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MALCOLM PAYNE

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Modern Social Work Theory

Fifth edition

Malcolm Payne

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Preface to the fifth edition

The aims of this book and its social construction perspective

My aim in *Modern Social Work Theory*, since its first publication in 1990, has been to present and review theories that at the time inform the practice of social work. Our professional imagination and our clients' needs set an agenda for us in every piece of practice that we undertake. I want to show how theories can guide and enthuse us, enhancing that practice so that it achieves the outcomes that policy and law in our country set for us.

This edition is restructured. After the initial section, which contains a general review of debate about social work theory, I have responded to comments by dividing the chapters reviewing practice theories into the three parts that are set out in the global definition of social work published by the international organizations representing social workers' professional bodies and schools of social work (International Federation of Social Workers ([IFSW], 2014). The number of chapters has also increased to 18, from 14 in the 3rd and 4th editions. All the subjects of the new chapters were mentioned in the previous edition, and while I continue to recognize links between them, several practice theories needed more substantial treatment. The section on social justice is also substantially expanded, which I regard as a better representation of a renewal of social work's values.

In this fifth edition, I continue to try to make the text an easy read, while not compromising the complexity of the ideas contained in social work theory. I have continued to highlight case examples, diagrams and tables to help readers who find a visual presentation of ideas helpful. I am grateful to Emma Reith-Hall for providing two extended case studies in Chapters 2 and 6. These contributions help us understand the complex interaction between theory and practice in our agencies. I have also spread throughout the text opportunities for you to 'pause and reflect', applying your own thinking to crucial aspects of the argument.

One illustration of the pace of theory development in social work is that, although this edition is being published only seven years after the previous edition, more than half of my accounts of example texts, which show how social work writers have used theories to present comprehensive accounts of practice, are new. I have continued to include the bare bones of how each group of theories developed, with historical citations that I hope will continue to provide a bibliographical resource, but mostly I refer to current sources, with more than half the citations referred to being published in the twenty-first century. About a third of the citations are new, and about a quarter were published after the previous edition.

I have retained my social construction perspective because it makes clear that many different interests form our theory and practice. As accountable professionals, our theory and practice are produced in alliance with the experiences of our clients and their families and communities. They are also influenced by political and social ideas, our professional learning, skill and experience, and the partnership of our colleagues in other professions and services.

More than 30 years ago, when I was first writing *Modern Social Work Theory* in the late 1980s, we were coming to the end of what some (for example, Orme & Shemmings, 2010) have called the theory or paradigm 'wars'. Theories were opposed to one another; people argued that some were better than others and would supplant them, but it has not turned out to be so. Instead, reviewing theory as it is currently used, I increasingly find that there are shared ideas present in most practice theories. In Figure 1.7, I extract these principles, which I call the shared principles of social work practice. They are present in the way in which most theory is used in practice, and you will find them recurring as you read social work theory and practice texts. I have sometimes highlighted them as I discuss a theory later in the book, but if you bear them in mind you will find them leaping out at you elsewhere in the text.

This book is, therefore, an argument that, rather than being at war, social work theories are increasingly contributors to the rich range of enterprises that social work engages with. Therefore, each chapter begins by saying 'this is the special contribution to your practice that this group of theories makes'.

You could criticize my presentation of these shared principles as signs of agreement about practice theory: perhaps they assume too much of a consensus about social work. But no, I think there is still plenty of disagreement in social work even if we can see common ways of practising.

Another emerging development is what, in Chapter 2, I call direct use of writers' ideas from the social sciences and exploration of social science concepts, rather than interpreting these ideas and concepts through the creation of a practice theory. There may be a problem with this, because it often means that the focus is on theoretical ideas and writers, rather than on using them in a holistic practice. I also point to several writers who draw together ideas from different practice theories. Social work theory, therefore, is moving away both from theory wars and from dividing up practice theories because of their distinct theoretical sources.

Nevertheless, I identify the distinct features of practice theories to help you disentangle the main sources of your practice models from a mix of ideas. This allows you, working with your team and agency, to construct a practice that is a coherent form of practice. If you are clear about the sources and the development of the practice ideas that you use, you can be more accountable for your practice. Your accountability is to your clients and the people around them, to the public and in the media as well as to the managers and policy-makers who implement the political and social mandate for the social work profession.

The structure of the book and its chapters

The book is divided into four parts. Part 1 (Chapters 1–3) is different from the others. It summarizes general debates about social work theory and how to apply it. Parts 2, 3 and 4 (Chapters 4–18) review the main groups of social work theories, derived from my analysis of leading texts in Chapter 2. They are divided into three main categories of theory, organized according to the three main objectives of social work listed in the global definition of social work proposed by the international social work organizations.

The structure of each chapter in Part 2 starts with summaries of the main elements of the chapter:

- the theory's distinctive features that make up its *main contribution* to social work practice;
- the *main points* that help us to understand that contribution;
- important *practice ideas* and concepts that this group of theories has contributed to social work; these cover only ideas used in practice, and this section is not a glossary of theoretical terms;
- a *debate summary* of the main points of contention about this theory.

Each summary leads on to a more detailed account of the theory, considering:

- *debate about the theory*;
- *major statements* of this theory in current social work texts;
- *wider theoretical perspectives* that put the theory in context – where did it come from?;
- *connections* between this theory and other social work theories;
- *the politics* of the theory, showing how it is contested in social work debate;
- *values issues*: a brief comment on values issues raised by the theory.

Building on this account of the theory, I then provide an account of how it is put into action within social work, covering:

- *applications*: an overview of how the theory is applied in social work;
- *example text(s)* selected from book-length accounts of how this group of theories has been applied in a social work text. I account for the judgements that informed the selections in the 'major statement' section earlier in the chapter. Since the aim of the example texts is to show how the theory under review has been applied at length, I do not use edited collections as example texts, but I often include insights from edited books and articles as counterpoints to the main example text(s);
- *conclusion: using the theory* sums up the main points about how this group of theories is used in social work practice.

Each chapter ends with:

- *additional resources*, which include further reading and specialized journals, and suggestions of websites that provide good access to internet resources.

My accounts of each theory are only a starting point for a further exploration. That is why I suggest additional resources in each chapter. If you are committed to a particular theory or point of view, you might dispute my condensation of and selection from the materials I cover in this book. My aim is to give access to a range of ideas and encourage readers to progress from this introduction to the comprehensive accounts you can find in the books and articles to which I have referred. I find the social work literature full of stimulating ideas for practice and understanding. I am sure you will too.

I hope that new generations of practitioners and students will continue to find this review of social work practice theories useful in constructing their practice.

Malcolm Payne
Sutton, UK

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About the author

Malcolm Payne is Emeritus Professor, Manchester Metropolitan University; Honorary Professor in the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education at Kingston University/St George's University of London and Docent in social work at the University of Helsinki, Finland. From 2003 to 2012, he was Director of Psychosocial and Spiritual Care and Policy and Development Adviser, St Christopher's Hospice, London. He is the widely translated best-selling author and editor of many books and articles, including *What is professional social work*? and *The origins of social work: Continuity and change*, which are companions to his account of social construction approaches to understanding social work in this book. Other books on social work theory include: *How to use social work theory in practice: An essential guide* and *Humanistic social work: Core principles in practice*. His recent books on practice include: *Citizenship social work with older people, Older citizens and end-of-life care: Social work practice strategies for adults in later life* and (with Margaret Reith) *Social work in end-of-life and palliative care*. He and Emma Reith-Hall recently edited the extensive *Routledge handbook of social work theory* (2019). He is an active contributor to social media, including Facebook (Malcolmpayne47) and Twitter (@malcolmpayne).

A note on terminology

'Clients' and other words for the people we work with

There are problems with putting people into categories. Many social workers dislike giving the people they work with category names such as 'client', 'patient', 'resident' and 'user'. It sometimes leads to them being referred to as 'the clients' or 'the users' in a disrespectful way, and all these terms are unacceptable to some of the people to whom they are applied.

Different countries have varying preferences. Since this book has an international circulation, I have often used the term 'client' as being the most inclusive and generally understandable term for its wide range of readers. I use other terms where the circumstances are appropriate, for example 'patients' when referring to healthcare situations, 'residents' when referring to residential care and 'users' when referring to people who are receiving packages of services or to people with intellectual disabilities who receive services, among whom this term has the widest currency.

Social development issues

In literature about international issues, people argue over how to refer to the economic and social development of particular countries. Should we say that a country is developed, underdeveloped or developing, which hides an assumption that development is a desirable end result? The term 'Third World', referring to political allegiance, derives from the Cold War period (1960s–1990) and has appropriately fallen out of use. Should we say that a country is a Western country, meaning a country with an industrialized developed economy, whose culture originates from European and North American models? Some writers refer to the North (the northern hemisphere) and the South, implying that most countries in the North are economically developed and most in the South are not. Some countries in the Southern hemisphere, such as Australia, are 'Northern' and 'Western' in their social and economic development and culture.

Some countries, however, do not fit into any such category. Examples might be countries such as China, which are experiencing rapid economic and social change and development alongside substantial poverty and inequality, or Eastern European 'transition' economies, which are moving from being part of the Soviet sphere of influence to participation in European economic markets.

Bearing all this in mind, I have chosen in this book to refer to economically developed countries with a largely European or North American culture as Western countries. I refer to poorer nations with less industrially developed economies as 'resource-poor', a term that is current in the healthcare professions.

PART 1

THINKING ABOUT SOCIAL WORK THEORY

The three chapters in this part discuss general issues about social work theory. What is it? Can it be used in practice? How is it created? What kinds of social work theory exist? How can you evaluate it? Can practice and theory be linked?

CHAPTER 1

The social construction of social work theory

MAIN CONTRIBUTION

This chapter aims to help social work practitioners feel confident in using theory in their practice. It discusses different kinds of social work theory and the arguments around them. Then it explains how all of this may be useful in practice. It shows how social work theory, and practice theory within it, is socially constructed. This means that both practice and theory are not given to us from on high, but that we build them through our experience in the real world. Social construction ideas also show that practice and theory are not separate, settled bodies of knowledge, but constantly evolve and influence each other. Change in social work, and in the lives of practitioners and clients, is possible if we engage in this process of evolution of ideas and practice.

MAIN POINTS

- The main aim of the book is to review social work practice theories.
- Theories are generalized sets of ideas that describe and explain our knowledge of the world in an organized way.
- Theory is different from both knowledge and practice.
- Social work theory comprises formal and informal theories of what social work is, how to do social work and the social world in which our clients live.
- Theory helps us understand and contest ideas about social work and the world around us. It offers a framework for practice and helps us to be accountable, self-disciplined professionals.
- All social activities generate practice theory, which in social work may be perspectives, frameworks, models and explanatory theories. They often complement each other.
- Social construction ideas emphasize that change for social institutions and individuals is always possible, although it may be slow. Social experience often reinforces stability rather than change.
- The social construction of social work theory forms a politics. This means that groups within the profession contend to gain influence over practice by getting support for particular theories.

- Three views of social work objectives (social cohesion, empowerment and social change and development) are derived from the aims of social work and from political philosophies. They form the context in which practice theories are socially constructed.
- Five shared principles affect our use of all practice theories: alliance, aim, action sequence, critical practice and rights.
- Social work is socially constructed in three main arenas of debate and practice. These are the relationships between clients, workers and social agencies.
- Clients make an important contribution to the construction of social work through their reflexive interaction with practitioners in social work agencies. I explain reflexivity in Chapter 3.

Knowledge, theory and practice

All over the world, at this moment, people are struggling into an office to see a social worker. Or perhaps they are meeting a social worker in their home or working with a social worker in a building such as a residential care home or a day centre. Or again, the social worker may be meeting them as part of a group and community activity, or in seeking policy change.

How can people using the social worker's services understand what is happening? How can the social worker decide what to do and explain it to them? You may have found that many statements about social work are generalized or idealistic and give you no clue about what is supposed to happen when social work takes place. Yet social workers must learn what to do and how to carry out what their agency and their profession expects of them.

The main aim of this book is to review the practice theories that social workers use to inform their practice. This chapter aims to help you understand what theory is in general, what theories influence social work and, within that, what social work practice theories are. It also helps you to think through some of the debates about using theory in practice. In this first section, I look at ideas about the various kinds of knowledge and theory available in social work. This helps us to understand that knowledge and theory are connected, but different.

What kinds of knowledge are useful in practice?

We start by looking at the kinds of knowledge that may inform what people do. Jacobs (2009) summarizes various philosophical accounts of knowledge in practice as follows:

- 'Knowing how' to do something is different from 'knowing that' something is true or 'knowing about' some aspect of the world.
- Technique is knowledge that is formulated in an organized way and is usually written down. Technique helps us to do something, but it is different from practical knowledge; that is, the unformulated knowledge of how to do something.
- Tacit knowledge is also unformulated and is different from express knowledge; that is, formulated knowledge of facts, procedures and values.
- Knowledge about the world used in academic study of the natural or social world is worked out by rational deductions from confirmed observations. This is different from

knowledge in practical fields such as social work. In practical fields where knowledge is used to do something, practitioners use theories to help them understand how knowledge can support their decision-making. Their aim is not just to know more, but also to use what they know. In practical fields of work, therefore, theory is about supporting reasonable judgements with thought-through arguments based on knowledge.

The implication of these distinctions is that you can know a lot about facts, procedures and values, and possess techniques for doing things, but knowledge about *how* to act may not be so easily formulated. You can sometimes see this in professional guidance or agency procedures, which often leave it to you to decide how to apply their instructions in relationships with your clients. Social workers use skills and theory learned in their education and by personal experience to do this. Polanyi (cited by Jacobs, 2009) suggests that there are important facets of the professional use of knowledge in practice. The first is about priorities. A professional learns which issues to focus on in each situation, and which are subsidiary and don't need to be dealt with in detail. Second, professionals use personal knowledge that comes from their interpretation, intuition and similar skills; for example, how well someone cares for the fabric of their house. In addition, they use impersonal knowledge, such as the number of rooms in a house, which we can learn in a mechanical way. Toulmin (cited by Jacobs, 2009) adds that knowledge in practical fields often involves clinical skills, which mean making timely decisions based on skills acquired through practice and honed and refined by repeated experience. This leads to a kind of practical wisdom. We develop this by a constant use of everyday practices, using local knowledge that allows for constant minor readjustments of formal rules by feel. The sociologist Garfinkel (1967; Roberts, 2006: 90) took this idea further, and showed that we all develop 'practical theories' about the world by building up with people around us a shared wisdom and a sense of what is reasonable and intelligible.

These points lead us to consider what theory is, what that special kind of theory that we call 'practice theory' is and how it may help professionals to use knowledge in their work.

What is theory?

One way to answer this question is to start from general ideas about theory. Sheldon and Macdonald (2009: 34) look at a dictionary definition of it, and suggest that there are both scientific and everyday uses of the word. To a scientist, a theory is a general principle or body of knowledge, reached through accepted scientific processes, that explains a phenomenon. The everyday use of the word 'theory' refers to abstract thoughts or speculations. In everyday talk, therefore, people may think that theory is disconnected from practical realities. Many social work writers (for example, Howe, 2009; Sheldon & Macdonald, 2009; Thompson, 2017) focus on explanation and structure: a theory should explain some aspect of the world in an organized form. Others accept less exacting understandings of theory. For example, Fook (2016: 50) argues that there are many different meanings of theory, and that the important thing is to be inclusive so that we do not cut ourselves off from useful ideas.

When a mass of knowledge about a situation has been built up, one of the uses of theory is to help you rise above what you can immediately observe to find patterns that are not obvious in the tangle of everyday life. Howe (2009: 1) offers an analogy. He describes how the first people to fly in balloons saw the landscape in a new way. He is suggesting that patterns and

order already exist, and that by looking more broadly than just at the situations you are faced with, you can identify aspects of them that are present but hidden from you. By providing you with organized descriptions of the world, a practice theory offers ideas about where to look.

Bringing these points together, I define a theory as a generalized set of ideas that describes and explains our knowledge of the world around us in an organized way. A social work theory is one that helps us to understand and to do social work. A social work practice theory describes and explains what actions to take when doing social work.

Knowledge and theory

To sum up these points, I argue that knowledge and theory are different but connected. In professional activities such as social work we use both, but we need a special kind of theory to practice. So:

- Theory is different from knowledge – theory involves thinking about something, while knowledge is a description of reality. Reality is a picture of the world that is accepted as true.
- Theory is different from practice – theory is thinking about something, while practice involves doing something.
- Practice needs theory to use knowledge – if we are going to do something, we need knowledge about the reality around us so that we can act upon it, but we need theory to help us interpret that reality.

Knowledge, practice and theory are connected, therefore, for two main reasons. First, the real world exists independently of theories and ideas about it, but evidence about that real world has to be obtained in ways that are accepted as valid through the accepted scientific processes that I mentioned earlier. If a theory is to explain the world, it must explain our knowledge of the world. The real is more than just being apparent; understanding a reality involves ensuring that the apparent is true, using some agreed process to check that what appears to be true actually is true. Second, social work is an activity, something that we do, so theories about it must be explanations of the real world that connect with how we act as practising social workers.

Practice theory

Sociological research tells us that having theories about practice is not restricted to social work; it is universal. Practice theory is a kind of social theory that describes how a social group conceives of and organizes important aspects of its work (Nicolini, 2012). Practice theories create social structures that provide stability in the actions that a social group undertakes. They describe who acts in social situations, what they want to accomplish, the outcomes of the actions and what relationships those actions create. Also relevant is the interests of the people who participate, who manages and controls the actions and who exercises power within the relationships. A practice theory allows people to examine what knowledges are used in the actions and relationships, what understandings and discourses are relevant to the people involved in the practice and the sense they make of the process. So, as we have already seen in relation to social work, practice theory tells everyone about the connections between ideas and practice (Hui, Schatzki & Shove, 2017).

Applying these general sociological concepts to social work, we can see that practice theories are created, owned and operated by social work practitioners to organize and provide structure in doing their work. Social workers are practitioners in the social group that is using practice theory to conceive and structure what they do. But they are not the only people relevant: their clients and the people and communities that surround them, their managers and the organizations within which they do their work and the policy-makers and political processes that create the social mandate to do their work are included in how they structure their work. Thinking about practice theory calls us to examine the knowledge that we use to pursue a specific piece of practice, and also the knowledge that we do not use, together with how practitioners, clients and managers debate and make sense of the practice. Looking at practice enables us to examine the human beings involved, their bodies, their minds, their spirituality, their social relations and how every aspect of those human beings affects the practice that we undertake. The following case example applies this understanding of practice theory to social work.

Case example: An assessment raises the question of what practice theory to use

Aiko was a new social worker for a mental health agency. She was asked to assess Colin, a man living alone, who was recently discharged from psychiatric care and was attending her agency's day centre. The community psychiatric nurse who was caring for Colin after discharge told Aiko that he planned to visit regularly to check on Colin's medication and make sure he was eating properly and looking after himself. The nurse knew nothing about any of Colin's friends or relatives. Colin told Aiko that he attended church regularly and had a 'pastoral link' who spoke to him each week at church and visited occasionally, and that he had a sister living nearby with a family, but there was very little active connection, although the sister thought he should do some volunteering with the aim of getting into work, and Colin liked this idea. The day centre operated on a recovery model of practice (see Chapter 13). One of the volunteers befriended Colin and encouraged him to make plans for taking up some activities that he enjoyed there, which might have been inconsistent with the employment idea. Aiko discussed this with her team leader. One option was to build a relationship with Colin and to do some counselling to help him decide on his future direction; this would complement the nurse's work. Alternatively, Aiko could build links with family and community supporters: this would add to what the day centre was doing. Or again, she could work with the day centre and its volunteer, coordinating their action. Or she could develop a combination of these approaches. There were lots of possibilities, and each had a practice theory to guide Aiko, and to help her to decide from her assessment what would be best for engaging Colin and what direction would be successful for him. Practice theories make it clear what she would need to know to use each of these approaches, and would help her to find out things to enable her to choose one option over the others.

Types of social work theory

Practice theory is, therefore, one of the different types of theory that are used in social work. In Figure 1.1, I have collected several points that enlarge on Sibeon's (1990) distinction between formal and informal theory. Formal theory is written down and debated in the profession and in academic work. Informal theory consists of wider ideas that exist in society or

Types of theory	'Formal' theory	'Informal' theory
Theories of *what social work is*	Formal written accounts defining the nature and purposes of welfare (e.g. personal pathology, liberal reform, Marxist, feminist)	Moral, political and cultural values drawn upon by practitioners for defining the 'functions' of social work
Theories of *how to do social work*	Formal written theories of practice (e.g. casework, family therapy, groupwork); applied deductively; general ideas may be applied to particular situations	Theories inductively derived from particular situations; can be tested to see if they apply to particular situations; also unwritten practice theories constructed from experience
Theories of *the client world*	Formal written social science theories; empirical data (e.g. on personality, marriage, the family, race, class, gender)	Practitioners' use of experience and general cultural meanings (e.g. the family as an institution, 'normal' behaviour, good parenting)

Figure 1.1 Types of theory
Sources: Sibeon (1990), Gilgun (1994) and Fook (2016).

that practitioners derive from experience. Sibeon (1990: 34) distinguishes between three different types of theory:

- Theories of *what social work is* are part of a discourse about the meaning of social work. Discourses are conversations between people, which you can see or hear in debates in articles and at conferences, but they are also reflected in the different ways people do social work. You can, therefore, take part in a discourse because of the way you do something, and not only in talk and writing. I consider theories about the meaning of social work briefly later in this chapter and more fully in Payne (2006). They offer different views of social work that, when you put them together, give you a fuller picture of what it is and what its aims are. I take up the issue of what social work is later in this chapter when, in the Section 'The social construction of social work', I examine how the discourses about social work and its practice create how we understand social work and its aims. This is important because the nature and aims of social work obviously have a bearing on how we do it.
- Theories of *how to do social work* are the practice theories that this book explores. They build on theories of what social work is by saying: 'If social work is like this and these are its aims, here are some ideas about how to do that and achieve the aims.'
- Theories of *the social world* are about the social realities that social workers deal with. Sibeon originally called it the 'client world' to emphasize that he is talking about the world that clients experience. I have expanded his word to point to the way social work explicitly uses ideas about the nature and structure of the societies we live in.

Theories of the social world are contested in the field where they came from. For example, ideas in child development, or the sociology of families and organizations, or the nature of power are vigorously debated. It is useful to know about them as we deal within social work agencies with children in their families. Using this material in social work, however, means that we must transfer it from its original discipline into social work practice. In doing this, we

must remember that it is not final knowledge; there will still be continuing disagreement over it and research into it. Moreover, social work uses these ideas in a different way from, say, doctors or teachers. The practice theories that I discuss in this book connect knowledge from different disciplines to social work practice. They say: 'To practise in the way this theory proposes, you need these kinds of knowledge from other fields of study.' In this way, practice theories help us practise by organizing how we transfer knowledge into social work.

As you look at Figure 1.1, you may need an explanation of some of the words. *Induction* means making a general point from particular examples. It refers to bottom-up theorizing in which you start from a series of similar experiences and devise a theory that explains them. *Deduction*, on the other hand, means arriving at conclusions about a particular instance from a general theory; that is, top-down theorizing. Here, you look at a theory that someone has formulated and work out how a case you are working on fits into it. A case example may help to understand this distinction.

Case example: Using induction and deduction when working with dying people

This example considers people's emotional reactions to dying. Perhaps you have worked with several dying people who at first got angry, and then became depressed, and then accepting about their approaching death. By a process of induction, you might create an informal model of the progression of emotional reactions to impending death using your experience. Imagine that you then meet a dying person who is depressed. As a deduction from your model, you might work on the assumption that they will shortly become accepting. In this way, induction allows you to take ideas from a case or a small number of cases and use them to create a general theory. Induction enables practitioners to transfer ideas observed from practice experiences into more general theories. We do this all the time to make sense of what is happening in our cases, often collaboratively as we talk things over with team members. It also allows us to contribute to theory from our own practice. We can feed patterns that we observe into writing about social work or into discussion about practice in our agency.

Deduction, on the other hand, allows you to use general theories in practice. For example, in this same area of work, Kübler-Ross (1969) came up with a theory in an interview study of dying people that they went through five stages. First, they went through a stage of disbelieving their diagnosis; she called this the shock and denial stage. Second, they went through an anger stage – resentment that this was happening to them. Next, they went into bargaining behaviour; for example: 'If I eat more healthily, I'll be able to fight this illness and recover.' The fourth stage was depression; and finally they became accepting of their fate. If you knew about Kübler-Ross's work, you would not need to use induction to create your own theory. Instead, from day one in your job, if you came across a dying person who was angry, you would expect bargaining behaviour next. Knowing about her theory, therefore, allows you to hit the ground running in your work, rather than having to work without any guidelines until you have built up experience from lots of different situations.

The problem with both deduction and induction is that they can lead you astray. Suppose, for instance, you did not see enough examples. You might assume that something was a pattern, but if you looked at more examples you would find that there were many exceptions to your initial assumption. The answer to this problem is to treat all your inductive theories

cautiously, testing them out with new experience. In this way, you build up better evidence to support your work.

Deduction may also be unreliable, because you might also be led astray by the research that led to the theories from which you are making deductions. Indeed, Kübler-Ross's theory has been refined to suggest that these reactions are quite common, but people do not go through all the stages in order. If a client misses one out, practitioners do not have to worry that they are not adjusting properly to their situation. Because we build up evidence all the time as we practise, when we find aspects of a theory that are not true, we may need to adjust our deductions and contribute that experience to the literature to refine the theory. All professions build up knowledge to support their work in this kind of way. In addition, they need to keep an eye on new research that tells them when a theory has been modified. Whether working inductively or deductively, therefore, practitioners have to keep on learning and checking the evidence.

Induction and deduction therefore go together and interact with each other: practitioners deduce how to practise from general theories and induce ideas from experience to contribute to the theory.

Why use theory in social work practice?

We have seen that knowledge, practice and theory are connected ideas, and social work has various types of theory including practice theory. But social workers have gone on to ask why abstract ideas should connect with what a social worker does in real life. Some feel uncomfortable about using theory in practice. This might be because social workers see themselves as practical people, doing rather than theorizing. Or maybe they have found theory difficult to digest or to connect with practice.

So why do practitioners use theory in social work? Figure 1.2 lists some of the advantages of doing so that have been identified by social work writers. These points are not exhaustive, some of them overlap and not everyone accepts all of them. However, simply listing the potential advantages of using theory in social work practice shows that people make a big claim for the value of theory in practice.

PAUSE AND REFLECT *Summarizing the claims for theory*

Look through the list in Figure 1.2. Why might it be important to get help with these areas of practice by looking at theory?

Some suggestions: the four main uses of theory

The list in Figure 1.2 contains several different ideas about the usefulness of theory in practice, but these may be summarized and grouped into four main points as follows:

- Theory helps us *understand and contest* ideas. This is important because theory can be *revelatory*: it reveals and makes clear things that might not be obvious.

- Theory offers *explanation and understanding*. This is important because it *orders* complexity. Social workers deal with complex human behaviour and social phenomena and need to think about what to focus on when they take action.
- Theory offers a *practice framework*. This is important because it organizes ideas and research that offer *guidance* about what to do in these complicated situations.
- Theory helps us to be *accountable*, *self-disciplined* professionals. This is important because clients, colleagues and agencies are entitled to expect that practitioners can justify and explain what they are doing and why.

Reason	Theory helps you to	Four uses of theory
Accountability	... be accountable to agencies, clients and colleagues	Professional
Boundaries	... locate the limits of permitted and required practice	Professional
Causation	... understand causation	Explanation
Control	... control situations you are involved with	Practice framework
Critical	... be critical of and contest assumptions and ideas	Ideas
Cultural understanding	... understand how general cultural differences affect us	Explanation
Cumulation	... build experience from one situation to another	Explanation
Discourses	... identify debates about meaning in our lives	Ideas
Effectiveness	... decide what is most likely to be effective	Practice framework
Explanation	... explain human development and social phenomena	Explanation
Focus	... identify relevant and irrelevant factors	Practice framework
Framework	... organize practice consistently	Practice framework
Guide	... guide actions	Practice framework
Identification	... identify concepts and theoretical traditions	Ideas
Ideologies	... understand the impact of organized systems of thought	Ideas
Intervention	... identify potential interventions	Practice framework
Knowledge base	... use knowledge to inform your actions	Explanation
Mobilization	... get support for potential objectives	Professional
Neutrality	... avoid bias in making decisions	Ideas
Outcomes	... select intervention outcomes	Practice framework
Prediction	... predict outcomes	Practice framework
Professional	... behave professionally rather than as an amateur	Professional
Self-discipline	... avoid irrational responses	Professional
Simplification	... simplify complex phenomena	Explanation
Understanding	... understand behaviour and social	Explanation
Value positions	... avoid taking dogmatic value positions	Ideas

Figure 1.2 Why use theory?

Sources: Healy (2014), Fraser and Matthews (2008), Greene (2008: 4–8), Gray and Webb (2009), Walsh (2010), and Hardiker and Barker (2015 [1991]).

Like many writers, Munford and O'Donoghue (2019) assert that we need practice theory because social work is contextual, responding to the needs of each local place. Social work must therefore respond to diverse social settings and the enduring issues faced there, and also to new social challenges, such as the digital world, disaster work and environmental change. Social work theory increasingly links individual and macro perspectives and incorporates an ethical dimension. To them, therefore, social work requires specific applications of theoretical ideas. D'Cruz (2009) argues that social work is not interested in knowledge or theory that has no practical use.

The alternative view is that ideas raise new possibilities and stimulate new action, but don't need interpreting into practice theories. Social work can pick up general social science theory directly to think about the nature of social work and how to practise it, rather than relying on practice theory specifically created in the social work field. Examples are books by Hodgson and Watts (2017) and Parrott with MacGuiness (2017), which apply concepts to social work from a range of humanities, philosophy and the social sciences. They cover issues such as difference, dignity, disadvantage, empathy, globalization, human rights, power, poverty, reflexivity, respect, risk, social justice, spirituality and stigma. Garrett (2018a) and Gray and Webb (2013a) also want to make connections between general social science ideas and practice. Both summarize the social work interest in the ideas of social thinkers such as Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Nancy Fraser, Antonio Gramsci, Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth.

I discuss some of these ideas and writers later in the book as their ideas come up. But we have seen that all people undertaking all activities such as social work have practice theories that organize their thinking about their actions. So I argue that it is most useful for social workers to start from the practice theory and see how theoretical ideas and theoreticians have influenced that practice, rather than starting from interesting theory and having to make a jump towards practice. In the next main section, therefore, I move on to identify different kinds of social work practice theory, and discuss how we can use it.

Social work practice theory

Types of practice theory

Practice theory in social work offers four different approaches to thinking about how to practise, which I illustrate in Figure 1.3. Opinion differs about whether all these approaches are equally useful, and after introducing them I will discuss some of the debates.

Perspectives allow practitioners to make decisions according to general guiding principles. Lying behind a preference for using perspectives is a philosophy that human beings are immensely diverse and that precise rules about how to act do not allow you to respect that diversity. Instead, you deduce from your perspective how to act in the situation that you are facing. Preferring to use perspectives also has the advantage of integrity: your perspective and your actions fit your personal value systems. *Frameworks* are more concrete and less value-based than perspectives, although there are usually some implied values that can be teased out from how they work. They can help us by setting out the range of situations that we typically have to deal with, and by identifying the range of methods available for us to select from, perhaps giving us

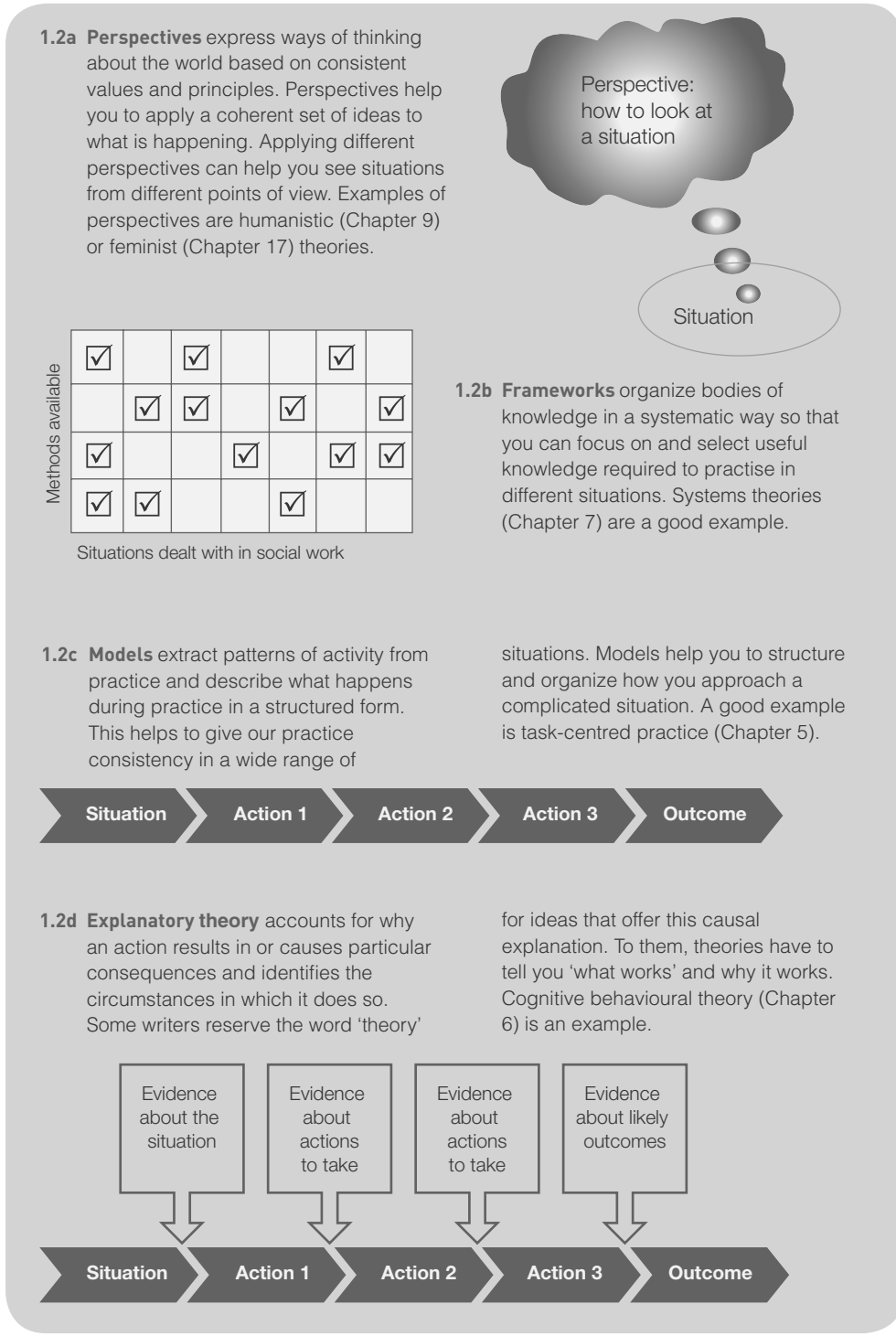

Figure 1.3 Approaches to practice. (**a**) Perspective. (**b**) Framework. (**c**) Model. (**d**) Explanatory theory

some basis for making our selection. *Models* are frameworks that set out a clear sequence of actions to take in the situation we are facing. *Explanatory theories* are models that are based on well-researched explanations of human and social behaviour. Here, the sequence of actions that you take is informed by knowledge about the reasons why this situation occurs and is backed up by evidence about the right actions to take to achieve the required outcome.

Thinking about the debates about these approaches, people prefer frameworks, models and particularly explanatory theories because they think it is wrong for their own personal values and preferences to intrude into decisions about professional actions. They think it is more ethical to concentrate on evidence that tells you what will be most effective in dealing with people and the problems they are facing. In that way, you may have a better chance of achieving what your agency or client wants. Such approaches see social work as a technical matter of applying knowledge in a neutral way. People who use perspectives say that since social work is a human, interpersonal process, using ideas to think through what is right for the human beings involved is more likely to be effective than using a non-human technical process.

One answer to these uncertainties is that, to some degree, these different types of theory may be used together. For example, you might use a framework or perspective to select models or explanatory theories from the options available, depending on the situation you have encountered. In the other direction, you might prefer to use an explanatory theory, but find, perhaps because there is no relevant evidence, that it does not fit the situation you are working with, so you use an appropriate perspective to guide you through this unknown or complex picture.

Using practice theory

How do we use practice theory? In the next Pause and Reflect question, I look at the different kinds of knowledge that are useful in a case example, and argue that practice theories allow practitioners to bring all these resources together in taking action.

PAUSE AND REFLECT: *A case example*

Using practice theory in working with a bereaved son

At the hospice where I worked, Graham came to see me about his mother. She had died unexpectedly while he was abroad with his father, who was divorced from his mother; she had since remarried. He spoke calmly, but said he was upset that this had happened while he had been away. I asked how I could help him. He had two main requests: he wanted help in finding out what had happened and he wanted to know what he should do. What would you do?

Some suggestions: theory is a useful framework

As you can see, my starting point was to ask an open-ended question, letting Graham take the lead and expressing my willingness to try to help with whatever he needed. In this situation, it is usual to appear sympathetic and express how sorry you are for the bereaved person's loss, but this does not come naturally to everyone. This is because many people fear they may not be able to handle strong emotion, if it is expressed, but working in a hospice this is everyday

for me. I'm cautious about saying 'I'm sorry for your loss', however, because some people may not see a particular death as a loss, and his opening statements did not clarify how he felt, so I did not make assumptions. For example, Graham might have had mixed feelings, having seen his mother's death as a relief from a long illness, or been pleased because he saw her as critical or demanding. Looking at this, some skills training in the right way to begin interviews, and experience and confidence that you can respond appropriately to whatever situation arises would be a good basis for starting social work. These skills are based on psychological and sociological communication theory, but they are also practical human behaviour that many people will have acquired through social experience. No absolute need for a practice theory here, then, although it might help you to organize your thinking about the social work approach to engaging with people (Payne, 2020b).

Graham's requests presented a legal and administrative problem. Information about his mother's medical care was private, so I had to get his stepfather's permission to allow him access. I then arranged for him to meet a nurse who had cared for his mother so that he could hear person-to-person the story of her last few hours. Doing this required legal knowledge about his rights to have access to confidential information, and administrative knowledge and organizational skills to know whom to contact and how to set up a meeting.

Finally, I needed to ask myself what he should do next. We talked over his memories of his mother, and he completed a salt sculpture of his mother, a commonly used technique for making a physical memorial to someone (see Reith and Payne, 2009: 151 for a description of what to do). In another session, we discussed how he could help his stepfather with some practical tasks, including sorting out his mother's finances and property and keeping some items of hers that were important to him. After this, we talked about his feelings about losing his mother, and I gave him the telephone number of our bereavement service, also asking him whether we could call him every so often to offer further help. I needed a sound knowledge of practical technique and of theory about bereavement and loss here. It was clear that it would be some time before Graham wanted to tackle his feelings about his mother, and that the repeated offer of a service would empower him to seek help if he needed it. Most people, however, manage bereavement without professional help.

This case example illustrates some of the reasons why people often feel that using social work theory is not relevant to them, since:

- practitioners can rely on skills learned in ordinary human interaction (e.g. being warm and welcoming);
- practice relies on learned communication and interview skills (e.g. open-ended questions);
- practice is often guided by legal and administrative requirements (e.g. access to records and arrangements for referral to other professionals);
- practice is often informed by practical techniques built up in agencies and learned by their staff (e.g. the salt sculpture);
- practice is informed by theory about problems (e.g. bereavement and loss) rather than social work theory.

So why would we need a social work practice theory? Let's stand back and look at the whole process with this client. There is a framework that guided the events that took place, and this consisted of several elements:

- The agency (the hospice) had decided to employ social workers and defined their roles and responsibilities, which came from some generalized view of what social workers might offer as part of a hospice service.
- In using my skills, I addressed issues that reflected the client's wishes as well as my own view about what it was important for me to deal with. That view came partly from the agency mandate (what social workers are expected to do in the hospice) and also from broader policy and social expectations (the expectations of social policy and the general public about what social workers do and what an agency like a hospice should do when bereaved people present themselves).
- My focus was on a combination of the client's personal emotional responses, practical tasks and social relationships. Combining work on different issues is characteristic of social work.
- I drew together a range of knowledge about psychological reactions and social relationships in bereavement and loss, legal, administrative and practical issues and interpersonal skills, which is again characteristic of social work.

The framework of a social worker's practice in this instance is underpinned by knowledge and ideas about what social workers representing their profession, as opposed to, for example, doctors, should do for the best when faced with a situation like this. My medical colleagues, when asked to see someone like this, would check for physical and psychiatric symptoms and pass the client straight on to a social worker. Our agency and society in general say that someone with combined emotional, practical and relationship concerns coming from an event in their lives needs a social worker.

And this was not a big part of my week. I often dealt with three or four such situations each day, all with different concerns. Therefore, questions such as 'what is my responsibility?', 'what skills do I need to act?', 'what should I focus on?' and 'what knowledge do I need?' come up repeatedly. Practice theory means that practitioners do not need to rethink social work every time they see a client: a set of ideas about social work describe and explain in an organized way the events in the world around them and provide general guidance on how to react. Practitioners may then adapt them to different scenarios.

As you look at the theories discussed in this book, you might identify some of the sources for my approach with Graham. For example, ideas about attachment (Chapter 4) inform bereavement practice, and crisis intervention theory (Chapter 5) suggests an initial focus on feelings. Although both of these theories influence theory about bereavement, bereavement theories do not in general tell you how to approach and work with people in a social work agency and then bring to the surface and respond to the issues that bereavement theory tells us are important.

Figure 1.4 shows my analysis of the role of social work theory as a framework for deciding on and planning intervention in a social work agency. Practitioners gain information about clients and their feelings and attitudes, and about the social situations that clients experience. The practice theory framework enables practitioners to create interventions that bring the specific information about this client in this situation together with generalized social work

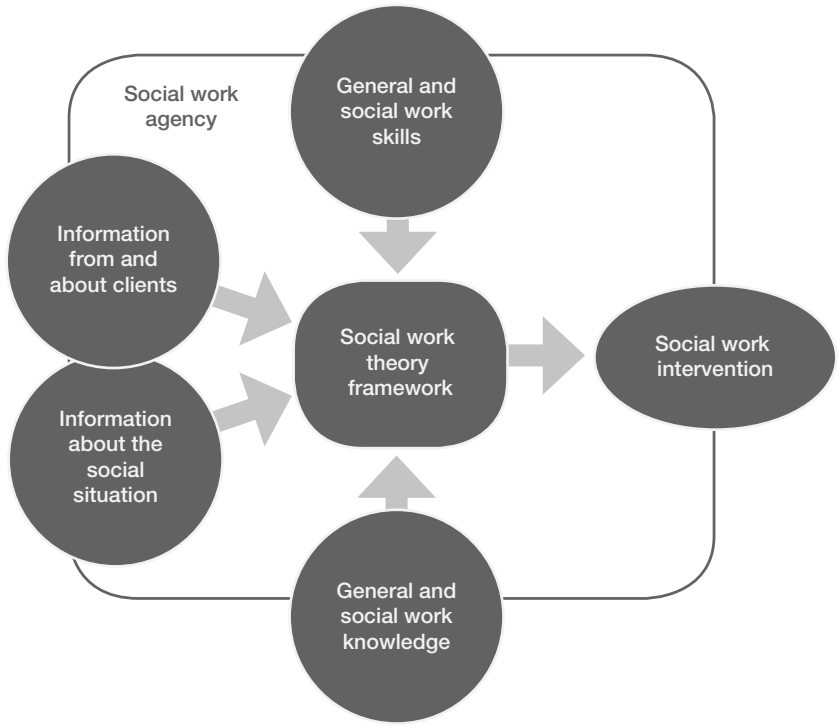

Figure 1.4 The role of social work theory

skills and knowledge. You can see from the social work agency boundary here that although all this is brought together in the agency, some knowledge and skills come from outside it, and the intervention itself also has effects outside the agency.

The knowledge and skills from outside the agency emerge from expectations taken up from the society that has created this agency and given it a mandate to operate. A society is the whole pattern of relationships between people, which form into social institutions that provide an organized and understood structure for people to manage the relationships between themselves.

Social work and social work agencies are examples of those patterns of relationships and the institutions in which they take shape. People form or construct social work and its agencies, therefore, by their demands and expectations, and social workers and their agencies are influenced to change by their experiences with the people they serve. In addition, practitioners, clients and agencies contribute to some extent to society's expectations and its political and social processes by their own thinking and doing. That is a process of social construction in which people who do things together and as part of the same social organizations come to share common views of the world that they see as a social reality. In this way, it is a circular process, with each element – agency, client, social worker – influencing the others, and all this occurring in the context of the social expectations that come from their wider social relations and the practical realities they face. I will explain more about social construction as a way of thinking about practice in Chapter 8.

In the following case example, Angus had first gone to the people he saw regularly – healthcare workers. They defined his problem as a housing issue, but when he went to the housing department, they saw it as a financial problem and sent him to the social worker. The social worker gave advice about social security and charitable grants, but also picked up the emotional elements of end-of-life care. Each stage of this pathway to the social worker had defined the problem differently, constructing for Angus a picture of the role of the next official he saw. He came to the social worker seeing her as a problem-solver, mainly with financial difficulties, and she expanded the role, building on these initial expectations. Later, her identification of an end-of-life care situation and subsequent discussion with the healthcare workers might have reconstructed their assumptions about what else social workers can do. Doing this as you go along helps to change other professions' views of what social workers can do, and in the long run doing this consistently enables social workers to begin to change society's views of them.

Case example: A client's pathway to the service is part of a shared construction of social work practice

Angus, a man in his 70s, was sent by a housing welfare officer from the local government housing office to a social services agency. He had arrears in payments for gas and electricity for his home. His wife had been ill and he had been using the heating more, but the house was also damp, and the housing welfare officer advised him that he needed better heating to prevent mould growing on the apartment walls. Angus's doctor and the district nurse who helped his wife had also advised him that he needed to make sure the house was suitable for caring for his wife. The social worker advised him about his social security entitlements, and also talked through the management of his income and the costs of his wife's illness. She agreed to apply for a charitable grant to help him. Visiting to complete the application form, she also discussed the pressures on him as a carer for his increasingly sick wife, and his fears that she was coming towards the end of her life.

To summarize what I have covered so far, I have argued that perspective, framework, model and explanatory theory can be used together. Going further, I have argued that for a social work practice theory to be useful, you need all these elements. Because social work is practical action, practice theory must include a model of explicit guidance. Yet action is not entirely pragmatic, because social work acts must be based on evidence about what is valid and effective, so any models should be backed up by explanatory theory and we need to evaluate the different kinds of knowledge that support it. Model and explanatory theory can only gain consistency over a wide range of social work and offer general usefulness if they offer a perspective that allows us to transfer ideas between one situation and another and be consistent in our work.

The social construction of social work

This section picks up again on theories of what social work is (see Figure 1.1) and shows how social work is socially constructed by our practice, the people and organizations involved with us and the theories that inform our practice. The process is set out in Figure 1.5. In the

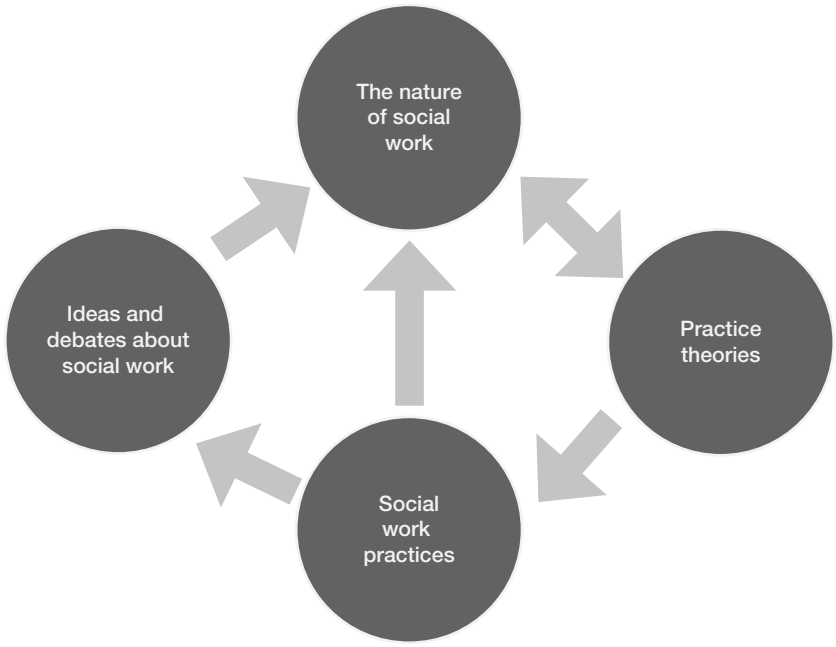

Figure 1.5 The social construction of social work

previous section, I argued that how we see the nature and aims of social work affects how we choose and use practice theories, whether they are formal written or informal unformulated theories. If we practise according to these theories, they will influence what we do. What we do then becomes a contribution to ideas and theories about social work, either through professional or social debate or more directly because people see and experience what we do, and this influences their understanding of social work. Practice theories are also part of the debate about what social work is because they give you an idea about what social workers are supposed to be doing, so there is a two-way interchange between practice theories and the nature of social work.

Social construction

Exploring ideas about social construction helps to explain how this works. The idea of *social construction* comes from the work of the sociologists Berger and Luckmann (1971). They say that, in social affairs (they are not talking about the natural world), people having a shared view about how things work helps us to live life. What we call 'reality' is social knowledge that has been agreed between people. For example, I always drink beer from a glass because my mother taught me that this was polite and that the tops of bottles often had broken glass that might cut my mouth. We all have slightly different views of that social reality, however, because we see and interpret what happens around us in slightly different ways, and this varies according to our life experience. Continuing the example, when I go into a bar with my son, he is always given the bottle, while the bartender looks at my greying hair and offers me a

glass. This is evidence that a social change has taken place that the bartender and I share awareness of: people often drink from the bottle nowadays, but older people like me have the habit of using a glass ingrained in us from longer ago. We arrive at agreed views of social reality and the circumstances affecting what people think is appropriate behaviour by sharing our knowledge with other people through various social processes that organize it and make it objective. How to go about shopping might be something we learn by example from our parents, while we might learn how a church service goes and how to behave there by watching other people at the service who seem to know what they are doing.

Social activity becomes habitual, so our assumptions about how things should be come to be accepted as true. In addition, we behave according to social conventions based on that shared knowledge of what we have accepted as true. So these conventions become institutionalized; that is, we turn them into rules of behaviour because most people agree about the accepted way of understanding that aspect of society. These understandings also become legitimized, accepted as morally right and appropriate, by a process that attaches 'meanings', integrating these ideas about reality into an organized and plausible system. Social understanding is, in this way, the product of many shared human understandings.

Case example: Accepting social distancing in the Covid-19 crisis

During 2020, a global pandemic caused a widespread illness (Covid-19) because a new type of virus affected most countries in the world. In most places, governments reacted by closing inessential activities and shops and asking people to avoid infecting others by staying at home This was called social distancing. Different governments introduced slightly different rules, and while most people complied because of public explanations about how infection worked, some people did not. In the UK, for example, when the weather was good, people living in small apartments went out to use the parks and beaches, and younger people more used to an active social life in bars and clubs than people in older age groups carried on socializing. This led the government to publicize and enforce very specific rules of behaviour. Some groups of people who thought that it was wrong for governments to impose behavioural rules on their populations in this way resisted it. We can see here how, faced with a new situation, people have no agreed guidelines for behaviour and explicit regulation must be developed.

The social understandings of the humans involved are also objective because the knowledge of reality is widely shared. Since everyone grows up within those social understandings to accept that they are a reality, people are in a sense the product of society. So there is a circular process in which individuals contribute through institutionalization and legitimization to the creation of social meaning within the social structure of societies, and in turn, societies, through individuals' participation in their structures, create the conventions by which people behave. We can see a spiral of constantly shifting influence, creating and recreating structures, and these changing structures recreate the conventions by which people live within them. Looking back at the case example of Angus, his pathway to practice may have reconstructed a different reality of social work for him, his family and the healthcare professionals he worked with. It is this same circular process that you can see creating social work in Figure 1.5.

Social construction ideas have been widely used in social psychology to criticize traditional psychology. Influential proponents of this view are Gergen (Gergen, 1994, 1999; Gergen & Gergen, 2003) and, in Britain, Parker (1998). To give you a flavour of what this might mean for social work, you might think that in the real world we all have a personality, which is basic to our individual identity. Constructionist psychology casts doubt on this because we all have the possibility of making changes, and then we become a different person. Traditional psychology emphasizes the continuity of personal identity, so it might lead you to say that it is difficult or impossible to change someone's basic beliefs. Constructionist psychology emphasizes the possibility of change, and might lead you to be optimistic about changing people's personalities. For a social worker, which of these views of personality that you accept matters. If you take the traditional view of personality as fixed and difficult to change, you might focus on practical help rather than trying to change personal attitudes or behaviour. If you take a constructionist view, you might look to making changes in the social surroundings and in how your clients think to help them change their personalities.

A good reason for using social construction ideas in social work is this idea that social arrangements are not set in stone. The nature of social work, and any other social construction, changes as events in history or relationships in various social contexts alter. So you cannot define social work in one way for all time and across the whole world; it changes according to how societies, clients and practitioners use it. This is a cause for optimism as it tells us that everybody can make a difference to any social institution or social relationship – because by doing it or debating it, we can contribute to changing it. All social work practice, yours and mine, plays a part in creating social work. This is also a positive idea for practice, since social construction tells us that people can reconstruct their lives and behaviour; we should not be gloomy about whether people can change.

A criticism of social construction identifies a consequence of this idea that the nature of social realities is always changing. The criticism claims that this leads to a position where there are no certainties and we can have no security, because everything is always changing; this is called relativism. There are two answers to this criticism (Archer, 1995). First, this process of social construction is a gradual one: things change slowly, morphing in a series of small changes until we become aware that a large change has occurred under the radar. We can keep up with this, and understanding changes that we can see around us helps us to adjust to wider social change. Look back at the case example about social distancing during the Covid-19 crisis for an instance in which understanding of changes in social rules helped people adjust. Social workers keep an eye on social research and official information so that they can stay up to date with how society is changing. Second, many things do not change, and much social experience reinforces current social constructions, so social construction often supports stability and security; it is wrong to claim that social construction says that everything is insubstantial.

The politics of theory

Social construction creates what I call a politics of theory (Payne, 1992, 1996a, 1998, 2002) in which political debate and conflicts create change within a profession about the theory that profession uses. I call it *political* debate because groups of people gain an interest in a theory

and support it in arguments with groups who support other theories. These groups are like the political parties supporting one policy or another in Parliament. This goes on in professions in the same way as in ordinary social life, as part of the constant interaction about what reality is.

The aim of each group is to gain wider acceptance within social work of the theory that they support. If they can achieve this, the support groups for particular theories shift our understanding of the nature and practice of social work. In this way, proponents and supporters of a theoretical point of view struggle to have it accepted, and they use practice theories that support their premises to ensure that it contributes more to the overall construction of social work and that it has a greater impact on practitioners' actions.

So when, as a practitioner, you use a theory, you are contributing to the politics of theory, because what you do in social work is or becomes social work through the process of social construction.

Three views of social work objectives

A widely discussed construction of social work is contained in the Global Definition of Social Work (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2014); this is a good example of how social work is constructed from the variety of views of it. The first sentence of the definition proposes that social work has three main objectives: '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.' I present these objectives in Figure 1.6 as the corners of a triangle; the space within the sides of the triangle represents the discourse between them. We have seen already that discourses are interactions between what people or groups say and do that indicate important differences between them in the meanings they give to something. The important differences between these views of social work

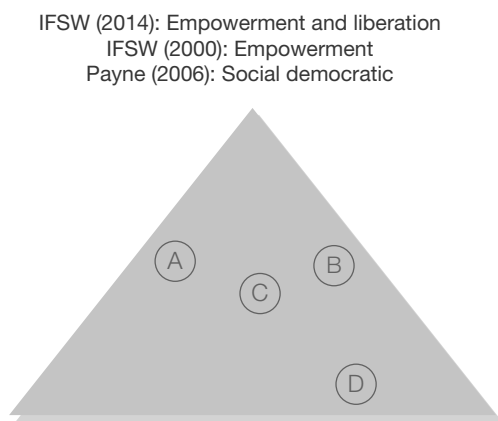

Figure 1.6 Three views of social work and their underlying political philosophies
Source: Adapted from Payne (2006).

connect with different political views about how welfare should be provided. We can therefore see that each view represents a political position in social work, connected with a political philosophy that would be recognized more widely in society, socialist philosophies, liberal or neoliberal philosophies and social democratic political philosophies (Payne, 2006). These philosophies also influenced alternative views of social justice, and I look at this in Chapter 14. The changes that have taken place in the IFSW definition and my own account of these three objectives have changed over the years since I first wrote about this (in Payne 1996b). Earlier editions of *Modern Social Work Theory* used the terminology of the previous IFSW Global Definition (IFSW, 2000). To make the connections across the years, Figure 1.6 identifies the previous IFSW terminology and the related political philosophies, as well as the current terms. We can see that the meanings attached to each of these broad objectives of social work has developed in the past 20 years, and will undoubtedly continue to develop, responding to social and political change.

Empowerment and liberation views

These views see social work as seeking the best possible well-being for individuals, groups and communities in society by promoting and facilitating growth and self-fulfilment. In this view of social work, practitioners help clients to gain power over their own feelings and their way of life. Through this personal power, they are enabled to overcome or rise above suffering and disadvantage. This view expresses in social work the social democratic political philosophy; that is, that economic and social development should go hand in hand to achieve individual and social improvement. Dominelli (2009) calls these therapeutic helping approaches.

Case example: A drug user's life

Karim was a young man who had become a drug user from an early age, being offered drugs at school, becoming part of a gang of young men and earning money by supplying drugs to others. Several years on, a new practitioner, Ken, became Karim's social worker as part of a drug rehabilitation project. Ken was shocked that Karim lived in derelict houses in poor and unhealthy conditions. Although he knew a lot of theory about the effects of drugs and possible treatment methods, he had not appreciated until he spent time with his client the urgency of Karim's need to get a regular fix, his lack of drive to make progress with his rehabilitation in spite of his unpleasant lifestyle and the influence of friends from his gang life, which meant that Karim could not keep to a daily routine involving activities not centred around drugs. When Karim failed to avoid drugs in a hostel placement, Ken was dispirited by his return to his old life and the failure of his treatment methods. He realized the importance of building a relationship with Karim, helping him to develop skills in social relationships and trying to provide a new social environment for him.

This case example illustrates how clients contribute to constructing social work: as practitioners gain experience of clients' lives, their practice changes as their understanding of what is possible and desirable shifts. Empowerment and liberation views of social work emphasize the importance of helping people lead a more fulfilling life by developing their skills and personal relationships. Humanistic and strengths theories are good examples of empowerment

views. These views are basic to many ideas of the nature of social work, but the two other views modify and dispute it.

Social change and development views

These see social work as seeking cooperation and mutual support in society so that the most oppressed and disadvantaged people can gain power over their own lives. Social work facilitates this by enabling people to take part in a process of learning and cooperation that creates institutions that everyone can own and participate in. Elites accumulate and perpetuate power and resources in society for their own benefit. By doing so, they create oppression and disadvantage, which social work tries to supplant with more egalitarian relationships in society. Dominelli (2009) calls these emancipatory approaches because they free people from oppression. Others (for example, Pease & Fook, 1999) call them transformational because they seek to transform societies for the benefit of the poorest and most oppressed. They imply that disadvantaged and oppressed people will never gain personal or social empowerment unless society makes these transformations. The shift in IFSW's terminology from 'social change' in 2000 to 'social change and development' in 2014 reflects the stronger global influence of social development as an objective and model of practice in social work professions in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Case example: Domestic violence

Ushi, the daughter of a Chinese family, married a violent man who often beat her. She accepted this as part of her husband's personality until he also began hurting their two daughters. Child protection concerns were reported by the girls' school, and the social worker helping the family picked up Ushi's increasing distress at the pattern of her husband's behaviour. The practitioner referred her to a woman's refuge, and the social worker there helped her to live in safety until legal action against her husband made it safe for her to return home with her daughters. In the process, Ushi became aware of her right to have positive expectations of her relationships with men, and her husband was forced to shift his perceptions of acceptable behaviour by a men's violence project.

Value statements about social work, such as codes of ethics, represent this objective by proposing social justice as an important value of all social work; this appears in the IFSW account of the values influencing social work. This view expresses socialist political philosophy; that is, that planned economies and social provision promote equality and social justice. Examples of social change views are anti-discriminatory or critical practice.

Social cohesion views

These see social work as an aspect of social provision that aims to create social cohesion and social order in society. It does this by meeting individuals' needs by providing personal practical help and services to them. Such views see social work as maintaining the social fabric of society by supporting people through difficult periods in their lives so that they can recover

their stability. This view expresses the liberal or neoliberal political philosophy that says societies should support personal freedom in economic markets, underpinned by the rule of law. Such political philosophies say that people should be free to make decisions about their lives, but if they have problems, they should suffer the consequences of those problems. The role of social work is to help people adjust to this way of organizing society, smoothing the way through problems that people cannot handle. A good example of social cohesion views is task-centred practice.

Case example: Mental illness

Bernard experienced considerable stress at work, which led to several periods of depression, and he eventually lost his job. After a period of hospitalization, a community mental health project involved him in a drop-in day centre, which reduced the sense of isolation he felt living in a small shared house. The project staff made sure Bernard's medication was continued and arranged for him to get help in applying for jobs, including putting him on a course to improve his job interview skills. They also persuaded him to take additional qualifications so that he could increase his job prospects.

Each of the views discussed here says something about the activities and purposes of social work in welfare provision in any society. Each criticizes or seeks to modify the others. For example, seeking personal and social fulfilment, as in empowerment and liberation views, is impossible for social change and development theorists because the interests of elites obstruct many possibilities for oppressed peoples unless we achieve significant social change. Social change and development theorists argue that merely accepting the social order, as empowerment and social cohesion views do, supports and enhances the interests of elites. Karim and Bernard might have been helped personally by engagement with their practitioners or by practical services, but the social pressures that make it hard for vulnerable youngsters to make their way in life still remain, so there will be a continuing flow of young men involved in cultures of drug misuse or suffering from exploitation, leading to mental ill-health. To social change and development theories, therefore, empowerment and social cohesion views do not remove the barriers that obstruct opportunities for people who should be the main beneficiaries of social work.

To take another example, social cohesion theorists say that trying to change societies on a large scale to make them more equal or to enable personal and social fulfilment through individual and community growth is unrealistic in everyday practice. Chapter 10 includes an example of this argument in relation to social development. Midgley and Conley (2010a) assert that steps forward are made through more practical measures to empower people to solve their problems. They, and others, argue that social change and development philosophies are unrealistic because most social work activity deals in small-scale improvements, which cannot lead to major social changes. In addition, stakeholders in social care services who finance and give social approval to social work activities mainly want to achieve a better fit between society and individuals rather than effect major changes.

These different views, however, have affinities with each other. For example, both the empowerment and liberation and the social change and development views largely concern

change and development, as we see in the cases of Karim and Ushi. In addition, empowerment and liberation and social cohesion views are about individual work rather than broader social objectives. Indeed, many practitioners find these two perspectives complementary. Most conceptions of social work include elements of each of these views, or they acknowledge the validity of elements of the others. Social change and development views criticize unthinking acceptance of the present social order, which is often taken for granted in empowerment and social cohesion views. Nevertheless, most social change and development practice theories include helping individuals to fulfil their potential within current social systems. Such theories often see this as a stepping stone to a changed society by promoting a series of small changes aiming towards bigger ones.

Looking at Figure 1.6, if you or your agency were positioned at A (which is very common, especially for social workers at the start of their careers), you might be providing assistance and therapeutic services as a care or case manager, or in child protection. You might do very little in the way of seeking to change society, and by being part of an official or service system you are implicitly accepting the current pattern of welfare services. In your daily work, however, what you do may well be guided by your personal aim to change society for the better in the future. For example, if you believe that relationships between women and men should be more equal, your work in families will probably reflect your views.

Position B might represent a practitioner working in a refuge for women who have experienced domestic violence. Much of the work is concerned with helping the women personally and practically, but the reason for the existence of their agency is to change attitudes towards women, and you might do some campaigning work as part of your role there.

Position C is equally balanced – some change, some service provision, some therapeutic helping. My hospice job was like that: one aspect was to promote community development so that communities respond better to people who are dying or bereaved, but I also organized and provided help and support for individuals, and was responsible for liaison with other services so that our service system became more effective.

Position D is mainly about social change but partly about social cohesion too. This reflects the reality that seeking social change is not, in social provision, about creating a revolution, but aims to make the service system more effective. Many community workers, for example, are seeking big changes in the lives of the people they serve by improving cooperation and sharing the preferred way of organizing society. As they do this, however, they may well help local groups make their area safe from crime, provide welfare rights advocacy or organize self-help playgroups in the school holidays. Working on such issues allows people to gain the skills to achieve wider social change in their community (see Chapter 10).

Political aims in welfare, views of social work and practice theories link in complex ways. The links between, say, liberal political theory and social work that aims for social cohesion are clear, but the devisors of task-centred practice (Chapter 6) did not say to everyone 'we are neoliberal theorists' and follow this up by devising a theory that expressed their political ideas. They did research, came up with an approach that seemed to work and presented it to social workers to use. When we set this alongside other theories, we can see that it meets some of social work's aims but not others. In the three reviewing sections of this book (Parts 2–4), each chapter has sections on wider theoretical perspectives and connections. These draw attention to some of the links and disagreements between theories that express these philosophies of welfare and views of social work.