The Merrill Social Work and Human Services Series

9TH EDITION

GENERALIST SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

An Empowering Approach

KARLA KROGSRUD MILEY MICHAEL W. O'MELIA BRENDA L. DUBOIS

NINTH EDITION

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Karla Krogsrud Miley
Black Hawk College, Professor Emerita

Michael W. O'Melia
St. Ambrose University, Professor Emeritus

Brenda L. DuBois
St. Ambrose University, Professor Emerita

Pearson

Content Development: Curtis Vickers
Content Management: Rebecca Fox-Gieg and Bridget Daly
Content Production: Neha Sharma
Product Management: Drew Bennett
Product Marketing: Rachele Strober
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Dedication

Revised in honor of our esteemed colleague and dear friend, Brenda DuBois

About the Authors

Karla Miley earned her AM degree in social work from the University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration. Professor Miley taught in higher education for over 30 years. Her full-time appointment was at Black Hawk College where she taught introductory and lifespan psychology and had responsibility for coordinating the social work transfer program. Over the course of her teaching career, she also held adjunct appointments in the accredited social work degree programs at Marycrest College and St. Ambrose University, Graduate School of Social Work. In addition to *Generalist Social Work Practice: An Empowering Approach*, authored with Michael O'Melia and Brenda DuBois, she has collaborated with Brenda DuBois in writing *Social Work: An Empowering Profession*, now in its ninth edition. Ms. Miley's work has also been published in edited collections, such as *Education and Research for Empowerment Practice* by Gutierrez and Nurius, *Empowerment Practice in Social Work by* Shera and Wells, and *Social Work, Health, and International Development: Compassion in Social Policy and Practice* by Dumont and St-Onge. She was co-editor with Michael O'Melia and the author of a chapter on empowerment and aging in *Pathways to Power: Readings in Contextual Social Work*. She has extensive experience in facilitating workshops, staff development training, and conference sessions on empowerment-oriented generalist social work, social justice, and social work ethics.

Michael O'Melia earned his MSW from the University of Iowa. He has extensive practice experience as a clinical social worker with individuals, couples, families, and groups. He also spent 25 years as an educator in social work programs at both the baccalaureate and master's levels. Now, a professor emeritus in the MSW Program at St. Ambrose University, Mr. O'Melia taught social work practice specializing in strengths-based, generalist, collaborative, and anti-oppressive methods. Throughout his career, Mr. O'Melia has functioned as a community trainer and consultant in child welfare, family therapy, delinquency prevention, and resistance-based practice. In addition to his work as co-author of *Generalist Social Work Practice: An Empowering Approach*, he was co-editor with Karla Miley of *Pathways to Power: Readings in Contextual Social Work Practice*. Mr. O'Melia continues to contribute as a board member on various community service agencies and as a consulting editor for the *Journal of Progressive Human Services: Radical Thought & Praxis.*

Brenda DuBois, MSW, PhD, received a baccalaureate degree from Western Illinois University, a master's degree in social work from the University of Iowa, and a doctoral degree in educational administration from Illinois State University. She taught social work for 20 years at Marycrest College and 15 years at St. Ambrose University, where she served as Director of the School of Social Work prior to her retirement. In addition to writing *Generalist Social Work Practice: An Empowering Approach* with Karla Miley and Michael O'Melia, she co-authored nine editions of *Social Work: An Empowering Profession* with Karla Miley and has been published in several edited collections and social work journals. Dr. DuBois presented at numerous conferences across the United States and Canada on topics of empowerment, social work ethics, and social justice. She also served on many community agency boards and social services committees throughout her lifelong career in social work.

Preface

About This Book

The approach to social work practice presented in this text acknowledges our interdependence and celebrates the resources that collaboration creates. Characteristic of a generalist social work perspective, this text explains processes for assisting human systems at the micro-, mezzo-, and macrolevels of practice. Moreover, this book specifically describes ways to construct an empowering helping relationship that functions as a resource for both workers and client systems. Collaboration is the heart of this empowering approach. We believe in the creative synergy of collaborative processes. It's how we wrote this book.

This text organizes material into four parts. The first five chapters create a foundation for empowerment-oriented generalist social work and frame a practice approach that applies to clients at the micro-, mezzo-, and macrolevels of practice. The remaining chapters articulate detailed processes for generalist social workers to guide clients through the phases of *Dialogue* (Chapters 6-8), *Discovery* (Chapters 9-11), and *Development* (Chapters 12-16).

Chapters 1 through 5 offer social work practice perspectives and describe how generalist social workers meet the core purposes of the social work by using an empowerment-based approach to enhance human functioning, ensure human rights, and promote social justice.

- Chapter 1, "Generalist Social Work Practice," overviews the profession of social work, including its value base and purpose. This chapter defines generalist social work, delineates roles for generalist practitioners, and introduces the empowering approach to generalist practice that is featured in this text.
- Chapter 2, "Human System Perspectives," considers various theoretical frameworks that support generalist social work practice, including ecosystems, feminist theory, critical and critical race theories, behavioral theory, social constructionism, biology and behavior, and a trauma-informed perspective. This chapter also offers an ecosystemic framework to weave these various perspectives into a comprehensive theory for generalist practice.
- Chapter 3, "Values and Multicultural Competence," explores the numerous filters through which we experience the world, including expectations, values, and culture. It also illustrates how social workers can infuse professional values and cultural competence into their practice.
- Chapter 4, "Empowerment and Strengths," describes empowerment as the foundation of value-centered generalist social work practice, defines the characteristics of empowerment practice, and articulates the utility of the strengths perspective for the empowerment social work method.
- Chapter 5, "An Empowering Approach to Generalist Practice," integrates the various perspectives offered in Part 1 to create an empowerment-based generalist practice model. It also offers detailed examples of how to apply this model at each level of practice as well as integrating interventions to demonstrate a multilevel approach.

Chapters 6 through 8 present engagement in the context of the *Dialogue Phase*, which includes practice processes related to constructing and maintaining empowering client–worker relationships, communicating effectively with diverse clients about their situations, and defining a purpose for the work.

- Chapter 6, "Engagement: Forming Partnerships," examines the social worker–client system relationship and the qualities necessary for building professional partnerships. To ensure a social justice perspective, this chapter also describes how to relate ethically with clients who are culturally different, oppressed, or reluctant to participate.
- Chapter 7, "Engagement: Articulating Situations," discusses dialogue skills. It emphasizes how social workers respond proactively to clients in ways that clarify their challenges, validate their feelings, and respect their perspectives on the presenting situation.
- Chapter 8, "Engagement: Defining Directions," explains how social workers reorient clients to create a vision of how they would like things to be. It also discusses how to increase client motivation, collaborate with clients who resist, partner with involuntary clients, and take priority actions in response to crisis situations.

Chapters 9 through 11 introduce assessment in the *Discovery Phase* and detail solution-oriented processes to identify client system strengths and environmental resources in preparation for constructing a plan of action.

- Chapter 9, "Assessment: Identifying Strengths," describes how social workers orient their conversations with clients to uncover strengths and potential solutions. Specifically, this chapter helps practitioners locate strengths by using solution-focused dialogue, exploring clients' cultural memberships, and considering clients' responses to adversity.
- Chapter 10, "Assessment: Assessing Resource Capabilities," offers processes and tools for social workers and clients at all system levels to discover their own abilities and the resources of their environments.
- Chapter 11, "Assessment: Framing Solutions," details planning processes that help clients and social workers collaborate to look at situations in strength-focused ways, set concrete goals and objectives, generate intervention strategies, and contract for change.

Chapters 12 through 16 cover intervention and evaluation in the *Development Phase* and feature generalist social work skills for implementing, evaluating, and stabilizing desired changes.

- Chapter 12, "Intervention: Activating Resources," describes intervention activities to empower clients with their own capabilities and increase access to the resources of their environments. Social workers implement processes to enhance interactions, develop power, modify behaviors, change perspectives, manage resources, and educate clients.
- Chapter 13, "Intervention: Creating Alliances," explores ways to initiate alliances in support of clients' change efforts. Examples of potentially beneficial relationships for clients and their constituencies include empowerment groups, case management teams, natural support networks, and service delivery coalitions.
- Chapter 14, "Intervention: Expanding Opportunities," examines possibilities for resource expansion through social reform, policy development, legislative advocacy, and community change. These activities fulfill the professional mandate to ensure a just distribution of societal resources.

- Chapter 15, "Evaluation: Recognizing Success," explains evaluation processes that maintain client motivation, identify effective strategies, and recognize successful outcomes. This chapter also discusses the use of social work research, the application of evidence-based practice, and how record-keeping contributes to evaluation and research.
- Chapter 16, "Intervention: Integrating Gains," focuses on closure processes. It describes how social workers use their skills to complete contracts with clients, make necessary referrals, stabilize the progress achieved, and resolve the emotional elements of the relationship. Concluding work with larger systems also receives special attention.

New to This Edition

This ninth edition of *Generalist Social Work Practice: An Empowering Approach* provides up-to-date information about key topics in generalist social work practice and integrates innovative pedagogy to support student learning. The authors add new material relevant to contemporary trends in social work practice, offer several more carefully crafted examples to illustrate how to apply complex theoretical and conceptual material, and supply links to e-resources to promote student learning and assessment. Specifically, this edition does the following:

- Expands coverage of the **biological influences** on behavior (*Chapter 2)*, **social justice and human rights** (throughout), **trauma-informed practice** (*Chapters 2, 7, and 9)*, **evidence-based practice** (*Chapter 15)*, and **environmental justice** (*Chapter 14)* to better prepare students for modern-day generalist social work practice
- Integrates **250 updated** or **contemporary references** to augment its classic roots in the foundation of social work knowledge and research
- Introduces **new Preparing for Practice** case scenarios and critical questions at the end of **each chapter** to encourage students to apply their knowledge to realistic practice situations.
- Incorporates **new detailed case examples** designed to illustrate the core competences of social work practice across a wide range of practice settings (*Chapters 4, 7, 13, 14, 15, and 16)*
- Integrates links to a **glossary of key concepts, assessment questions,** and **video assets** throughout the Pearson eText to facilitate an interactive learning experience
- Reflects **contemporary concerns and trends** in each chapter's boxed information supported by up-to-date research and content
- Updates **demographic information** about various population groups and problem frequency (*Chapters 8 and 9)*
- Offers numerous **bibliographic references and text citations** to support students' inquiry into specialized topic areas (*All chapters*)

Key Content Updates by Chapter

Chapter 1 adds human rights as a core social work value to guide social work practice, thereby strengthening the existing value base of human dignity and social justice. This chapter introduces how theory and the ideal of empowerment shape the empowerment method detailed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 adds a section on behavioral theory, expands the section on biology and behavior to include brain structure and functioning, and includes new material on genetics, behavior, and the environment.

Chapter 3 expands the section on values and diversity to include cultural humility and adds emphasis to the multilevel experience of providing culturally competent practice.

Chapter 4 reorganizes material to begin with a new case example and a comprehensive explanation of the elements of empowerment, followed by a discussion of the strengths perspective as essential for implementing an empowerment approach to social work practice.

Chapter 5 offers readers the opportunity to apply their developing knowledge of a generalist approach to a case scenario that ends the chapter as well as includes details about the "Grand Challenges" facing the social work profession in the next decade.

Chapter 6 updates the research about what enhances the worker–client relationship and discusses what social workers should do to be safe.

Chapter 7 features a new opening example to illustrate the experience of proactive responding with a couple, offers new material on microaggressions, and examines social workers' appropriate use of self-disclosure.

Chapter 8 expands guidelines on how social workers can effectively respond to clients' critical needs, including food insecurity, homelessness, trauma, and large-scale crises. A new analysis of the social determinants of health is also offered.

Chapter 9 augments a social worker's knowledge about the use of client strengths, especially cultural strengths. It adds a section about men as a cultural group, more clearly distinguishes gender identity and sexual orientation, and offers updated information on resilience applicable to all people.

Chapter 10 reorganizes content to feature the comprehensive frameworks available for ecosystemic assessment and to ensure a view of client functioning in environmental context.

Chapter 11 fine tunes the explanation of planning processes, simplifies the process of contracting with clients, and affords a focus on planning in aging services.

Chapter 12 more fully explains narrative and behavioral approaches, updates information about delivery formats for educational interventions, and offers new material to emphasize social support and self-help.

Chapter 13 incorporates a new example for case management with refugees, highlights the work of community service alliances, and references the increased use of technology to support and deliver services.

Chapter 14 discusses the use of microlevel skills in macrolevel practice and adds new material on environmental justice. It offers two new case examples; one describes a public health initiative to address environmental pollution, and another illustrates the benefits accrued as a result of a school social worker's grant development efforts.

Chapter 15 presents a new opening example to illustrate the key role of record keeping in research, evaluation, and planning with clients. It also describes the importance of research literacy and the ethical use of evidence-based practice.

Chapter 16 reorganizes material to present a coherent framework for ending work with a client system, including a new case example demonstrating effective referral processes. The end-of-chapter case scenario challenges social workers to confront their feelings about closing out their work with clients.

Pearson eText, Learning Management System (LMS)–compatible Assessment Bank, and Other Instructor Resources

This revision incorporates several enhanced eText features including a digital glossary, various application exercises, and quizzes to assess learning outcomes. Throughout the text, key terms are bolded and linked to a pop-up glossary to reinforce student understanding of important concepts. Each chapter also provides videos, case scenarios, and/or designated artifacts to set up opportunities for readers to apply core social work concepts and practice essential skills. Finally, learning outcome quizzes that emphasize higher-order thinking rather than simple recall are located throughout each chapter. All of these eText features have been developed by the authors to closely fit the substance of the text and support student learning.

Pearson eText (9780135868836)

The Pearson eText is a simple-to-use, mobile-optimized, personalized reading experience. It allows you to easily highlight, take notes, and review key vocabulary all in one place–even when offline. Seamlessly integrated videos and other rich media will engage you and give you access to the help you need, when you need it. To gain access or to sign in to your Pearson eText, visit: https://www.pearson.com/pearson-etext. Features include:

- **Video Examples** Each chapter includes *Video Examples* that illustrate principles or concepts aligned pedagogically with the chapter.
- **Interactive Glossary** In every course there are professional terms that you need to know. You will find these need-to-know terms in boldface in each chapter. By clicking on these boldfaced terms, you can quickly access and learn the meanings of the terms that affect how you practice partnerships.

LMS-Compatible Assessment Bank

With this new edition, all assessment types—quizzes, application exercises, and chapter tests—are included in LMS-compatible banks for the following learning management systems: Blackboard (9780137355358), Canvas (9780137355396), D2L (9780137355419), and Moodle (9780137355372). These packaged files allow maximum flexibility to instructors when it comes to importing, assigning, and grading. Assessment types include:

- **Learning Outcome Quizzes** Each chapter learning outcome is the focus of a *Learning Outcome Quiz* that is available for instructors to assign through their Learning Management System. Learning outcomes identify chapter content that is most important for learners and serve as the organizational framework for each chapter. The higher-order, multiple-choice questions in each quiz will measure your understanding of chapter content, guide the expectations for your learning, and inform the accountability and the applications of your new knowledge. When used in the LMS environment, these multiple-choice questions are automatically graded and include feedback for the correct answer and for each distractor to help guide students' learning.
- **Application Exercises** Each chapter provides opportunities to apply what you have learned through *Application Exercises*. These exercises are usually short-answer format and can be based on Pearson eText Video Examples, written cases, or scenarios modeled by pedagogical text features. When used in the LMS environment,

a model response written by experts is provided after you submit the exercise. This feedback helps guide your learning and can assist your instructor in grading.

- **Chapter Tests** Suggested test items are provided for each chapter and include questions in various formats, including multiple choice and essay. When used in the LMS environment, and multiple-choice questions are automatically graded.

Instructor's Resource Manual and Test Bank (9780135868942)

The Instructor's Resource Manual and Test Bank includes an overview of chapter content and related instructional activities for the college classroom and for practice in the field as well as a robust collection of chapter-by-chapter test items.

PowerPoint® Slides (9780135869017)

PowerPoint® slides are provided for each chapter and highlight key concepts and summarize the content of the text. The slides will help instructors structure the content of each chapter to make it meaningful for students.

Note: All instructor resources—LMS-compatible assessment bank, instructor's manual, and PowerPoint slides—are available for download at www.pearsonhighered.com. Use one of the following methods:

- From the main page, use the search function to look up the lead author or the title. Select the desired search result; then access the "Resources" tab to view and download all available resources.
- From the main page, use the search function to look up the ISBN (provided above) of the specific instructor resource you would like to download. When the product page loads, access the "Downloadable Resources" tab.

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Brief Contents

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Contents

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1

Generalist Social Work Practice

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"What's working well that you would like to see continue?" With this question, Andrea Barry, a family preservation worker, shifts focus in her work with the Clemens family. She carefully studies the reactions to her question on the faces of the family members who are gathered with her around their kitchen table. She reads caution, apprehension, maybe even a little anger, and yes, there it is, a growing sense of surprise, of intrigue with her approach. As a social worker with the family preservation program of Northside Family Services, Andrea has seen this before. Preparing to fend off the blame of abuse or neglect, families involved with the program are often taken off guard by the careful, nonjudgmental phrasing of her questions. With the query about "what's working well," Andrea recognizes family strengths and looks toward the future, toward things families can still do something about. In other words, she sets the stage for empowering families by focusing on their strengths and promoting their competence.

Andrea's question embodies her view of how families might find themselves in this predicament. To continue to focus on "What are your problems?" doesn't make sense to Andrea, who sees family difficulties arising from the challenge of scarce resources rather than resulting from something that the family is doing wrong. As reflected in

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1.1 Describe the social work profession, including fields of practice, purpose, and a value base related to human dignity and worth, social justice, and human rights.

1.2 Explain generalist social work as an integration of practice at multiple client system levels, founded on theory, policy, research, and empowerment.

1.3 Compare and contrast the multiple functions and roles of generalist social workers at various system levels.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

her question, Andrea believes that even those families referred by the Child Protective Unit for work with the family preservation program are actually doing a lot right. She regards families as doing the best they can with currently available resources. So, of course, in trying to overcome their present difficulties, the subsequent question becomes, "What can we do to build on your strengths?" rather than "What else is wrong?" Her approach presumes that all families have strengths and are capable of making changes; it prompts them to collaborate with her as partners in the change process.

Andrea has learned from experience that different families benefit from different constellations of resources for optimal functioning. Some family members need to understand themselves and each other better. Others need information about how to cope with the inevitable, and also the unexpected changes that occur throughout their lives. Often, isolated families will benefit from supportive interpersonal relationships. Still other families need to access resources from within the community. Andrea teams with families to manage a network of social services, selecting among possibilities ranging from housing assistance to job training to crisis childcare to child abuse prevention.

Andrea also recognizes that to serve their best interests, she must broaden her focus and look beyond the needs of individual families. Many times, families confined by forces they consider to be beyond their personal control seek a professional voice to speak for them at the levels of government, policy, and resource allocation. They certainly need power and resources to take charge of their own direction in a world that continues to grow more complex and confusing.

As Andrea provides opportunities for the members of the Clemens family to respond to her questions, she reminds herself that this family is unique. She knows to attend to the ways that her clients are similar as well as to the ways they are different. As a Black woman, Andrea herself is sensitive to the confinement of prejudgments. The strengths the Clemens family members have to offer and the challenges they face are particular to their own situation. Demonstrating her cultural competence, Andrea thoughtfully examines the assumptions she makes about people, based on their obvious similarities so that she will not ignore their inevitable differences.

Clients have taught Andrea that individual differences themselves can be the key to solutions. Social work practitioners accept the challenge of enabling each client system to access its own unique capabilities and the resources of its particular context. Andrea's role in the professional relationship is that of a partner to empower families with their own strengths, not to overpower families with her own considerable practice knowledge and skills. Andrea has learned to depend on each family system's special competencies to guide her in this empowering process.

Even though Andrea considers the entire Clemens family as her client, she will not neglect her professional mandate to act in the best interest of the Clemens children. Ethical considerations and legal obligations compel Andrea to protect the children in this family. However, family service social workers simultaneously focus on the preservation of families and the protection of children. Andrea sees the needs of families and children as convergent. What benefits the family will help the children's development. What benefits the children will contribute to the cohesiveness of the family. Theoretically, she sees the whole family system as her client and knows that any change in the family system will create changes for individual family members.

Andrea's work with the Clemens family reinforces her opinion that social policy that aims to keep families together is good policy. She always feels best when implementing

a policy that reflects a professional philosophy that so neatly fits her own values. The policy of family preservation makes sense in Andrea's practice experience as well. She has observed the trauma for families and children when children at risk are removed from their own homes. Reuniting them, even after positive changes occur, always seems to be a difficult transition. Research in the field of child welfare confirms Andrea's practice observations and lends support to the current policy of family preservation. Andrea believes that keeping families together makes good economic sense, too. She suspects that economic considerations are a major force motivating the development of policies that favor family preservation.

"What's working well that you'd like to see continue?" This is a simple question, yet it reflects Andrea Barry's empowerment orientation toward **social work** practice. Andrea has learned that even simple questions can have positive impact, especially when they contribute to a supportive atmosphere, help to develop collaborative relationships with clients, and point the conversation in the direction of potential solutions.

THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

Learning Outcome 1.1 Describe the social work profession, including fields of practice, purpose, and a value base related to human dignity and worth, social justice, and human rights.

Andrea Barry practices in family services—one of the many **fields of social work**. Other practice arenas include school social work, medical social work, criminal justice services, mental health, youth services, child welfare, services to older adults, community organizing, housing support, urban development, and international social work to name several. More than 90 percent of social work professionals work with the most vulnerable members of society in the fields of mental health and substance abuse, healthcare, and child welfare (Torpey, 2018).

All social work practitioners, regardless of their particular field of practice, share a common professional identity and work toward similar purposes. The **National Association of Social Workers** (NASW) in its ***Code of Ethics*** (2017b) defines this unifying purpose, or mission, of all social work as "to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty" (Preamble). Similarly, the **Council on Social Work Education** (CSWE), an organization that accredits undergraduate and graduate social work programs, describes the social work profession as promoting the well-being of individuals and the collective betterment of society through the "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" (2015, p. 1). The **International Federation of Social Workers** (IFSW, 2014) states that social work is "a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people" (Global Definition section, ¶ 1). Notice the unifying themes that distinguish social work from other professions: The social work profession charges its members with the dual responsibility to both promote competent human functioning and also to fashion a just society.

This simultaneous focus on persons and their social environments permeates all social work practice. Achieving this purpose requires social work professionals to

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Video Example 1.1

Identify the elements of an empowering strengths-based approach to child and family services in this video about social work in Doncaster, England.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCiy8XHhk4A

understand and take action on the interplay between the personal troubles of their clients and the public issues that affect us all. As a social worker, Andrea Barry works with the Clemens family to facilitate the adaptive functioning of their family and preserve its unity. She also works to create a resource-rich and responsive environment that will contribute to the development and stability of the Clemens family.

Social Work Practice

Practicing social work means taking actions to help individuals, families, groups, and communities adapt to life challenges while continuously working to create social conditions favorable to human well-being. Social workers strive to strengthen human functioning and promote effective societal structures. For example, the practitioner who helps a child with learning disabilities to develop a positive self-image while also advocating with the school to provide specialized services helps the client directly and fashions a supportive educational environment. By accomplishing both individual and structural changes, the worker acts on the social work profession's commitment to achieve individual enhancement and social change.

If social workers are to be successful, they require a clear understanding of the way things are and a positive vision of the way things could be. To this end, practitioners use their knowledge and skills to work with people in ways that strengthen clients' competence, link them with needed resources, advocate institutional change, and promote social policy that responds to the needs of all. Moreover, as a way to improve practice outcomes, the profession calls on social workers to apply research-based theory and evidence-based intervention methods. The most effective social workers contribute to professional knowledge by conducting their own research and evaluation activities.

Competent professional practice requires social workers to develop wide-ranging skills. In a direct way, practitioners engage with clients to assess challenges in social functioning, plan potential solutions, develop skills to resolve problems, and create support for change attempts. Importantly, workers assess clients' needs for resources and link them to appropriate services, a vital strategy in any change effort. More than simply connecting clients with services, workers leverage their own power to advocate optimal benefits for clients.

Social workers also labor in the community at large to help create a more humane and operational social service network. To accomplish this, social workers champion the ideals of client-centeredness, coordination, effectiveness, and efficiency in service delivery. They develop communication networks among organizations to ensure client access to resources. When necessary supports do not exist, practitioners work to generate new opportunities. Workers continuously strive to ensure accountability and apply professional social work standards, ethics, and values in the delivery of services to clients. All social workers, including those in direct service positions, have important knowledge to share in order to achieve equity and effectiveness in the service network.

To realize even greater benefits, social workers participate in social policy development and social work research. They analyze the impact of legislation on social problems, imagine new policy initiatives, and lobby for laws, regulations, and services that meet individual and collective needs. Moreover, as part of their responsibilities to contribute to the knowledge and theory base of the profession, practitioners also engage in research and program evaluation. For success in practice, social workers need to be **generalists** with skills to work with individuals directly and within systems to evaluate and improve social structures.

SOCIAL WORK VALUES

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Video Example 1.2

Based on this video, review the mission and purpose of the social work profession and describe which overarching values each of the key issues represents.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x76h8X8RmhA

Historically, social work has been described as a value-based profession. Whatever actions social work practitioners take when helping clients should fit the profession's foundational values to respect **human dignity and worth** as well as reflect a commitment to **social justice**. More recently, the global context of social work emphasizes the ideal of universal human rights as another value that undergirds social work practice. As the IFSW (2014) states, "principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing" (Global Definition section, ¶ 1). These **core values** of human dignity and worth, social justice, and **human rights** define the identity of social work and guide the profession as it moves forward.

Human Dignity and Worth

Recognizing the inherent human dignity and worth of all people advances a nondiscriminatory view of humankind. The NASW (2017b) *Code of Ethics* instructs social workers to treat clients with respect, honor their unique and diverse qualities, promote self-determination, strengthen clients' capacities to achieve desired change, and resolve conflicts between the interests of clients and those of society. Similarly, in their statements on ethics in social work, the IFSW (2018) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW, 2018) affirm the centrality of treating people with dignity and worth as a core value, while also charging social workers to challenge the beliefs of those who act in ways to denigrate human dignity.

Respectful interaction represents one direct way that social workers can affirm a person's sense of worth. Social work practitioners treat people with consideration, respect their uniqueness, appreciate the validity of their perspectives, and listen carefully to what people have to say. Ultimately, affording people dignity and worth empowers them to fully utilize the resources of a just society.

Social Justice

Social justice describes the ideal circumstances in which all members of a society have equal access to opportunities, rights, political influence, and benefits (DuBois & Miley, 2019; Healy, 2001). Social justice prevails when all members profit from the resources that a society offers and, reciprocally, have opportunities to contribute to that society's pool of resources. This exchange, characteristic of a socially just society, shows a synergistic dynamic in which persons who are treated fairly and given opportunity become resources themselves capable of generating more societal resources to benefit themselves and others.

To achieve the social justice ideal, the IFSW (2018) and the IASSW (2018) instruct social workers to take actions within society at-large as well as directly with their clients. These international professional associations charge social workers around the world to strive for transformational change in society by: (1) confronting all forms of discrimination and oppression; (2) creating inclusive communities that respect ethnic and cultural diversity; (3) advocating equitable distribution of societal resources; (4) challenging injustice in policies and practices; and (5) working to build solidarity within the social work profession and throughout the community.

The philosophy of social justice has deep roots in the social work profession; however, political realities and ethical dilemmas confound workers' attempts to apply the principles of social justice in practice. For example, Reisch (2002) describes two problems in actualizing social justice principles, challenges that remain evident in the contemporary political and economic environment. First, Reisch notes a paradox of defining justice principles within a socio-political-economic system that for the most part perpetuates injustice. Second, Reisch highlights the tension between asserting individual rights and advancing the common good in allocating societal resources. Group and individual interests do not always converge. Clearly, social workers face pitfalls when choosing actions in practice that promote a social justice ideal.

Social injustice prevails when society infringes on human rights, holds prejudicial attitudes toward some of its members, and institutionalizes inequality by discriminating against segments of its citizenry. Encroachments on human and civil rights deny equal and equitable access to opportunities and resources, limiting full participation in society. Collectively, the injustices enacted by advantaged groups create oppressive conditions for disadvantaged groups. Members of oppressed groups often personally suffer the effects of dehumanization and victimization. Aware social workers understand the consequences of injustice on the lives of their clients, act to mitigate the negative effects, and acknowledge their professional responsibility to work more broadly for social and economic justice.

Human Rights

Unless people are afforded basic human rights, societies cannot achieve social justice. According to the United Nations, human rights are "those rights which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings. Human rights and fundamental freedoms allow us to fully develop and use our human qualities, our intelligence, our talents and our conscience and to satisfy our spiritual and other needs" (UN, 1987, as cited in Reichert, 2003, p. 4). Given their inherent nature, human rights can only be violated, neither given nor taken away. Some argue that human rights are "the bedrock of social justice" (Wronka, 2017, p. 1).

Grouped in three broad categories, human rights safeguard freedom and ensure personal liberty (Reichert, 2003; Wronka, 2017, 2019). *Civil and political rights* include rights that guarantee against discrimination as well as rights to due process, fair trials, and freedom of speech and religion. Upholding *social and economic rights* offers the promise of an adequate standard of living that provides the basic human needs for food, clothing, housing, medical care, and education. Finally, rather than being accorded to individuals, *collective rights* are held communally by all members of particular group. Examples include "the right to live in an environment that is clear and protected from destruction and rights to cultural, political and economic development" (Chandra, 2017, p. 51).

Human rights violations show up as social exclusion, discrimination, oppression, and disenfranchisement – all issues of concern to social workers. Social work clients are frequently members of marginalized social and cultural groups – children, older adults, members of the LBGTQ community, nondominant ethnic and racial groups, immigrants, people in poverty, and persons with disabilities or mental illness. As such, a human rights perspective that protects vulnerable clients informs various fields of social work practice (Healy, 2017; Healy & Link, 2012; Reichert, 2011). For example, human rights issues within the criminal justice system are well-documented (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2018; McCarter, 2018). Evidence of human rights violations surfaces within various facets of this system including racial disparities, racial profiling, use of excessive force, detaining youths in adult prison, and sentencing children to life in prison without parole.

Box 1.1 Professional Image and a Social Justice Identity: A Policy–Practice Connection

What might you expect in response to telling someone that you've decided to become a social worker? "That's great!" or "Why would you want to do that?" Although social workers contribute to society in important ways, many people hold negative stereotypes about the social work profession. Historically, the narrow portrayal of social workers in the media has contributed to this inaccurate public image (Freeman & Valentine, 2004; Zugazaga et al., 2006). Social workers have frequently been seen as child welfare workers taking children from their parents, as counselors suspicious of their clients' motivations, or as bureaucrats in perfunctory roles. Rarely are social workers represented as the influential, ethical, and important contributors that many social workers reveal themselves to be.

Social, political, and professional changes affecting social work practice have also contributed to public confusion about what social workers actually do. The bifurcation of the social work profession into two mutually exclusive divisions, one focusing on clinically based (micro) practice and the other on policy-oriented (macro) practice, has diluted the social justice image of social work (Lightfoot & Toft, 2019; Olson, 2007; Reisch & Andrews, 2004; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Stoeffler & Joseph, 2019) and skewed social work identity toward clinical practice. As a result, some suggest that the profession has abandoned its engagement in public discourse, social commentary, political and social activism, and intellectual life, leaving social workers without influence on current social issues and with scant attention to social justice (Karger & Hernandez, 2004; Reisch, 2016).

A generalist, empowerment approach to social work practice bridges the micro–macro split within the social work profession. Because the unifying purpose of social work is to enhance human well-being and to promote a mutually beneficial interaction between individuals and society, empowerment-oriented social workers practice at the intersection of private troubles and public issues. In doing so, they demonstrate a partisan commitment to people who are vulnerable, disenfranchised, and oppressed and take action to expand the structures of society that provide opportunities for all citizens. According to Miley and DuBois (2005), this means that empowerment social work is simultaneously clinical (personal) and critical (political).

The recent rise of social workers in politics and government may signal the increased presence and visibility of an activist social work agenda and spur a more expansive image of what it means to be a social work professional. As a result of the federal elections of 2018, newly elected Senator Kyrsten Sinema joins fellow social worker Debbie Stabenow in the US Senate. Likewise, newly elected Representative Sylvia Garcia joins reelected congresswomen and fellow social workers Karen Bass, Barbara Lee, and Susan Davis in the US House. NASW (2018) lists more than 180 social workers serving in local and state-wide elective office across the United States, including those serving in state legislatures, city councils, and local school boards. Clearly, social workers can be political as well as clinical and are positioning themselves in government to have influence on social policy and community well-being.

Social work skills prepare people to participate in many endeavors beyond the important yet expected roles of human service delivery and community support. Social work professionals can build effective and ethical relationships; they possess the capacity to quickly understand challenging situations; they have ideas about how to initiate and sustain human system change; and they recognize the impact of social injustice. Corporations find that social workers can adapt these skills to contribute to a more humane workplace, offer support and guidance to business clients, provide consultation and training in effective leadership, and steer organizations toward ethical and philanthropic enterprises (Bullinger, 2018; Laurio, 2018). Persons educated as social workers have branched out to contribute as authors including Alice Walker and Amy Bloom, as actors including Martin Short, Samuel L. Jackson, and John Amos, or as government economists, such as Jared Bernstein (Social Work Degree Center, 2018-2019). Clearly, a more accurate image of a social work professional is that of someone with abilities to apply the values, knowledge, and skills of the social work profession in various settings to benefit individual well-being and enrich community life.

Jane Addams, an early twentieth-century pioneer in social work identified human rights as a sphere of practice, yet social work has only recently asserted its identity as a human rights profession (Androff, 2016; Jewell et al., 2009; Reichert, 2011; Staub-Bernasconi, 2016). Although the NASW *Code of Ethics* (2017b) does not specifically refer to human rights, the NASW (2017c) does subscribe to a policy statement on human rights that indicates that "the struggle for human rights remains a vital priority for social work practitioners and advocates in the 21st century" (p. 195). Similarly, CSWE (2015) explicitly recognizes human rights as one of the core values of the social work profession and explicitly integrates human rights into its statement on educational outcome competencies and associated practice behaviors. Additionally, the IFSW (2018) and the IASSW (2018) in their statements on ethical principles concur that social workers have an unequivocal obligation to advocate human rights. A human rights approach expands the view of social workers so that they "see both clients' rights and their needs, view clients as rights-holders rather than charity seekers, and focus on human rights violations rather than individual pathologies" (Mapp et al., 2019, p. 264).

GENERALIST SOCIAL WORK

Learning Outcome 1.2 Explain generalist social work as an integration of practice at multiple client system levels, founded on theory, policy, research, and empowerment.

Generalist social work describes an integrated and multileveled approach for achieving the fundamental purposes of social work. A generalist approach to social work provides a structure that fits an empowerment-focused practice method. Generalist practitioners acknowledge the interplay of personal and collective issues, prompting them to work with various levels of human systems—societies, communities, neighborhoods, complex organizations, formal groups, families, and individuals—to create changes that benefit human health and well-being.

The generalist approach to social work practice rests on four key premises. First, *human behavior is inextricably connected to the social and physical environment*. A change initiated by either person or environment triggers a response by the other. Second, *based on this linkage of persons and environments, opportunities for enhancing the functioning of any human system include changing the system itself, modifying its interactions with other systems, and altering its environmental context*. Generalist practitioners implement multilevel assessments and multimethod interventions in response to these possible venues for change. Third, *work with any level of a human system—from individual to society—uses similar social work process*es. Social work **intervention** with all human systems requires an exchange of information through some form of dialogue, a process of discovery to locate resources for change, and a phase of development to accomplish the purposes of the work. Finally, *because of their big-picture perspectives, generalist social workers can readily assess the impact of social policy on service delivery and evaluate the effectiveness of various change strategies*. This broad vision positions generalists to contribute as researchers and policy developers regardless of level of practice.

To comprehend what generalist social workers do entails an in-depth understanding of what it means to operate at the multiple levels of social work practice, including practice with **microlevel**, **mezzolevel**, and **macrolevel systems**, and within the **system of the social work profession**. It also requires knowledge to apply relevant social work **theory**, a recognition of the impact of **social policy**, and the astute use and generation of social work **research**.

Pearson eText

Video Example 1.3

What levels of generalist practice are reflected in these social workers' stories about their work?

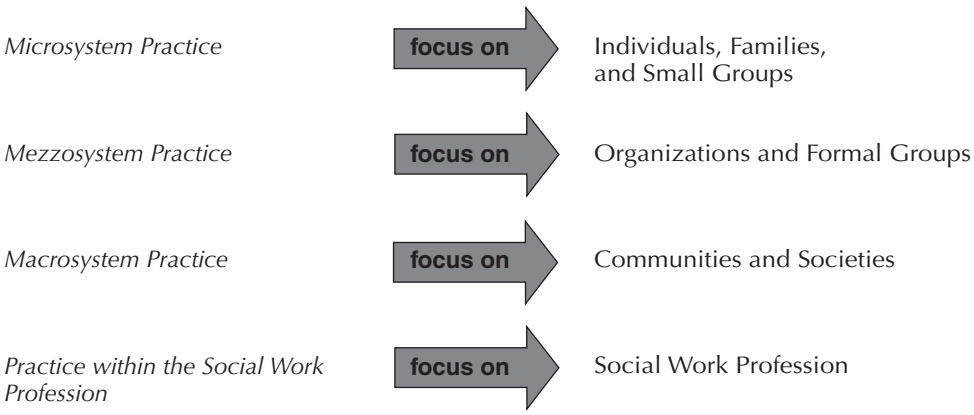
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3hzv4z3aHQ

Levels of Generalist Practice

Generalist social workers look at issues in context and find solutions within the interactions between people and their environments. The generalist approach moves beyond the confines of individually focused practice to the expansive sphere of **intervention at multiple system levels**. Although microlevel interventions create changes in individual, familial, and interpersonal functioning, generalist social workers do not necessarily direct all their efforts toward changing individuals themselves. Workers often target changes in other systems, including changes in the social and physical environments, to facilitate an individual's or family's social functioning. In generalist social work, the nature of presenting situations, the systems involved, and potential solutions shape interventions, rather than a social worker's adherence to a particular modality.

The perspective of generalist social work is like the view through a wide-angle lens of a camera. It takes in the whole, even when focusing on an individual part. Workers assess people in the backdrop of their settings, and interventions unfold with an eye to outcomes at all system levels. Practitioners visualize potential clients and agents for change on a continuum ranging from micro- to mezzo- to macrolevel interventions, small systems to large systems, including professional-level systems of practice (Figure 1.1). Generalist social workers view problems in context, combine practice techniques to fit the situation, and implement skills to intervene at multiple system levels.

Figure 1.1 System Levels for Social Work Intervention



Microlevel System Practice

Microlevel practice focuses on work with people individually, in families, or in small groups to foster changes within personal functioning, in social relationships, and in the ways people interact with social and institutional resources. Social workers draw on the knowledge and skills of clinical practice, including strategies such as crisis intervention, trauma-informed practice, family therapy, linkage and referral, and small group work.

For example, in the opening example, social worker Andrea Barry might coach Mr. and Mrs. Clemens directly on parenting skills or refer them to a parent education group – both microlevel interventions.

Mezzolevel System Practice

Mezzolevel practice creates changes in task groups, teams, organizations, and the network of service delivery. In other words, the locus for change is within organizations and formal groups, including their structures, goals, and functions. For example, if, in working with the Clemens children, Andrea learns of their embarrassment at receiving lunch subsidies because the school physically segregates the "free lunch" students from the "full pay" students in the cafeteria, she can help them and other families who report similar concerns by working directly on the school's policy. Andrea's work with the school to address this demeaning and discriminatory practice represents a mezzolevel intervention. Effecting change in organizations requires an understanding of group dynamics, skills in facilitating decision-making, and proficiency in organizational planning. Working with agency structures and the social service delivery network holds promise to develop quality services that may benefit individual clients and others in similar circumstances.

Macrolevel System Practice

Macrolevel practice addresses social problems in community, institutional, and societal systems. At this level, generalist practitioners work to achieve social change through neighborhood organizing, community planning, public education, policy advocacy, and social action. A worker's testimony at a legislative hearing reflects a macrolevel strategy to support a comprehensive national family welfare policy. Working with neighborhood groups to lobby for increased city spending on police protection, street repair, and park maintenance exemplifies another macrolevel intervention. Social policy formulation and community development lead to macrosystem change.

Practice within the Social Work Profession

In consideration of all elements of the ecosystem, generalist practitioners also work to improve the social work professional system itself. Professional-level activities assert the role of social workers as they collaborate with interdisciplinary colleagues and lead the way in improving service delivery. For instance, by supporting social work licensure and the legal regulation of practice, practitioners use their collective influence to ensure the competence of those persons who practice as social workers. To safeguard ethical standards and professional accountability, generalists function as interventionists within the system of the social work profession.

Theory in Generalist Practice

Social work theory contributes to an understanding of human beings; it provides a framework for thinking about people and their situations. Generalist social work practice requires not only theories that describe human individual behavior and development but also draws on theories that explain the functioning of larger systems that affect people's lives. Human system behavior is not easily understood, yet social workers are expected to understand people and their circumstances in order to help clients reach their goals. Theoretical information provides essential support for social workers in **assessment**, planning, and intervention. To determine how to assess problems, resolve issues, and create environmental resources and opportunities, knowledgeable social workers filter client experiences through the lens of relevant theories about human behavior and the social environment.

Various social work theories focus on different aspects of peoples' lives as most significant. As an example, one theory emphasizes the strengths and resources that people have used to manage life events. Recognizing existing capabilities prepares clients to develop their abilities and repeat things that work. Another useful theory highlights the expectations that people hold about what will happen, based on past successes and traumas. Other core social work theories examine clients' interpersonal relationships in the context of events happening in the world around them. Still other theories focus on how social institutions and structures define individual experience. These views – articulated in empowerment (DuBois & Miley, 2019), the strengths perspective (Saleebey, 2013), behavioral theories (Bandura, 1977; Pavlov, 1927, reprinted 2010; Skinner, 1953), a trauma-informed perspective (Bent-Goodley, 2019), life course theory (Elder, 1998), critical theory (Gray & Webb, 2013), feminist theory (Turner & Maschi, 2015), and an ecosystemic view (Gitterman, Germain, & Knight, 2018) – are only a few of the theoretical perspectives that may be helpful to a generalist practitioner.

Policy in Generalist Practice

Social policy determines whether society distributes resources among its members in ways to honor human rights and promote human dignity or whether society caters to privileged populations, thereby sustaining inequality, economic disparity, and social injustice. Social policies direct the delivery of health and human services, including mental health, criminal justice, child welfare, health and rehabilitation, housing, and public assistance. The quality of these services affects the well-being of many social work clients. Social workers take a stand to press for fair and effective social policies that benefit all persons, and they advocate changes in policies adversely affecting disenfranchised and oppressed groups.

Social policies affect all facets of social work. In fact, "practice informs policy and policy informs practice" (DuBois & Miley, 2019, p. 250). Importantly, social policy shapes bureaucratic structures and agency practices, ultimately defining who qualifies for services and for what services they qualify. Even within their own individual practice activities, social workers unavoidably make policy judgments by attending to or overlooking constantly changing social realities. Based on their day-to-day practice of social work and through their connections with professional organizations such as the National Association of Social Workers, social workers are in pivotal positions to advocate policy change.

To understand the impact of social policies on social work practice, consider how policy affects Andrea Barry's practice in family preservation. Social policies, framed at the legislative level in the amendments to the Social Security Act and implemented through state administrative procedures, define the goals and processes that Andrea implements in family preservation. Agency-level policy to design programs and services consistent with empowering principles and a strengths perspective further refines Andrea's approach to working with families. As a professional social worker, Andrea's direct practice with families falls within the policy guidelines established by the NASW standards for child protection. Policy choices made at many levels—federal, state, agency, professional organization, and worker—influence the day-to-day practice of social work.

Research in Generalist Practice

Social work research involves systematic investigation, appraisal of practice effectiveness, and program evaluation – the results of which can enrich theory, enhance policy formulation, and guide workers to implement successful practice interventions. Research

provides evidence to help a practitioner figure out *what works* for a client's unique situation. **Evidence-based practice** draws on scientifically sound research processes to generate data that can pinpoint effective change strategies and discover robust program models. These rigorous scientific studies contribute to the emergence of best practice guidelines, suggested strategies that when implemented are likely to achieve desired outcomes for clients. Across all fields of social work practice, workers apply best practices derived from evidence that has been generated through social work research.

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Video Example 1.4

Consider how the foundation of theory, policy, and research informs the examples of social work practice included in this video, Also consider the interrelationship between strengths and empowerment.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A27QjpQ_Ieo&t=222s

Research boosts social work efficacy, as illustrated in the example of Andrea Barry's work in family preservation. Her coursework on empowerment-based practice, theories about families, and the dynamics of child abuse and neglect—all information rooted in decades of social work research—informs Andrea each time she interacts with clients. As an ethical social worker, Andrea routinely reads professional journals, especially *Social Work, Child Welfare, The Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work, The Journal of Evidence-Based Practice*, and *Families in Society*, to keep up with best practices relevant to her work in child welfare. She also uses various evaluation methods to monitor her clients' progress and to continually assess and improve her own practice skills. Additionally, Andrea contributes to social work knowledge through careful documentation of her work in a new play therapy program piloted at Northside Family Services, data which ultimately will be combined with other workers' records to analyze the usefulness of the pilot program. Generalist-focused social workers, including those like Andrea who primarily provide direct services, recognize their responsibilities to conduct research, inquiries that can augment their own practice effectiveness and add to the knowledge base of the social work profession.

Advantages of a Generalist Approach

Social workers realize many advantages from a generalist practice approach. Inevitably, changes in one system ripple through other interrelated systems. In other words, significant improvements in client or environmental systems might precipitate other beneficial changes. A single policy change may have far-reaching benefits for an entire society. Research demonstrates that effective change strategies in one situation may have a broader impact and assist others in similar situations.

Generalist social workers see numerous angles from which to approach any solution. Because of their multidimensional perspectives, generalist practitioners are likely to uncover more than one possible solution for any given problem. They analyze the many dimensions of any challenging situation to discover entry points for change. They also align the motivations and efforts of client systems with systems in their environments, synchronizing the movements of all involved to achieve the desired outcome. Generalist social work frames a way of thinking about the context of problems and solutions and describes a way of working with various levels of client systems.

EMPOWERMENT-ORIENTED SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Not all methods of generalist practice are the same. The answers to key questions differentiate various approaches. Does the approach use a process that centers on diagnosis and problems, or does it focus instead on strengths and solutions? Is the scope limited to creating individual adaptation and change, or does the view expand to include multileveled

intervention? To what degree does the approach account for individual uniqueness and recognize the inequities in social, economic, political, and cultural status that impact client well-being? To answer these questions, an empowering generalist practice method welds an empowerment perspective to a strengths-centered generalist process applicable to solutions at many levels.

Empowerment

Historically, social work has focused on personal and sociopolitical issues related to power. Decades ago, Smalley (1967) first described the aim of social work practice as releasing human power in individuals to reach their full potential combined with unleashing social power to fuel changes in society. Consistent with its roots, contemporary social work also emphasizes empowering individuals to contribute to society and wielding social power to improve social institutions and social policy, which in turn spurs individual development (Breton, 2017; DuBois & Miley, 2019; Parsons & East, 2013). At its core, an **empowering practice** approach addresses the subtext of power inherent in all human relationships including those between client and community and between social worker and client.

An empowerment perspective defines social work practice outcomes and processes. It frames the desired outcome as clients taking charge of their lives and suggests a practice process that in and of itself functions to empower. In the example that opens this chapter, social worker Andrea Barry joins with the Clemons family to restore feelings of control and well-being – a desirable outcome. And, in doing so, she makes sure to elicit their active involvement, honor their contributions, and work together with them to define problems, goals, and potential solutions – an empowering process. Social workers interact with clients in ways that elevate their experience of power throughout the social work process.

In relating with their clients, social workers supplant *power over* clients in favor of a *power with* approach, a collaborative style that can trigger personal, interpersonal, and sociopolitical benefits. Successfully infusing empowerment into social work practice guarantees clients' privilege to assert their own perspectives and actively partner with social workers to develop effective solutions. Working as allies with clients to build on their strengths and access life-enhancing resources unleashes potent forces to benefit clients, workers, and the communities in which they both live.

To attain preferred outcomes, practitioners help people experience power within three interrelated domains – personal, interpersonal, and political. Personal power springs from a sense of **competence**, recognition of self-worth, and capabilities to meet needs. Interpersonal power develops from effective communication, skills to develop relationships, and a positon of influence in a community. Political power comes from equal and equitable access to resources, assertion of social and economic rights, and abilities to generate social change. As Lee (2001) summarizes, empowerment-oriented social workers guide clients to "gain access to power in themselves, in and with each other, and in the social, economic, and physical environments" (p. 26). DuBois and Miley (2019) agree that an empowerment method should enhance personal strengths and affirm individual differences; encourage active participation in relationships, including those with social workers; and integrate the clinical and political dimensions of social work in day-to-day practice by critically reflecting on structural arrangements, adopting a commitment to human rights, and engaging in social action (See Table 1.1)

Table 1.1 Elements of Empowerment-Based Social Work Practice

Empowerment Principle	Practice Guideline
Focusing on strengths	Act on the knowledge that all people have untapped and unacknowledged strengths that, when activated, help people cope effectively with life challenges.
Affirming the value of diversity and difference	Honor the complexity of cultural identity as defined by the intersection of race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, religion, ability, socioeconomic status, geographic location, immigration status, national origin, and political affiliation.
Working collaboratively	Accept clients as experts on their situations and work with them as partners throughout the change effort.
Linking personal and political power	Recognize the individual and political dimensions of day-to-day social work practice.
Critically reflecting on structural arrangements	Analyze the impact of social and political structures that institutionalize discrimination and perpetuate oppression.
Adopting a human rights stance	Safeguard human rights with all clients and in all practice contexts.
Engaging in social action	Participate in social change efforts through advocacy, community action, and political activism.

Imagine the experience of those individuals who can recognize and use their personal talents, activate interpersonal support, effect sociopolitical change, and contribute to the community at-large. That's the achievement that social workers would like to engender with their clients – an awareness of personal value, social influence, and importance to others. Empowerment means having a sense of competence, interpersonal effectiveness, and ready channels for accessing essential resources. To increase the sense of power throughout a client's life experience, social workers collaborate with clients throughout the practice process and adopt a generalist framework to guide their actions.

Empowerment-Based Generalist Practice Processes

The social work process refers to the ways in which social workers proceed with clients through phases of developing a relationship, figuring out what is going on, and taking action to help things get better. Workers fashion their practices as guided by these social work processes commonly described as engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation (CSWE, 2015). The specific actions taken by workers within each phase vary based on approach. The practice model chosen determines the nature of the worker/client relationship, the focus for assessment, the range of intervention, and the method of evaluation.

Generalist social workers use best practices with all families.

Shutterstock

The social work processes delineated in this text offer an approach that is both generalist and empowering. Generalist practice relies on flexible social work processes with universal applications across system levels, processes that apply

to individuals, families, and groups as well as organizations and communities. For a generalist social work method to also be empowering requires a process of collaborative engagement, an assessment of strengths and resources, an intervention that considers changes in both person and context, and continuous evaluation by workers and clients together. An empowering approach to social work practice is both generalist and collaborative.

The generalist empowerment method describes the practice process as progressing through phases of **dialogue** (engagement), **discovery** (assessment), and **development** (intervention and evaluation). Within the dialogue phase, workers develop partnerships with clients, articulate their current situations, and determine their hoped-for outcomes. In the discovery phase, workers strive to identify client strengths, locate environmental resources, and create plans to achieve goals based on the opportunities discovered. In the development phase, workers and clients collaborate to activate resources, create helpful alliances, and reshape environments to respond to client needs. Throughout the development phase, workers and clients engage in a continuous evaluation of progress as they work to sustain positive changes. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the empowerment practice method and offers examples that apply these processes at the micro-, mezzo-, and macrolevels of social work practice.

SOCIAL WORK FUNCTIONS AND ROLES

Learning Outcome 1.3 Compare and contrast the multiple functions and roles of generalist social workers at various system levels.

Generalists work with systems at many levels, but what does that actually mean in their daily practice of social work? As a family preservation worker, Andrea Barry intervenes directly with individuals and families. She provides them with education, counseling, and linkage to needed community resources—activities associated with roles at the microlevel. Yet, Andrea's work encompasses more than microlevel intervention. In her position, Andrea identifies gaps in the social service delivery network when families need resources that are not available. As a result, she works with other professionals in child welfare to address social service delivery issues—a mezzolevel intervention. She also participates on a community coalition with her interdisciplinary colleagues to develop a community-wide effective parenting campaign – a macrolevel strategy. Recognizing her ethical responsibility to provide the best service possible, Andrea systematically evaluates the effectiveness of her work and keeps up to date on child welfare policy initiatives. In doing so, Andrea demonstrates the integration of research, policy, and multilevel intervention that characterizes generalist social work practice.

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Video Example 1.5

Identify generalist roles used in social work practice with an immigrant family.

Activities of generalist social work practice fall broadly into three interrelated functions: **consultancy**, **resource management**, and **education** (DuBois & Miley, 2019; Tracy & DuBois, 1987). Within each function, social workers take on various roles that specify what actions workers will take to assist client systems. Interventions designed within this model cover the range of issues presented to generalist social workers by clients at all system levels.

Consultancy

Through consultancy, social workers seek solutions for challenges experienced by individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. As consultants, workers help client systems to clarify issues, recognize strengths, discuss options, and identify potential courses of action. Clients and their constituents possess information and resources,

actual and potential, that are vital for resolving the issue at hand. When social workers consult, they offer their expertise but acknowledge that they are not the only experts. Workers actively respect clients' competence and solicit clients' ideas about what might be helpful. Consultancy activities cast workers into the roles of **enabler**, **facilitator**, **planner**, and **colleague** and **monitor** (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 Consultancy Roles

Level	Role	Strategy
Micro-	Enabler	Empower clients in finding solutions
Mezzo-	Facilitator	Foster organizational development
Macro-	Planner	Coordinate program and policy development through research and planning
Social Work Profession	Colleague/Monitor	Mentor, guide, and support professional acculturation

Based on the Information Model for Generalist Social Work Practice by B. C. Tracy and B. DuBois

Enabler Role

Functioning in the enabler role, social workers engage individuals, families, and small groups in counseling processes. As enablers, empowering practitioners do not subsidize client incapacity or encourage dependency; instead, they encourage clients to participate as partners in assessing challenging situations, framing potential solutions, and working toward sustainable change. In other words, enablers are change agents working at the microlevel who "use varying approaches in order to provide the conditions necessary for clients to achieve their purposes, meet life challenges, engage in their natural life development processes, and carry out their tasks" (Maluccio, 1981, p. 19). Fulfilling their roles as enablers, social workers consult with individual, family, and small group clients to modify behaviors, improve relationships, and strengthen access to the resources of their social and physical environments.

Facilitator Role

Implementing the mezzolevel role of facilitator, social workers activate organizational and formal group members to participate in assessment and change efforts. As facilitators, practitioners observe group interaction, offer constructive feedback about group process, stimulate intragroup support, and suggest structured activities to ensure equity and fairness as group members work together. Beyond tending the internal functioning of the group, social work facilitators also strive to enhance linkages within organizations and in the community at-large. In this role, practitioners may even target their own agency settings to increase the competence and cooperation of staff to ensure the agency's effective contribution to social service delivery.

Planner Role

Social workers functioning as planners endeavor to understand community needs, respond to gaps and barriers in service delivery, and determine effective processes for social and community change. To understand macrolevel social problems, planners use various techniques, including needs assessments, service inventories, community profiles, community inventories, environmental scans, and field research. To intervene as planners,

social workers likely participate with other helping professionals to construct strategies to fuel and sustain community change.

Colleague and Monitor Roles

Through their colleague and monitor roles, social workers engage with other professionals uphold expectations for the ethical conduct of members of their profession. As colleagues, social workers develop working partnerships with fellow practitioners by participating in professional organizations such as the NASW and its local membership groups, and through their everyday contacts with other professionals. The *Code of Ethics* (NASW, 2017b) specifically casts social workers as monitors, charging them to review the professional activities of peers to ensure quality and maintain professional standards. Consultative relationships among social work practitioners lead to ethically sound practices and professional development.

Resource Management

As social service delivery system experts, social workers stand out as the helping professionals most proficient in knowing what might be available to meet peoples' financial, housing, food, medical, and mental health needs. In applying this knowledge social workers can readily function as resource managers by linking clients with helpful services and supports.

Social workers offer knowledge about what's available, a stance of client advocacy, and skills for resource development. However, clients also share responsibilities to access existing opportunities, activate dormant supports, and assert their rights to services. Resource management becomes empowering when it increases the client system's own resourcefulness, leaving social workers to assist by coordinating and advocating rather than by controlling or directing. Social workers as resource managers function in the roles of **broker**, **advocate**, **convener**, **mediator**, **activist**, and **catalyst** (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3 Resource Management Roles

Level	Role	Strategy
Micro-	Broker/Advocate	Link clients with resources through case management
Mezzo-	Convener/Mediator	Assemble groups and organizations to network for resource development
Macro-	Activist	Initiate and sustain social change through social action
Social Work Profession	Catalyst	Stimulate community service through interdisciplinary activities

Based on the Information Model for Generalist Social Work Practice by B. C. Tracy and B. DuBois, 1987.

Broker and Advocate Roles

Actions taken to facilitate people's access to life-sustaining and life-enhancing resources require social workers to take on the roles of broker and advocate. In the micro-focused broker role, social workers link clients to helpful resources by providing information about service options and by making direct referrals. Competent brokers carefully assess

clients' needs and consider eligibilities for assistance, then provide clients with choices among alternative resources, if possible. Brokers also expedite clients' connections to appropriate agencies and follow up to evaluate the success of their efforts.

Moreover, as intermediaries between clients and community helping systems, social workers have opportunities to protect clients' rights through advocacy. Social workers as advocates function as spokespersons for clients who face obstacles to service access or become overwhelmed by the bureaucratic maze of governmental structures and policies. Circumstances often press social workers to take on advocacy roles when the rights of social service clients are abridged despite their legitimate access to social and community resources.

Convener and Mediator Roles

Social workers adopt convener and mediator roles when assisting formal groups and organizations to coordinate resource distribution and development. Conveners promote interagency discussion and planning, mobilize coordinated networks to streamline service delivery, and advocate policies that promise equitable funding and just service provisions. As conveners, social workers use networking strategies to bring together diverse representatives to identify and address shared goals, such as in the examples of community task groups and interagency committees. When controversy or conflicts of interest arise, social workers as mediators use their skills to negotiate and resolve conflicts. Conveners-mediators working at the mezzolevel help human service providers to identify resource gaps and encourage proactive interagency planning to develop new initiatives within social service delivery systems.

Activist Role

Generalist social workers are well-positioned to identify unjust societal conditions that are detrimental to the welfare of their clients. This macrolevel view prepares social workers to assume activist roles in support of laws and policies that generate services that are truly helpful and fair. Social work activists employ strategies to inform citizens about current issues, mobilize resources, build coalitions, take legal actions, generate funding, and lobby for legislative changes. Activists empower community-based efforts to resolve commonly held concerns and work with others collaboratively to redress social injustice and generate social reform.

Catalyst Role

The catalyst role exemplifies social workers' commitment to stand with other professionals to develop a humane system of service delivery, advocate just social and environmental policies, and support a worldview acknowledging global interdependence. In association with colleagues and as partners in professional organizations, social workers take actions to stimulate change by lobbying and providing expert testimony to shape legislation. As catalysts, social workers initiate, foster, and sustain interdisciplinary cooperation to advance client and professional interests at the local, regional, national, and international levels.

Education

Social work clients rightfully expect that social workers have knowledge that may be beneficial, so it makes sense that social workers should function as educators. Social work practitioners recognize the need to educate clients in ways that acknowledge clients' expertise and elicit clients' input, choosing methods in which workers and clients share the functions of teachers and learners. Collaborative learning presumes that client systems

are self-directing, possess reservoirs of experiences and resources on which to base educational experiences, and desire immediate applications of new learning. The education function of social work respects the knowledge and experience that all parties contribute. Functioning as educators involves the social work roles of **teacher**, **trainer**, **outreach**, **researcher**, and **scholar** (Table 1.4).

Table 1.4 Education Roles

Level	Role	Strategy
Micro-	Teacher	Facilitate information processing and provide educational programming
Mezzo-	Trainer	Instruct through staff development
Macro-	Outreach	Convey public information about social issues and social services through community education
Social Work Profession	Researcher/Scholar	Engage in discovery for knowledge development

Based on the Information Model for Generalist Social Work Practice by B. C. Tracy and B. DuBois, 1987.

Teacher Role

Many social work clients seek suggestions about what they should do to resolve their current difficulties. What might work? Social workers in the microlevel role of teacher can offer potential answers to this question, drawing on ideas rooted in research-based knowledge and their own practice wisdom. To affirm clients' existing understanding of the situation, practitioners work collaboratively to honor clients' perspectives and mutually share knowledge about possible strategies for change. Collaborative educational exchanges may occur naturally within the ongoing conversations of social workers and clients or be more structured, such as in the examples of role plays, family conferences, or educational classes.

Trainer Role

As educational resource specialists for formal groups, social workers in their trainer role make presentations, serve as panelists at public forums, and conduct workshops – all mezzolevel interventions. Sometimes, trainers work within the organization as employees; at other times, organizations contract with outside social workers to provide specific training experiences. Successful training strategies require a careful assessment of staff-development needs, a clear understanding of the training goals, the ability to convey information through appropriate learning formats, and a concrete evaluation process.

Outreach Role

In outreach roles, social workers intervene at the macrolevel to inform the public about social problems, describe social injustices, and suggest services and policies to address these issues. Workers disseminate information about what services are available to meet various needs, thereby enhancing service accessibility. Using social media, distributing leaflets, conducting mailings, staffing information booths, and engaging in public speaking all bolster community awareness about programs and services. Increasing understanding of issues such as poverty, health care, disease control, stress, suicide, infant mortality, substance abuse, and family violence leads to early intervention and stimulates support for prevention programs.

Table 1.5 Family Service Interventions—Case Example: Andrea Barry

	Microlevel	Mezzolevel	Macrolevel	Social Work Profession Level
Consultancy	Counseling with families	Facilitating organizational change to prevent burnout in child protective workers	Participating in child welfare community planning	Addressing ethical and legal issues in mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect
Resource Management	Linking families with additional community resources	Coordinating service delivery planning among local agencies	Developing a stable funding base for child welfare services	Stimulating interdisciplinary cooperation to develop resources
Education	Providing opportunities for learning anger control and positive parenting	Leading staff development training on mandatory reporting at local day care centers	Initiating public education regarding child protective resources	Presenting family preservation research at a regional conference

Researcher and Scholar Roles

Professional knowledge and scientific research create a foundation for accountable social work practice. The NASW *Code of Ethics* (2017b) obligates social workers to conduct their own empirical research and share their findings with colleagues, activities casting social workers in the roles of researcher and scholar. Competent social work professionals critically examine social work research to ensure that their work is evidence-based. Social workers contribute to and draw on research related to human behavior, service delivery, social welfare policy, and intervention strategies.

Integrating Generalist Functions

In practice, social workers interweave the functions of consultancy, resource management, and education. For example, in addition to counseling, consultancy may involve linking clients with resources and teaching them new skills. Similarly, even though education is identified as a separate function, it's likely a part of other social work activities as well. Rather than compartmentalizing, this trilogy of social work functions and associated social work roles that apply to each system level provides an organizing schema for generalist social workers to be expansive in their work with clients by implementing multifaceted assessments and interventions within the entire ecosystem. Table 1.5 offers examples of how family service worker Andrea Barry engages in consultancy, resource management, and education at all system levels.

REFLECTING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

Empowering generalist social work advocates a multifaceted approach designed to help people overcome challenges in their lives. Guided by the core values of human dignity, social justice, and human rights, generalist practitioners perform many professional roles, apply and generate social work research, and improve social policy. Proficiency as a social worker requires a coherent practice framework and resourceful ways of looking at human systems to affect beneficial change. A competent generalist approach interweaves consultancy, resource management, and education strategies at all levels of practice (micro,

mezzo, and macro) to enhance the lives of individual, family, group, organizational, community, and societal clients.

This book explains the processes essential for an empowerment-oriented method of generalist social work. This first chapter provides an overview of the purposes and values of the social work profession and describes generalist social work practice. Chapter 2 discusses social work theory and articulates how various views, including the ecosystems perspective, biology, feminism, life course theory, and critical theory, support a generalist approach. Chapter 3 explores the ways in which values, expectations, and cultural attributes filter perceptions and affect social workers and clients. Chapter 4 explains how the ideal of empowerment and a strengths perspective shape an empowering practice approach. Chapter 5 fully describes the empowering method of social work practice as framed within three concurrent phases—dialogue, discovery, and development—each articulated by distinctive practice processes. Chapters 6 through 16 examine each of these processes in detail and apply them at all levels of social work practice.

PREPARING FOR PRACTICE

It resonates with Kelly Moran when Professor Arcane says, "social workers are not so much professionally educated as they are naturally developed, born and bred by families who need social workers." It gets a laugh from the whole class, but Kelly feels that it's true. Alcoholism and mental health issues dominated her early family life. She learned to cope, help her siblings, and support her parents through difficult times. And now she is enrolled in a social work program, learning how to help others. Kelly quickly recognizes that she naturally possesses much of what it takes to be an effective social worker. She is a good listener and friend. Kelly can be helpful without doing too much, something she now knows is called an empowerment approach. She'll be good at that.

But it's new for Kelly to learn that social work is a value-based profession with a mission to safeguard human dignity and worth, social justice, and human rights. Kelly "gets" human dignity and worth. She knows the stigma of being seen as disadvantaged and always treats everyone the way she herself wants to be treated – with respect. But these ideas about working for social justice and human rights take her out of her comfort zone. These are big issues that require big answers – more than just helping one person at a time. It requires the skills and actions of a generalist social worker who is capable of intervening at all system levels. Kelly will have to think about that. Is this a good fit for her?

What are the things that Kelly should think about to determine whether she should pursue a career in social work?

- What are the key values that Kelly will commit to as a social work professional?
- What can Kelly do to increase her understanding of these values and how it would influence her social work practice?

What competencies does Kelly need to be an effective generalist social work practitioner?

- What strengths does Kelly already possess to be a successful social worker?
- What knowledge and skills should Kelly develop to become competent?
- Is social work practice a good fit for you?

2

Human System Perspectives

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

2.1 Compare and contrast the contributions of theories and perspectives that support generalist social work, including ecosystems, social constructionism, a feminist perspective, life course theory, critical theory, behavioral theories, biology and behavior, and a trauma-informed perspective.

2.2 Delineate concepts from social systems theory to frame an understanding of human functioning.

2.3 Apply the ecosystems perspective as an assessment tool and practice framework for generalist social work practice.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Successful generalist social work practice requires extensive knowledge of theories explaining how human individual and social systems function within ecological, political, and global contexts. In keeping with the profession's dual focus on persons and environments, generalist social workers operate from an expansive view of human functioning, applying theories that explain why human beings do what they do as individuals, as family members, as members of social groups, as contributors to communities, as citizens of society, and as part of the human race. Useful theories help practitioners understand how larger system dynamics play out in individual lives, examine how social and cultural identities influence human experience, and explain how learning, previous experience, and biology affect human behavior. Competent social workers flexibly apply various theories that fit their particular client's circumstances best in order to assess situations comprehensively and generate the most promising interventions for clients to achieve desired outcomes.

This chapter describes and applies useful theories for generalist social work practice including an **ecosystems view**, **social constructionism**, **a feminist perspective**, **life course theory**, **critical theory**, **critical race theory**, **behavioral theories**, **biology and behavior**, and a **trauma-informed perspective**. Additionally, this chapter explains how **social systems** and

ecosystems function by detailing key concepts and themes in order to frame an empowering generalist approach to social work.

KEY PERSPECTIVES FOR EMPOWERING PRACTICE

Learning Outcome 2.1 Compare and contrast the contributions of theories and perspectives that support generalist social work, including ecosystems, social constructionism, a feminist perspective, life course theory, critical theory, behavioral theories, biology and behavior, and a trauma-informed perspective.

No single theory or perspective represents "the generalist social work view." Instead, generalist practitioners integrate numerous theoretical perspectives to explain the complexity of human system functioning within an ecosystemic context. Derived primarily from the social and behavioral sciences, theories about human systems provide a cogent understanding of how biological, psychological, social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental systems affect human behavior. Ethical social workers critically analyze the effects of the various perspectives they apply. To evaluate a theory's efficacy in practice, workers examine its relevance, universality, utility, reliability, integrity, and impact (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Analyzing Theoretical Perspectives

Dimension	Key Questions
Relevance	What is the main focus of the theory? Is it relevant to the situation? To what system level does the theory apply?
Universality	Does the theory apply widely to diverse situations or narrowly to particular cases? Is the theory culturally sensitive? What is the differential impact of applying this theory to various cultural groups?
Utility	Does the theory further the worker's understanding of human system behavior or guide the worker's efforts in change activities?
Reliability	What research and evidence support the theory? Are the samples in the research studies representative of diverse groups or of only particular segments of the population?
Integrity	Is the theory congruent with the professional values and ethics of social work?
Impact	What assumptions does the theory make about clients, including their power, expertise, and roles?

In selecting which theories to apply, empowerment-oriented social workers incorporate theories that explicate power dynamics and reveal openings for people to assume direction of their lives. The choices social workers make about theory determine whether they act as agents of social control or empower clients to make changes in themselves, their situations, and within social structures.

Ecosystems

The ecosystems perspective centers on the exchanges between people and their physical and social environments by combining key concepts from ecology and general systems

theory (Germain, 1979, 1983; Germain & Gitterman, 1996; Gitterman & Germain, 2008; Kondrat, 2013; Siporin, 1980). An ecosystems view is a perfect fit for generalist social work practice. Ecological theory stresses how systems evolve to survive in their environments. General systems theory offers principles about how human systems operate and interact with one another. Together, ecology and systems theory describe the functioning and adaptation of human systems, a pivotal perspective for generalist social workers.

In the ecosystems view, persons and environments are not separate but exist in ongoing **transactions** with each other. We cannot simply add an understanding of persons to an understanding of environments. Instead, we must also examine the reciprocal interactions or transactions between the two. Each one affects the other. The ecosystems perspective describes the ways that environments affect people and the ways people affect their environments.

Three compelling reasons support an emphasis on the ecosystems view to frame generalist social work practice (Gitterman & Germain, 2008). First, because of its integrative nature, the ecosystems view draws on the strengths of many helpful theories to describe human behavior in all its complexity. Second, it describes the interconnected functioning of individuals, families, groups, organizations, local communities, and international societies, thereby supporting the multilevel strategies of generalist social work intervention. Third, the ecosystems view clearly focuses on how people and their environments fit, rather than forcing social workers to place blame on either the person or environment for problems that arise. This accepting posture toward human behavior reflects the value base of social work; it directs workers and clients to join forces against the problematic fit of clients in situations rather than judge clients themselves to be deficient.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism focuses on how people understand themselves and interpret what is happening in their lives. Each of us selectively attends to, interprets, and acts on our beliefs about ourselves and the world around us, a concept embodied in the theory of social constructionism. Social constructionism centers on how people construct meaning, emphasizing social meaning as generated through language, cultural beliefs, and social interaction (Gergen, 1994). Each person understands events only as they are filtered through the ecosystemic layers of the social and cultural environment.

Cultural identity and social position influence the person you believe yourself to be and therefore the way you interpret the events in your life. The **privilege** of membership in an advantaged group offers a sense of fit with the world; it reinforces well-being and validates feelings of control. Through social interaction, discourse becomes the means by which dominant groups promote self-serving ideologies, limit social participation, impose meaning, and construct "realities" for less powerful others. This control over norms held by the majority group is known as **hegemony**—an invisible force that offers privilege to dominant groups and maintains oppressive beliefs about nondominant groups (Mullaly, 2002). "Consequently, a person from an ethnic group in the minority may construct a sense of self that is influenced by this devaluation, lack of power, and discrimination in the societal context" (Greene, Jensen, & Jones, 1996, p. 2).

Applying a social constructionist view, social workers see two distinct intervention points in the lives of clients who are oppressed. First, workers can interfere with the internalization of disempowering beliefs by collaborating with clients to question socially generated "truths" and their relevance for a particular client. For example, the practitioner who questions how a female client's love of another woman can be "wrong" and validates the

experience as "maybe something to celebrate" works to disable the heterosexist bias that undermines the client's emotional experience. Second, workers can advocate for social and political changes to liberate disadvantaged groups from the kind of oppressive belief systems and discriminatory laws that undermine this client's happiness. Interventions at both the individual and societal levels apply social constructionist thinking to overturn the hegemony that distorts the client's emotional reality and inhibits her free choice.

Similar to social constructionism, the psychological theory of constructivism questions the assumption of a fixed and objective reality. Constructivism holds that two people can interpret the same event very differently because they each experience a personalized, idiosyncratic view of what has occurred. Each person's unique perspective is rooted in individual history, current expectations, political sensibility, and sense of self. Like social constructionism, constructivism favors the idea of everyone's creation of a unique reality (Gergen, 1994). Both theories also view reality as maintained through language (Greene & Lee, 2002). Astute social workers recognize each client's unique experience exists in the context of a society that promotes a dialogue and subsequent reality that favors some people over others.

Feminist Perspective

A feminist perspective provides a political foundation for social workers striving to achieve a just society (Baines, 1997; Carr, 2003; Gutiérrez & Lewis, 1998; Hyde, 2013; Saulnier, 1996; Turner & Maschi, 2015). Consistent with the ecosystems perspective, a feminist view concretely links individual experiences with social forces in recognition that gender defines how power is distributed at all levels of society. From a feminist perspective, the personal is political. Social forces perpetuate the subjugation of women; and this oppression plays out in interpersonal relationships, social policy, and laws. The feminist perspective aligns with the theory of social constructionism, acknowledging that the oppressed position of women in our society results from a patriarchal construction of reality—not something real that indicates that women are not contributors, but an oppressive story about where women fit in society. Men have privilege, and women are left to deal with that. To ignore this social reality is to participate in it. Feminism forces social workers to turn from a stance of neutrality to a position of advocacy for gender equality.

Feminist theory does not offer a singular view but rather a set of perspectives that have a core consistency. In their review of the history of feminisms, Kemp and Brandwein (2010) note five prevalent themes: (1) efforts to include women in all aspects of society; (2) a goal of solidarity among women; (3) the elevation of women's perspectives and experiences in shaping a just society; (4) an emphasis on the intertwined nature of personal and political experience; and (5) a focus on praxis, the process by which people take action, critically reflect on their experiences, and determine new strategies to advance personal and political goals.

A pioneer in translating these ideas into practice, Bricker-Jenkins (1991) recommends that feminist practitioners "reflect and express ideologies, relations, structures of power and privileges, or other salient features of the cultural milieu" (p. 279). To actualize gender equality and egalitarianism, Hyde (2013) indicates that tenets of feminist practice should include creating processes and structures to promote collaboration, networking, and relationship building among all oppressed groups, not only women but others who are also marginalized. Disempowering views held toward women are rooted in dominant narratives, stories that undermine the voices of those who are disadvantaged. The social worker's task becomes one of *deconstructing* a disempowering reality for women and *reconstructing* a more liberating narrative that recognizes the power of women and others who have been historically denied privilege.

Life Course Theory

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Video Example 2.1

Use this video to review key elements of life course theory in the context of aging studies.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBOE9Yzg-Hc

Life course theory emphasizes the influences of sociocultural-historical contexts on human development. As we go through life, significant events occurring in the world around us impact our sense of self, limit or expand our opportunities, and affect our well-being. Founded on the work of sociologist Glenn Elder (1994, 1998, 2001), life course theory traces sociological influences on human behavior as humans cope over their life spans. Historical contexts and world events ultimately shape individuals' life choices, dictate their social relationships, and affect their **resilience** to manage challenging events.

Four main themes frame life course theory: the historical influences on life course, timing of life events, linked lives, and human agency. A fundamental force, the *historical context* provides both opportunities and restraints that expand or limit life choices. Those born about the same time, or cohort groups, experience a similar sociopolitical-historical milieu throughout their lives. Think about how the activism of the 60s shaped the lives of all who lived through it. However, the individual life trajectories of cohort members may differ, depending on the exact *timing of their life events,* such as marriages, deaths, births, education, employment, and retirement. Whether the timing meets the social expectations of "on time" or "off time," that timing influences the individual's experience of the event. The theme of *linked lives* calls attention to how networks of social and intergenerational relationships influence human development. For example, the effects of family caregiving responsibilities for an aging parent reverberate throughout the family system. Finally, *human agency* highlights the power of personal decision-making that gives direction to lives within the boundaries set by contextual opportunities and constraints.

Findings from large-scale longitudinal studies reveal extensive variation in life trajectories among cohort group members (Hutchinson, 2005). Locale, gender, individual resilience, socioeconomic status, cultural identity, and ethnicity all generate differences in a person's sense of agency—that sense of power one feels to act and to cope with life events. Life course theory reflects the social work profession's awareness of the influence of context, recognizing the parallel experience of individual lives and collective human experience. When applying life course theory, social workers can focus on turning points in clients' lives, help them to reset life trajectories, and lobby contexts to yield equitable access to resources and opportunities.

Critical Theory

Critical theory directs practitioners to examine how power differentials affect the daily lives of their clients and influence how clients relate to social workers (Gray & Webb, 2013; Kondrat, 2002; Salas, Sen, & Segal, 2010; Wheeler-Brooks, 2009). Critical theory emphasizes that "everyday practices operating in multiple locations . . . enact relations of culture, power, identity, and social structure" (Keenan, 2004, p. 540). Some everyday interactions serve as resources; others promote privilege for one party and sustain oppression for the other.

To apply critical theory, practitioners first require an understanding of the recursive nature of human actions and social structures; each produces the other (Keenan, 2004). Second, workers recognize that repetitive actions lead to established social structural arrangements, some good for clients, some not so good. Disrupting detrimental patterns of interaction that people have with social structures can sometimes lead to improvements in people's lives, such as in the example of a community policing program that achieves more affirming interactions between citizens and law enforcement personnel. Third, social workers acknowledge that differential power distribution within intercultural relationships elevates some cultural

beliefs to positions of truth and invalidates others, depending on who has the power. This negotiated system of beliefs within the context of power dynamics reflects social construction, not necessarily reality or universal truth. Critical theory offers a perspective for "examining institutional and social practices with a view to resisting the imposition of oppressive and dominant norms and structures" (Salas, Sen, & Segal, 2010, p. 93).

Informed by critical theory, empowerment-oriented practitioners take actions to collaborate with clients, thus asserting clients' human rights. Critical theory directs social workers to analyze the sociopolitical and economic arrangements that define human identity, beliefs, and interactions. A critique of these social arrangements focuses on issues of hierarchy and privilege, class distinctions and distortions, definitions of power, and the culture of silence and domination (Baines, 2007; Fook, 2002; Gray & Webb, 2013; Williams, 2002). Questions for social work practitioners applying critical theory include the following:

- Who defines the structural arrangements?
- Who holds the power?
- Who controls the resources?
- Which groups benefit or suffer?
- Whose voices are valued?
- Who has the most to gain or lose from changing the social arrangement?
- In what ways do various diversities influence structures?
- What actions can lead to change?

In effect, "critical reflection seeks to challenge the prevailing social, political, and structural conditions which promote the interests of some and oppress others" (Ruch, 2002, p. 205). Applying critical theory fits the profession's core value of social justice; and it aligns with practice strategies that promote anti-oppression, antidiscrimination, advocacy, and democratic participation.

Critical Race Theory

Closely related to critical theory, critical race theory emphasizes that social structures and everyday patterns of interaction perpetuate racism. Critical race theory challenges the myth of objectivity and "color-blindness" (Abrams & Moio, 2009). Tenets of critical race theory include the ideas that (1) racism is an expected experience of most people of color that originates in social interactions and becomes embedded in social institutions; (2) interests of majority group members converge to maintain a status quo that maintains positions of power by oppressing racial minorities; (3) race is socially constructed, not biologically determined; (4) driven by self-interest and economics, dominant groups differentially racialize minority group members; and (5) no one has a singular racial identity that can be easily described (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007, 2017) Critical race theory focuses on how race influences power, privilege, and oppression (Daniel, 2018; Kolivoski, Weaver, & Constance-Huggins, 2014; Sisneros et al., 2008). Applying the consciousness raised by a critical race perspective, social workers strive to counteract the effects of racism and ensure that all people regardless of racial and ethnic identity have access to life-sustaining and life-enhancing resources.

Behavioral Theories

Behavioral theories describe the processes by which humans learn new behaviors. We respond to current events in ways triggered by past experiences, repeat behaviors that work best, and imitate the behaviors of others. These three forms of learning represent the behavioral approaches of **classical conditioning**, **operant conditioning**, and **social learning theory**.

Pearson eText

Video Example 2.2

Review this video to discern the difference between classical and operant conditioning.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRdCowYEtAg

Classical Conditioning

Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov first described classical conditioning in 1927 (reprinted in 2010), based on his laboratory-based observations of digestive processes in dogs. Pavlov observed that the dogs spontaneously salivated as they tasted food. Moreover, he noticed that the dog's salivation began prior to eating when they heard a bell that rang shortly before dinner. Pavlov hypothesized that the sound of the bell signaling the imminent arrival of food prompted the salivation response, a connection that was not previously automatic but was newly learned by association. Based on these observations, Pavlov derived a schema to understand this associative learning process. First, elements essential to associative learning must be present: these include an unconditioned stimulus (the taste of food), a reflexive or automatic, unlearned response (salivation), and a neutral stimulus (the bell). Second, these elements reconfigure as the dogs now associate the sound of the bell with mealtime. As a result, the bell becomes a conditioned (learned) stimulus that results in the dogs' salivation, a conditioned (learned) response. Such automatic, nonconscious responses deeply imbedded in our brains, characterize classically conditioned learning. In his time, Pavlov merely speculated that brain centers formed the basis of classical conditioning; however, contemporary research confirms the neural basis of associative learning (Butler et al., 2018; Kim & Jung, 2006; Palmer & Gong, 2014).

A range of human emotions, from feeling safe and secure to experiencing fear and anxiety, may indicate classically conditioned responses. For example, being bitten by a dog may subsequently engender panic at the mere sight of a dog. The fragrance worn by someone we love may evoke positive emotion; whereas, the smell of alcohol may cause distress in a person previously abused by someone who is alcoholic. In relation to addiction, classical conditioning explains how exposure to cues in social and physical environments, such as special occasions, friends, or places associated with drug use, can stimulate intense craving or drug-seeking behavior (NIDA, 2014). The learned associations forged by classical conditioning act powerfully to determine our responses to the events in our lives.

Operant Conditioning

American psychologist, B. F. Skinner (1938, 1953) detailed operant conditioning, a type of learning influenced by the results we get from the actions we take. By studying animal behavior, Skinner discovered that rats randomly poking various levers in his "Skinner Box" learned to press the lever that provided food pellets. Likewise, when he introduced an electrical charge, rats learned which lever to hit to turn off the electrical shock. In Skinner's view, consequences matter. People (and rats) repeat actions that get them what they want.

Acting in ways that access desirable rewards and avoid negative consequences represent powerful motivators that shape human behavior. Providing **positive reinforcement** in response to a behavior increases the likelihood that behavior will reoccur. For example, when parents add a star to a chart after their child completes a chore, they positively reinforce the child's cooperative behavior. Similarly, when a child's temper tantrum in a grocery store prompts a parent to buy what the child wants, the child learns to throw a tantrum again to gain the desired result. Moreover, when our behavior prevents a negative consequence, we're likely to repeat that behavior too. Aren't we all more likely to obey speed limits in order to avoid speeding tickets? Simply put, learning to behave in certain ways results from experiencing either positive or **negative reinforcement** for how we have acted in the past.

In contrast, **punishment** or the application of negative consequences and **extinction** or the non-reinforcement of behavior decreases the likelihood that a person will repeat a behavior. When parents take away a child's toys as a consequence for the child's temper

tantrum, they use the strategy of punishment. When parents ignore the temper tantrum and refuse to give in to the child's demands, then they apply a method of extinction. Both responses may reduce the child's tantrums; however, research indicates that punishment, particularly physical punishment, often results in behavioral problems and other poor developmental outcomes (Afifi et al., 2017; Baydar & Akcinar, 2018; Grogan-Kaylor, Ma, & Graham-Berman, 2018; Ma & Grogan-Kaylor, 2017). Importantly, reinforcement offers the *only* pathway for learning new and more desirable behaviors.

Research on addiction demonstrates how even chemicals in our brain respond to operant conditioning and patterns of reinforcement. In effect, "our brains are wired to ensure that we will repeat life-sustaining activities by associating those activities with pleasure or reward" (NIDA, 2014, p. 18). For example, the amount of the pleasure-inducing substance dopamine the brain releases in response to substance use may be up to ten times greater than the levels of dopamine resulting from eating or sex. These data suggest positive reinforcement associated with the brain's chemical-based reward system plays a significant role in repeated substance use leading to addiction (Koob, 2011, 2016; Koob & Volkow, 2016). Ironically, if drug use ceases, the absence of drug-stimulated dopamine is magnified by the brain's previous decline in dopamine production resulting from the addiction. Because a reduction of dopamine intensifies emotions such as dysphoria, anxiety, and irritability, the associated distress driven by negative reinforcement may stimulate drug-seeking behavior (Koob & Simon, 2009). In turn, returning to drug use is positively reinforced by the stimulating effects of increased levels of dopamine. Our brains are trained to seek the most pleasant outcome.

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura (1977, 1986, 2006) expands traditional behavioral theories by incorporating cognitive processes into his theory of social learning. Sometimes called observational learning, Bandura contends that humans learn vicariously by watching others and witnessing the consequences of their actions. In general, we learn through modeling and imitating behaviors we observe, by processing verbal instructions, and by viewing symbolic images of how to act as represented in various forms of media.

Our abilities to think allow us to focus our attention, store information for future reference, and regulate our behavior. Being able to anticipate the potential outcomes of our actions informs us in ways similar to experiencing actual consequences. For us to learn cognitively, we need to pay attention, retain information, reproduce behaviors, and sustain motivation. *Attention* leads us to focus on the salient features of the observed behavior so that we can repeat the behavior. *Retention* refers to the storing of relevant images, labels, and other verbal clues to inform our memories about how to behave. To *reproduce* the desired behavior, we must have the necessary skills. Finally, *motivation* is crucial; we must desire to behave in the prescribed way. For Bandura, learning doesn't require a personal experience of reinforcement. Instead, one can learn vicariously by observing the behaviors of others and recognizing the benefits they receive.

Pearson eText

Video Example 2.3

Check out this video to further understand brain functioning and behavior, particularly emotions and the limbic system.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDlDirzOSI8

Biology and Behavior

For decades, social workers have claimed the biopsychosocial realm of human behavior as a foundation for understanding clients' situations, but the social work perspective has generally emphasized psychosocial domains over biological influences. However, emerging scientific evidence increasingly reveals the extensive biological underpinnings of behavior, pressing social work professionals to understand more fully the reciprocal interaction of

biology and behavior. Occurring throughout the life span, biological effects on behavior can be positive or negative, subtle or dramatic, short- or long-term. The interdependence of **brain structure** and functioning offers a salient illustration of the biology/behavior interface. Another example involves the experience and expression of stress.

Brain Structure and Functioning

Through advancements in neurotechnology, scientific evidence now verifies what we have discerned intuitively: The human brain both influences and is influenced by environmental events. The brain orchestrates human behavior via such activities as thinking, feeling, communicating, remembering, and taking action. By knowing, for instance, the impact that trauma has on behavior, social workers can craft interventions that address its neurobiological underpinnings, including the fundamentals of brain structure and functioning, and the remarkable ability of the brain to change over the lifespan.

The brain is composed of three structures—the **prefrontal cortex**, the **mid-brain**, and the **brain stem**. Located at the front of the brain, the prefrontal cortex is responsible for the executive functions related to integrating social-emotional and cognitive responses. For example, regarding social-emotional behaviors, the prefrontal cortex is involved in regulating emotions, maintaining self-control, delaying gratification, assessing social interactions, and providing direction for socially acceptable behavior. Among the cognitive functions of the prefrontal cortex are attention, the ability to predict behavioral outcomes, abstract thinking, and problem-solving. Current research indicates that the prefrontal cortex continues to develop beyond adolescence through the mid-twenties (Arain et al., 2013; Baker et al., 2015; Baum et al., 2017; Black, 2017; Griffin, 2017; Kundu et al., 2018; Sousa et al., 2018). The development of emotional regulation and problem-solving skills is a long-term process that is affected by life events.

Situated between the prefrontal cortex and the brain stem, the midbrain includes components of the **limbic system**—the **hippocampus**, the **amygdala**, and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (**HPA**) **axis**. The hippocampus is directly involved in transferring immediate experiences into long-term memory and subsequently retrieving them for further reflection. Differences in hippocampal structure affect its function. For example, when individuals with a smaller hippocampus face trauma, they may have difficulty regulating their fear response and integrating their experiences into their storehouse of memories (Dahlitz, 2017). Long-term exposure to stress can also damage the abilities of the hippocampus to store and retrieve memories. For example, "a compromised hippocampus may not anchor emotional reactions to a traumatic event to a specific time and space and such reaction can reoccur inappropriately as is typical of PTSD" (p. 23).

Another component of the limbic system—the amygdala—connects closely with other parts of the brain (Dahlitz, 2017). It plays a central role in our experiences of arousal, anxiety, fear, and anger, drawing on **episodic memories** to assess a situation and orchestrate our responses. Under ordinary circumstances, the amygdala defers to the prefrontal cortex to regulate emotion and related behavior. However, in ambiguous circumstances or in those that provoke fear or surprise, the amygdala, without our conscious awareness, goes immediately into action to assess the situation. If the amygdala senses danger, it takes action to keep us safe by triggering the hypothalamic-pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis to launch a "fight, flight, or freeze" response. By preempting the prefrontal cortex, our responses in crisis situations may fall short of rational or adaptive. An overactive amygdala characterizes conditions, such as depression, anxiety disorders, phobias, and PTSD.