Specifically, thinking in terms of paradigms or worldviews can provide us with new ways of understanding humans’ behaviors in individual, family, group, organizational, community, and global contexts.

The concept of paradigm can serve us very well to organize our thinking about and increase our understanding of multiple theories and perspectives about human behavior and the social environment. Using the concept of paradigm can help us understand the way things are and, equally important for social workers, it can help us understand the way things might be and the changes necessary to achieve new approaches to social work education and practice.

Next, we explore an example of a social work paradigm, including its ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

## Poverty-Aware Social Work Paradigm

The poverty-aware social work paradigm (PAP) is a “new paradigm for social work” focused on the profession’s commitment to reduce and eliminate poverty (Krumer-Nevo, 2016, p. 1793). The PAP includes essential elements of a paradigm: ontology, or what we see as real; epistemology, the means we use to gain and use knowledge to verify reality; and axiology, the ethical dimensions flowing from our view of reality and the processes of generating knowledge to confirm that our view of reality is correct.

Krumer-Nevo is a member of the social work department at Ben-Gurion University in Israel. The PAP paradigm in part flowed from a program he developed in Israel and for which he served as director. In outlining the new paradigm, Krumer-Nevo describes its paradigmatic elements.

In PAP the *ontological* questions include “What is the nature of poverty?” and “What are the characteristics of poor people?” (Krumer-Nevo, 2016, p. 1795). PAP views poverty as a “violation of human rights” that pervades all aspects of poor people’s lives. Poverty is more than the lack of material needs (decent housing, health care, education). It involves the stigma and discrimination faced by poor people, their lack of voice in the processes and policies affecting them, and a disregard for the knowledge gained and held by poor people as a result of experiencing poverty (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). Krumer-Nevo (2016) contrasts the PAP ontology with that of paradigms based on a conservative approach that “views poverty as the sum total of the psychological, moral, behavioural [sic] and cultural pathologies or deficits of poor people” (pp. 1796–1799). This approach views poor people’s problems as their own fault and, therefore, their responsibility, not society’s, to solve. Obviously, these two views of poverty are



quite different ontologically because they view the “reality” of poverty and its causes in such contrasting ways.

*Epistemology* in the PAP paradigm is gaining knowledge through a “critical constructivist” approach (we address constructivist and critical theory later in the text) that focuses on reality as constructed through relationships and interactions between the persons involved (social worker and poor people or poor communities) and heavily influenced by power structures’ negative effects on poor people. Heavy influence is placed on the importance of stable relationships based on trust between workers and the people they serve (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). The following case example highlights the importance of relationships where social workers really know and trust the people they serve.

Dana asked her social worker for assistance in buying a dining set. When offered a set, she refused to take it because it had iron legs and she preferred wooden ones. The social worker, who had known Dana only briefly, was tempted to interpret this reaction as proof that she was ungrateful or not as poor as she claimed. Yet, when she [asked Dana about her] refusal of the first set of furniture. Dana revealed that her husband had been violent towards her and their children, and had hit them with pieces of furniture. Her rejection of the iron-legged table and chairs was not the “spoiled” reaction of an ungrateful poor woman, but rather the rational calculation of a mother protecting her children and herself. Understanding this point changed dramatically the social worker’s [perspective]. (Krumer-Nevo, 2016, p. 1801)

This case is a reminder of the importance of deep and trusting relationships between workers and service users that are critical to PAP. In addition, thinking back to our earlier discussion of our perceptions flowing from paradigms we hold about people and their motivations for behaving as they do, the social worker’s initial perception based on her own worldview was clearly not consistent with the reality of Dana’s situation and her reason for choosing as she did.

*Axiology* or the ethical dimension of a paradigm reflects how and what is determined good or bad in terms of that paradigm and includes value judgments about the world based on the paradigm. For PAP, ethics are focused on solidarity or a sense of “we” rather than “they.” This solidarity extends to the work social workers and client systems engage in together to overcome obstacles and make clients “equal partners” in confronting problems of unequal power (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). Later in this text, we explore a strengths-based perspective (paradigm) you will find similarly based on notions of social worker and client systems as equal partners in resolving problems and fulfilling needs. Krumer-Nevo suggests the PAP paradigm is unique in “its integration of the way social work sees (ontology), knows (epistemology), commits itself (axiology), and works (practice) with people in poverty” (2016, p. 1805).

## Paradigm Shift and Social Work

As we noted earlier, in discussing the steps in Kuhn’s paradigm cycle, paradigms can go through processes that include paradigm change or even revolution. The PAP social work paradigm we explored previously offers an example of efforts to change or shift the social work paradigm to better and more comprehensively address one of our fundamental goals: poverty reduction and elimination. A *paradigm shift* is “a profound change in the thoughts, perceptions, and values that form a particular vision of reality” (Capra, 1983, p. 30). In PAP we saw shifts in how we might think about and perceive the reality of poverty by viewing it as a violation of basic human rights (ontology), we explored new approaches to gaining knowledge to reduce and eliminate poverty

(epistemology), and the values and ethics (axiology) of the new paradigm (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). Ontology and epistemology will be addressed further in Ch. 2.

To describe the fundamental changes required of a paradigm shift, Thomas Kuhn (1962/1970) uses the analogy of travel to another planet. Kuhn tells us that a paradigm shift “is rather as if the professional community had been suddenly transported to another planet where familiar objects are seen in a different light and are joined by unfamiliar ones as well” (p. 111). The elements of this analogy—travel, another planet or world, viewing both familiar and new objects in a different light—are consistent with our efforts in this text to travel on a journey toward a more complete understanding of HBSE. Our journey will take us to other people’s worlds and it will call upon us to view new things in those worlds and familiar things in our own worlds in new ways and through others’ eyes. As we continue our journey we should try to appreciate that the process of taking the trip is as important and enlightening as any final destination we might reach.

Paradigms are not mysterious, determined-for-all-time, immovable objects. Paradigms are social constructs created by humans. They can be and, in fact, have been changed and reconstructed by humans throughout our history. We have seen scientific (Sun-centered versus Earth-centered universe) and political revolutions (the creation of American democracy in 1776 or the civil rights movement leading to the Civil Rights Act of 1964) that resulted in new paradigms or substantial paradigm changes. Such changes, Kuhn (1962/1970) suggests, come about when a segment of a community, often a small segment, has a growing sense that existing institutions are unable to adequately address or solve the problems or anomalies in the environment (i.e. racial discrimination and oppression in a country with a constitutional paradigm of freedom and human rights). The actions taken by the dissatisfied segment of the community can result in the replacement of all or parts of the older paradigm with a newer one. However, since not all humans have the same amount of influence or power and control over what a paradigm looks like and whose values and beliefs give it form, efforts to change paradigms often involve significant conflict. The American civil rights movement resulted in intense violence brought upon the smaller group seeking change (African Americans and their White allies) by the larger, more powerful group (racist and segregationist White Americans). However, in spite of the almost overwhelming obstacles faced by African Americans in gaining their civil rights, they and their integrationist allies succeeded. However, we must not forget that we are far from overcoming racial discrimination and oppression in the United States. Currently, for example, we are witnessing worrisome increases in racial and immigrant discrimination and intimidation, including hate crimes and unequal treatment by police and the criminal justice system (Slate Staff, 2017).

Using the notion of paradigm shift will enable us to expand our knowledge of human behavior and the social environment and to use this additional knowledge in our practice of social work. It can free us from an overdependence on traditional ways of viewing the world as the *only* ways of viewing the world. It can allow us to “shift” or move beyond these views to alternative possibilities for viewing the world, its people, and their behaviors.

The concept of paradigm shift allows us to make the transitions necessary to continue our journey to explore alternative paradigms and paradigmatic elements that represent the many human interests, needs, and perspectives not addressed by or reflected in the traditional and dominant paradigm. The concept of paradigm shift is also helpful in recognizing relationships between traditional and alternative paradigms and for tracing how alternative paradigms often emerge from traditional or dominant ones. Traditional or dominant paradigms and alternative or possible paradigms for human behavior are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

As we will see in the discussion of paradigms and history, different paradigms can be described as different points in a progression of transformations in the way we perceive human behavior and the social environment. The progression from traditional and dominant to alternative and



possible that we envision here is one that reflects a continuous movement (we hope) toward views of human behavior more consistent with the core values of social work and away from narrow perspectives that include only a privileged few and exclude the majority of humans. In some cases, this progression will mean returning to previously neglected paradigms. Such a progression, then, does not imply a linear, forward-only movement. It might more readily be conceived as a spiral or winding kind of movement. The worldviews illustrated in our discussion of history, for example, represented the perspectives almost exclusively of Europeans. Very different worldviews emerged in other parts of the world. Myers (1985), for example, describes an Afrocentric worldview that emerged over 5,000 years ago among Egyptians that posited the real world to be both spiritual and material at once. This holistic perspective found God manifest in everything. The self included “ancestors, the yet unborn, all of nature, and the entire community” (Myers, 1985, p. 35). Many scholars suggest that this paradigm continues to influence the worldviews of many people of African descent today. This Afrocentric paradigm clearly offers an alternative to European humanist or scientific paradigms that emerged during the Renaissance. Such an alternative emphasizing the interrelatedness of individuals and community and their mutual responsibility for one another encompasses much that is valuable and consistent with the core values of social work.

## TWO TYPES OF PARADIGMS: TRADITIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE

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The presentation of two different types of paradigms is somewhat of an oversimplification and we should proceed with some caution here. Presenting two different paradigms can easily lead to a binary or either/or notion of separate and mutually exclusive paradigms but also of the notion that one (traditional) is bad and the other (alternative) is good. This is not the intent here.

Outlining two general types of paradigms is simply a means of comparing and contrasting different ways of knowing and viewing the world. Perhaps the best example of this, as we see in detail in Chapter 2, is the “ways of knowing” dimensions of the two paradigms. Traditional paradigms present optimal “ways of knowing” as those based on a quantitative approach and scientific method to discover what is “true.” The alternative paradigm presents optimal “ways of knowing” as those based on more qualitative or intuitive ways of seeking that which is “true.” It is counterproductive to consider these ways of knowing to be mutually exclusive or even antagonistic toward one another. For example, the new realm of knowledge emerging as a result of research in the neurosciences (brain sciences) (we explore this later) is clearly based on a “scientific” approach, but knowledge gained through this approach has informed how we understand the foundational social work skill of empathy, a very qualitative aspect of social work practice (VanCleave, 2016).

We explore in some detail the dimensions of both of these types of paradigms in Chapter 2. For now, when we refer to traditional or dominant paradigms, we simply mean the paradigms or worldviews that have more influence in constructing the environments that make up our worlds. When we refer to alternative or possible paradigms, we mean worldviews that have had less influence and have been less prominent in shaping our own and others’ views about humans and their environments. They are called “alternative” paradigms only in the sense that they have for too long been overlooked and undervalued in a world that disproportionately reflects traditional or dominant worldviews. Some “alternative” paradigms may actually be “traditional.” For example, historical knowledge gained through qualitative approaches such as storytelling (oral tradition) are long and respected “traditional” approaches to knowing in many cultures

and predate scientific or quantitative approaches. Here we refer to them as alternative because these approaches to knowing have not the same influence on how we view the world around us as quantitative approaches.

## PARADIGMS: BOTH/AND NOT EITHER/OR

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Much of the emphasis in this text is on shifting to alternative paradigms and transcending the limits of traditional and dominant paradigm thinking. It is important to realize, though, that our journey to understanding human behavior and the social environment will not take us to either one or the other worldview. Our journey will take us to both traditional and alternative destinations along the way. After all, traditional scientific worldviews have revealed much valuable knowledge about us and our worlds.

We try in this text to learn about alternative paradigms and to challenge us to think beyond traditional paradigms in which science is the single source of understanding. However, in order to understand alternative paradigms, we need to be cognizant of traditional theories about human behavior and development. We challenge traditional paradigms as incomplete, as excluding many people, and as reflecting biases due to the value assumptions and historical periods out of which they emerged. These inadequacies, however, render traditional theories nonetheless powerful in the influences they have had in the past, that they currently have, and that they will continue to have on the construction and application of knowledge about human behavior and the social environment. Traditional approaches provide important departure points from which we may embark on our journey toward more complete, more inclusive, and less-biased visions (or at least visions in which bias is recognized and used to facilitate inclusiveness) of HBSE.

There is another very practical reason for learning about theories that emerge from and reflect traditional paradigms. The practice world social workers inhabit and that you will soon enter (and we hope transform) is a world constructed largely on traditional views of human behavior and the social environment. To survive in that world long enough to change it, we must have knowledge and understanding of that world. We must have sufficient knowledge of traditional and dominant paradigms of human behavior and development to make decisions about what in those worldviews we wish to retain because of its usefulness in attaining the goal of maximizing human potential. Knowledge of traditional and dominant paradigms is also necessary in deciding what to discard or alter to better serve that same core concern of social work. To help us understand paradigms in the context of social work, we need to be able to conduct a paradigm analysis.

## PARADIGM ANALYSIS FROM A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

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Put simply, *paradigm analysis* is learning to “think paradigm.” It is a process of continually asking questions about what the information, both spoken and unspoken, we send and receive reflects about our own and others’ views of the world and its people, especially people different from ourselves. It is a process of continually “thinking about thinking,” such as the elements of critical thinking we discussed earlier. Paradigm analysis requires us to continuously critically evaluate the many theories and perspectives we explore for their consistency with the core values of social work.

Paradigm analysis involves asking a set of very basic questions about each of the perspectives or theories we explore in order to determine its compatibility with the core values of social work. These questions are:

1. Does this perspective/theory contribute to preserving and restoring human dignity?
2. Does this perspective/theory recognize the benefits of, and does it celebrate, human diversity?
3. Does this perspective/theory assist us in transforming our society and ourselves so that we welcome the voices, the strengths, the ways of knowing, and the energies of us all?
4. Does this perspective/theory help us all (ourselves and the people with whom we work) to reach our fullest human potential?
5. Does the perspective/theory reflect the participation and experiences of males and females; economically well off and poor; White people and people of color; gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender persons, non-binary persons and heterosexuals; old and young; temporarily able-bodied and people with disabilities?

The answers we find to these questions will tell us generally if the perspective we are exploring is consistent with the core values of social work. The answer to the final question will tell us about how the paradigm came to be and who participated in its development or construction. The questions above can also help us decide whether the paradigm or perspective being examined should change or “shift” to help fulfill the purposes of social work.

## HOW DOES OUR PARADIGM OR WORLDVIEW COME ABOUT?

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Socialization is the process of teaching new members the rules by which the larger group or society operates. Socialization involves imparting to new members the knowledge, values, and skills according to which they are expected to operate. For example, the social work education process in which you are currently involved is a process for socializing you to the knowledge, values, and skills expected of professional social workers.

In a more general sense, we are socialized to and interact with others in the social environment from paradigmatic perspectives. These perspectives are not only imparted to us through formal education in the schools but also through what we are taught and what we learn from our families, religious institutions, and other groups and organizations as well. We are influenced by worldviews and we reflect the worldviews to which we have been socialized. The worldview likely to have influenced us most if we were socialized through the educational system in the United States is the traditional or dominant paradigm. The influence of this paradigm is pervasive, even if the worldviews of our families or cultures are in conflict with parts of or the entire traditional or dominant paradigm. Because of the power we give to thinking consistent with the traditional paradigm, it is extremely difficult for alternative paradigms to be accorded equal legitimacy. It is not, however, impossible. As we shall see, it is quite possible through understanding traditional and alternative paradigms and the dynamics of paradigm change that we can exercise choice in the paradigms or worldviews through which we lead our lives. We suggest here that social changes resulting from shifts in worldviews inherently and inextricably flow from changes in the way we as individuals view our worlds. This position is consistent with the suggestion of much alternative paradigm thinking, in particular that of feminism, that *the personal is political*.

As suggested earlier, a significant responsibility for us as social workers is assisting people whose needs are not met and whose problems are not solved by the institutions and processes in the social environment that emerge from and reflect the dominant/traditional paradigms. Much of what social work is about involves recognizing, analyzing, challenging, and changing existing paradigms. An essential step in fulfilling this important responsibility is learning to listen to, respect, and effectively respond to the voices and visions that the people with whom we work have to contribute to their own well-being and to the common good. In this way, paradigms that too often have been considered permanent and unchangeable can be questioned, challenged, altered, and replaced. More important, they can be changed to more completely include the worldviews of persons previously denied participation in paradigm-building processes.

Such a perspective on knowledge for practice allows us to operate in partnership with the people with whom we work. It allows us to incorporate their strengths, and it provides us an opportunity to use social work knowledge, skills, and values in concert with those strengths in our practice interactions. We explore client–worker partnerships and strengths-based perspectives in Chapter 4.

The possible or alternative paradigms are those that enrich, supplement, or replace existing paradigms by including the voices and visions—values, beliefs, ways of doing and knowing—of persons who have usually been left out of the paradigm building that has previously taken place. It is interesting, but not coincidental, that the persons who have usually been left out of paradigm-building processes are often the same persons with whom social workers have traditionally worked and toward whom the concerns of social workers have historically been directed.

## PARADIGMS AND HISTORY

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To help us apply a critical thinking approach to explore either traditional or alternative paradigms, we need to acquire a historical perspective about the contexts out of which these worldviews emerged. Neither the traditional nor their alternative counterparts came about in a historical vacuum. They instead emerged as points along a historical continuum marked by humans’ attempts to understand their own behaviors, the behaviors of others, and the environments in which they lived.

### Pre-modern/Pre-positivism

A historical perspective can help us appreciate that the paradigms we explore as traditional and currently dominant were considered quite alternative and even radical at the times of their emergence. For example, the emergence of humanism—a belief in the power of humans to control their own behaviors and the environments in which they lived—in Europe at the opening of the Renaissance (mid-1400s) and at the end of the Middle Ages (the early 1400s) was an alternative, and for many a radical, paradigm at that time. Humanism was considered by many, especially those in power, to be not only alternative but also dangerous, wrong, and heretical. Humanism was considered an affront to scholasticism, the traditional paradigm or worldview that had been dominant throughout much of Europe in the Middle Ages (approximately A.D. 476–mid-1400s). Scholasticism (approximately A.D. 800–mid-1400s) was a worldview that saw a Christian god, represented by the Roman Catholic Church, as the sole determiner and judge of human behavior. This Christian god was the controller of the entire natural world or environment in which humans existed. Similarly, Protestantism was a worldview placed in motion by Martin Luther during the early 1500s. It questioned the absolute authority of the Roman Catholic

Church and the Pope as the sole representative of God and was seen as another radical alternative affronting the existing worldview. The emergence of both humanism and Protestantism were alternative ways of viewing humans and their environments that called into question, and were seen as significant threats to, the then existing dominant and traditional ways of viewing the world (Manchester, 1992; Sahakian, 1968).

## Modernism/Positivism

Another important perspective from which to get a sense of the historical continuum out of which paradigms emerge is that of the birth of worldviews explaining human behavior and the environments we inhabit through science. The emergence of worldviews that explained the world through science was in some ways an extension of the humanistic paradigm. Science was a powerful tool through which humans could gain control of their behaviors and of the universe they inhabited. Science allowed humans to understand the world by directly observing it through the senses and by carefully measuring, experimenting, and analyzing what was observed. The emergence of scientific thinking or positivism during the period called the Enlightenment or the “Age of Reason” in the 17th and 18th centuries, however, was also a significant challenge to humanism and represented an alternative paradigm itself. Scientific thinking questioned humanism’s central concern for gaining understanding through such expressions as art, literature, and poetry. A scientific worldview saw humanism and its reflection in the humanities as a traditional and insufficient way of viewing the world.

As Sahakian (1968, p. 119) points out “Science sought to extend, if not replace, humanism’s ways of knowing and understanding the world with a more reliable and comprehensive perspective that was cosmos-centered rather than [hu]man-centered”. The humanities raised questions and sought answers by looking to and rediscovering the great ideas and expressions of humans from the past, such as the classic works of the Romans and Greeks. Science offered keys to unlocking the secrets of the universe and the future through new ways of asking and answering questions. Science promised not only new questions and new ways of posing them but also answers to questions both new and old (Boulding, 1964).

The empirical observations of Galileo Galilei in the first half of the 1600s confirming the earlier findings of Copernicus in the early 1500s, for example, literally provided a new view of the world (Manchester, 1992). (Remember the earlier discussion of geocentric and heliocentric worldview or paradigms earlier.) This new and alternative view moved Earth from the stable and unmoving center of the universe to one in which it was but one of many bodies revolving around the Sun. The threat posed by such a dramatically different view of the world as that of Copernicus to the traditional Roman Catholic theology-based paradigm is captured eloquently by Manchester in his book *A World Lit Only by Fire*:

The Scriptures assumed that everything had been created for the use of man. If the earth were shrunk to a mere speck in the universe, mankind would also be diminished. Heaven was lost when “up” and “down” lost all meaning—when each became the other every twenty-four hours. (1992, p. 229)

According to Manchester, it was written in 1575 that “No attack on Christianity is more dangerous . . . than the infinite size and depth of the universe” (1992, p. 229). Much about the traditional paradigms that we explore in the next chapters has their roots in science and scientific ways of thinking that we virtually take for granted today. These approaches to understanding our worlds are centered in empirical observation and rational methods of gaining knowledge. So, science offers us a current example of what was, in a historical sense, an alternative paradigm