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Theoretical Perspectives on Human Behavior

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CHAPTER OUTLINE

OPENING QUESTIONS

- What theories are needed to understand the multiple dimensions of person, environment, and time involved in human behavior?

- What criteria should social workers use to evaluate theories of human behavior?

KEY IDEAS

As you read this chapter, take note of these central ideas:

1. The systems perspective sees human behavior as the outcome of reciprocal interactions of persons operating within linked social systems.

2. The conflict perspective draws attention to conflict, inequality, dominance, and oppression in social life.

3. The rational choice perspective sees human behavior as based on self-interest and rational choices about effective ways to accomplish goals.

4. The social constructionist perspective focuses on how people learn, through their interactions with each other, to understand the world and their place in it.

5. The psychodynamic perspective is concerned with how internal processes such as needs, drives, and emotions motivate human behavior.

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

7. The social behavioral perspective suggests that human behavior is learned as individuals interact with their environments.

8. The humanistic perspective emphasizes the individual's inherent value, freedom of action, and search for meaning.

Case Study

Intergenerational Stresses in the McKinley Family

The hospice social worker meets three generations of McKinleys when she visits their home in an upper midwestern city. She is there because the family has requested hospice services for Ruth McKinley, the 79-year-old mother of Stanley McKinley. Ruth has a recurrence of breast cancer that has metastasized to her lungs; she is no longer receiving aggressive treatment and her condition is deteriorating. Upon entering the house, the social worker meets 50-year-old Stanley, his 51-year-old wife, Marcia, and their 25-year-old daughter, Bethany, who takes the social worker to a bedroom to meet her grandmother. She gives Ruth a gentle pat and introduces the social worker. Ruth smiles at Bethany and greets the social worker. Bethany leaves the room to give some privacy to the social worker and her grandmother.

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The social worker spends about 20 minutes with Ruth and finds her weak but interested in talking. Ruth says she knows that she is receiving hospice care because she is dying. She says she has lived a good life and is not afraid of dying. She goes on to say, however, that there are some things on her mind as she thinks about her life. She is thinking a lot about her estranged daughter who lives several states away, and she does not want to die with this "hardness between us." She also is thinking a lot about Stanley, who is unemployed, and hoping that he can find a spark in his life again. Bethany is very much on her mind, as well. She says she worries that Bethany is sacrificing too much of her young life to the needs of the family. As Ruth grows tired, the social worker ends the conversation, saying that she would like to visit with Ruth again next week so that they can talk some more about Ruth's life and the things that are on her mind.

Back in the living room, the social worker talks with Stanley, Marcia, and Bethany. She learns that Ruth moved into Stanley and Marcia's home 5 years ago after she had a stroke that left her with left-sided paralysis. At that time, Stanley and Marcia took out a second mortgage on their house to finance some remodeling to make the home more accessible for Ruth, providing her with a bedroom and bathroom downstairs. They also put in a much-needed new furnace at the same time. Bethany speaks up to say that her grandmother is the kindest person she knows and that they were all happy to rearrange their home life to make Ruth comfortable. Marcia notes that it seemed the natural thing to do, because Ruth had taken care of Bethany while Marcia worked during Bethany's early years. After Ruth came to live with them, Stanley continued to work at a print shop, and Marcia changed to the evening shift in her job as a police dispatcher. Bethany arranged her work and part-time community college studies so that she could be available to her grandmother between the time her mother left for work and her father returned from his workday. She took charge of preparing dinner for her dad and grandmother and giving Ruth a daily bath.

This arrangement worked well for 4 years. Bethany speaks fondly of the good times she and her grandmother had together as Bethany provided direct care to her grandmother, and her grandmother showered her with stories of the past and took a lively interest in her life, often giving her advice about her romantic life. Marcia breaks in to say that life has been tough for the past year, however, and her voice cracks as she says this. She recounts that they learned of the recurrence of Ruth's breast cancer 11 months ago and of the metastasis 5 months ago. For a few months, Stanley, Marcia, and Bethany juggled their schedules to get Ruth to doctor visits, chemotherapy treatments, and bone scans, until Ruth and the oncologist decided that it was time to discontinue aggressive treatment.

Then, 7 months ago, Stanley lost his job at the printing company where he had worked since getting out of the army, and he has been unsuccessful in finding new work. They were still managing financially with the help of unemployment checks until Marcia took a tumble down the stairs and injured her back and hip 4 months ago. She had surgery, which was followed by complications, and has been out of work on disability. She is expecting to go back to work next week. Bethany says she has wanted to work more to bring more money into the home, but she has also been needed at home more to fill in for Marcia. She lost one job because of too many absences and has pieced together two part-time jobs that give her a little more flexibility. She worries, however, about having no health insurance because she needs ongoing treatment for asthma. Marcia says that Stanley has been a wonderful caregiver to her and his mom, but she knows that the caregiving has interfered with his job search and is wearing him down.

Stanley enters the conversation to report that they have been unable to make mortgage payments for the past 3 months, and the bank has notified him that they are at risk of facing foreclosure. He becomes despondent as he tells this. He says they have been in the house for 15 years and had always paid the mortgage on time. The second mortgage for the remodeling is adding to the current financial pinch.

He says he is in a quandary about what to do. Marcia is going back to work soon, but she is still not strong enough to provide much physical care to Ruth. In addition, he is not at all optimistic that he will find a job in the near future. His former boss has now closed the printing shop because she lost some of her large clients. Stanley wonders if he should retrain for another occupation, but knows that this is not a good time for him to try to do that, with his mother's deteriorating condition. Bethany suggests that she should take some time off from school and find a job working nights so that she can give her dad time to look for jobs during the day. She has graduated from community college and been accepted into a bachelor's degree program in nursing. She says she is feeling too sad about her grandmother and too worried about the family's future to do well in school anyway. Besides that, she would like to be able to spend more time with her grandmother before she dies. At this point, Marcia breaks down and cries, sobbing that she just wants to give up: "We work so hard but nothing goes our way. I don't know where we will go if we lose the house."

As the family talks about their problems and possible solutions, the social worker recalls that she has heard something about a community program that provides counseling to people who are in jeopardy of home foreclosure. She wonders if that could help the McKinley family.

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES FOR A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH

The unfolding story of the multigenerational McKinley family may be familiar to you in some ways, but it is also unique in the way these particular persons and environments are interacting over time. As a social worker, you need to understand these details about the situation of the family. However, if you are to be helpful in improving the situation, you also need some scientific knowledge that will assist you in thinking about its unique elements. As suggested in Chapter 1, the range of knowledge offered by a multitheoretical approach is necessary when taking a multidimensional approach to human behavior. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce you to eight theoretical perspectives that are particularly useful for thinking about changing situations of persons and environments: systems perspective, conflict perspective, rational choice perspective, social constructionist perspective, psychodynamic perspective, developmental perspective, social behavioral perspective, and humanistic perspective. In Chapter 1, we defined *theory* as a logically interrelated set of concepts and propositions, organized into a deductive system, which explains relationships among aspects of our world. We suggested that a *perspective,* in contrast to a theory, is broader and more general—an emphasis or view. Each of the perspectives discussed in this chapter is composed of a number of diverse theories. Each of these perspectives is European American in heritage, but in recent years, each has been influenced by thinking in other regions of the world.

We have selected these eight theoretical perspectives because they have stood the test of time, have a wide range of applications across dimensions of human behavior, and are used in empirical research. Each has been reconceptualized and extended over time. In this volume, margin notes are used in Chapters 3 through 14 to help you recognize ideas from specific perspectives. Our purpose in this chapter is to introduce the "big ideas" of the eight perspectives, and not to present a detailed discussion of the various theories within the perspectives. We do call attention, however, to some of the most recent extensions of the perspectives. We want to lay the groundwork for your understanding of the variations of the perspectives discussed in subsequent chapters. If you are interested in a more in-depth look at these theoretical perspectives, you might want to consult an excellent book titled *Contemporary Human Behavior Theory: A Critical Perspective for Social Work* (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2006a).

Besides presenting an overview of the big ideas, we analyze the scientific merit of the perspectives and their usefulness for social work practice. The five criteria for critical understanding of theory identified in Chapter 1 provide

the framework for our discussion of the perspectives: coherence and conceptual clarity, testability and empirical support, comprehensiveness, consistency with social work's emphasis on diversity and power arrangements, and usefulness for social work practice. Four of the perspectives introduced in this chapter are based in sociology, four are based in psychology, and several have additional interdisciplinary roots. This diversity reflects the history of the social work profession: Social work scholars began with a preference for sociological knowledge, moved over time to a preference for psychological knowledge, and have recently come to seek knowledge of both environmental and personal factors. This recent trend is consistent with the multidimensional approach of this book.

As noted in Chapter 1, diversity and inequality are major themes of this book. In earlier versions of the eight perspectives, few theorists acknowledged the importance of looking at diverse persons in diverse environments. Each of the perspectives has continued to evolve, however, and the perspectives are being reconstructed to better accommodate diversity and address inequality. Some theory critics suggest that this shift to greater emphasis on diversity and inequality represents a paradigm, or worldview, shift (e.g., Schriver, 2004). Other theory critics, on the other hand, argue that the eight perspectives discussed here have undergone continual change, but not such revolutionary change as to be labeled a paradigm shift (e.g., Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). These critics suggest that the perspectives have stood the test of time because they have, over time, become much more self-conscious about diversity and inequality. Whether or not the attention to diversity and inequality constitutes a paradigm shift, we agree that it has been a major and positive trend in behavioral science theorizing.

Another major trend in behavioral science theory is that although much of recent theorizing fits within existing categories of theoretical perspectives, theoretical synthesizing is blurring the boundaries between perspectives (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). Theorists are being influenced by each other, as well as by societal changes, and have begun to borrow ideas from each other and to build new theory by combining aspects of existing theory. As you read about each of the perspectives, think about not only how it can be applied in social work practice, but also how well it represents all the complexities of human behavior in its current form.

SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

When you read the case study at the beginning of this chapter, you probably thought of it as a story about a family system—a story about Ruth, Stanley, Marcia, and Bethany McKinley—rather than "Ruth McKinley's story," even though the hospice case file reads "Ruth McKinley." You may have noted how Ruth's, Stanley's, Marcia's, and Bethany's lives are interrelated, how they influence one another's behavior, and what impact each of them has on the overall well-being of the family. You may be thinking about the reciprocal roles of caregiver and care recipient and how the family members keep adjusting their caregiving roles to accommodate changing care needs. You also may note that this family, like other families, has a **boundary** indicating who is in and who is out, and you may be wondering if the boundary around this family allows sufficient input from friends, extended family, neighbors, religious organizations, and so on. You may also have noted the influence of larger systems on this family, particularly the insecurities in the labor market and the gaps in the health care system. Medicare coverage for hospice care is an important resource for the family as they cope with the end-of-life care needs of Ruth. You can see, in Exhibit 2.1, how these observations about the McKinley family fit with the big ideas of the systems perspective.

The **systems perspective** sees human behavior as the outcome of reciprocal interactions of persons operating within linked social systems. Its roots are very interdisciplinary. During the 1940s and 1950s, a variety of disciplines—including mathematics, physics, engineering, biology, psychology, cultural anthropology, economics, and sociology—began looking at phenomena as the outcome of interactions within and among systems. Mathematicians and engineers used the new ideas about system **feedback mechanisms**—the processes by which information about past behaviors in a system are fed back into the system in a circular manner—to develop military

technology for World War II; scientists at Bell Laboratories used the same ideas to develop transistors and other communication technology (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Later, George Engel (1977) used the same ideas to develop a biopsychosocial model of disease.

Social workers were attracted to the systems perspective in the 1960s, as they shifted from a psychiatric model to one that was more inclusive of environment. Social work has drawn most heavily from the work of sociologists Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton, psychologists Kurt Lewin and Urie Bronfenbrenner, and biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy. The social workers who first adopted the systems perspective were heavily influenced by *functionalist sociology,* which was the dominant sociological theory during the 1940s and 1950s. In functionalism, social systems are thought to be orderly and remain in a relatively stable state, also known as *homeostasis* or *equilibrium.* Each part of the system serves an essential function in maintaining the system, and the functions of the various parts are coordinated to produce a well-functioning whole. System processes and structures such as rules and roles serve to maintain system stability. Although this systems approach did not deny the possibility of system change, it was more concerned with the mechanisms of system maintenance and stability.

In the systems perspective, the structure of roles has been an important mechanism for maintaining system balance. **Role** refers to the usual behaviors of persons occupying a particular social position. Consider the roles played by each person in the McKinley family and the stresses the family has faced as a result of role transitions over the past year. Stanley has lost his role as family provider and has needed to increase his caregiving role. He has struggled to find time and energy for the job search. Marcia took on the role of care recipient rather than caregiver. Bethany faced new challenges in juggling worker, student, and caregiver roles. She seems to be indicating that she is experiencing some role overload.

There was substantial growth in interest in the use of the systems perspective in social work during the 1970s, but by the end of the decade, social workers became dissatisfied with the perspective on two counts. First, the perspective was seen as too abstract and, second, the emphasis on stability seemed too conservative for a profession devoted to social change. Throughout the 1980s, some social work scholars tried to correct for these shortcomings with the continual development of ecological and dynamic systems approaches (e.g., Germain & Gitterman, 1980). Social workers (e.g., Bolland & Atherton, 1999; Hudson, 2000; K. Warren, Franklin, & Streeter, 1998) took renewed interest in the systems perspective in the 1990s as they began to make use of chaos theory and the related complexity theory. Chaos theory emerged in mathematics in the 1960s, took hold in a number of natural science disciplines in the 1970s, and revitalized the systems perspective in the social sciences, but interest in chaos theory has waned somewhat in the first decade of the 21st century.

Whereas traditional systems theories emphasize system processes that produce stability, **chaos theory** and the closely related complexity theory emphasize systems processes that produce change, even sudden, rapid, radical change. This difference in understanding about change and stability in social systems is explained by propositions

- Systems are made up of interrelated members (parts) that constitute a linked whole.
- Each part of the system impacts all other parts and the system as a whole.
- All systems are subsystems of other larger systems.
- Systems maintain boundaries that give them their identities.
- The dynamic interactions within, between, and among systems produce both stability and change, sometimes even rapid, dramatic change.

▲ **Exhibit 2.1**   Big Ideas of the Systems Perspective
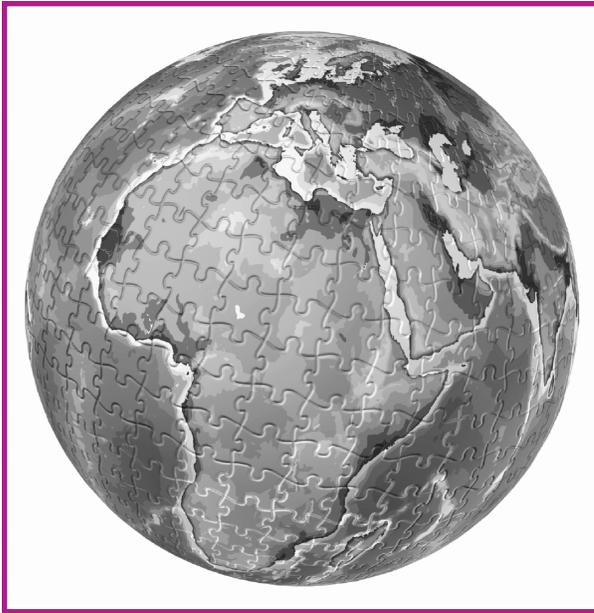
▲ **Photo 2.1** The pieces of this globe come together to form a unified whole—each part interacts and influences the other parts—but the pieces are interdependent, as suggested by the systems perspective.

central to chaos theory. Traditional systems theories proposed that system stability results from *negative feedback loops* that work like a thermostat to feed back information that the system is deviating from a steady state and needs to take corrective action. Chaos theory recognizes negative feedback loops as important processes in systems and acknowledges their role in promoting system stability. In addition, it proposes that complex systems produce *positive feedback loops* that feed back information about deviation, or should we say innovation, into the steady state in such a way that the deviation reverberates throughout the system and produces change, sometimes even rapid change. The change-producing feedback may come from within the system or from other systems in the environment.

Like earlier systems theories, chaos theory emphasizes that all systems are made up of subsystems, and all systems also serve as subsystems in other systems. Subsystems are always adjusting to each other and their environments, and the resultant changes are continuously being fed back. This results in a constant state of flux, and sometimes small changes in systems can reverberate in such a way as to produce very sudden and dramatic changes. Recently, chaos theory has been recommended as a useful approach for clinical social workers and clinical psychologists as they assist clients in trying new solutions to long-standing problems (M. Lee, 2008) and to recreate themselves in times of transition (Bussolari & Goodell, 2009).

One issue about which the various versions of the systems perspective disagree is the permeability, or openness, of systems' boundaries to the environment. Functionalist sociology seemed to assume that interactions take place within a *closed system* that is isolated from exchanges with other systems. The idea of systems as closed was challenged by dynamic systems theories, most recently chaos theory, which assumes a more *open system* as the healthy system. As Exhibit 2.2 illustrates, an open system is more likely than a closed system to receive resources from external systems.

Recently, *deep ecology* has emerged with an emphasis on the notion of the total interconnectedness of all elements of the natural and physical world (Besthorn & Canda, 2002; Ungar, 2002). Sociologist John Clammer (2009) suggests that deep ecology, with its addition of connections to the natural and physical worlds, can help to bridge Western and Eastern social science. The emerging *globalization theories* also emphasize the openness of systems, calling our attention to, among other things, how Stanley McKinley's job opportunities are connected to the increasingly globalized economy (Z. Bauman, 1998; U. Beck, 1999; Giddens, 2000).

On the other hand, recent theorizing in sociology has argued the case of the closed system. Niklas Luhmann's (1987) general systems theory, which has lately gained popularity in sociology, suggests that in highly complex societies, systems tend to become fragmented and closed to each other. They develop different languages and cultures and, consequently, cannot receive (hear and understand) feedback from each other. Luhmann calls such systems *autopoietic*. The events of September 11, 2001, and many other recent happenings, remind us that even in a context of rapid international communication and a global economy, cultures may remain very isolated from the feedback of other cultures. The seemingly impermeable cultural boundaries between the United States and Middle Eastern nations speak to this. Luhmann's theory

of closed systems has not been used in the U.S. social work literature, but it has been a popular approach among European social workers (see Wirth, 2009).

This is how the criteria for evaluating theory apply to the systems perspective:

• *Coherence and conceptual clarity.* Although it has been popular over time, the systems perspective is often criticized as vague and somewhat ambiguous. Functional sociology has been particularly vulnerable to criticisms that its concepts are poorly, or inconsistently, defined. Although chaos theory and complexity theory have greater consistency in use of terms than earlier approaches did, concepts in these theories remain highly abstract and often confusing in their generality. In reality, chaos theory and complexity theory emerged in applied mathematics, and concepts from them are still being developed in the social sciences. There are recent attempts by social workers to extrapolate concepts from these theories (e.g., Bolland & Atherton, 1999; Hudson, 2000; K. Warren et al., 1998), but scholars have not yet stated or explained the concepts of these theories in the simplest and clearest way possible. A recent article by Mo Yee Lee (2008) makes great progress in this area.

Closed System
No Exchange With
External Systems

Open System
Exchange of Resources
With External Systems

▲ **Exhibit 2.2**   Closed and Open Systems

• *Testability and evidence of empirical support.* Poorly defined and highly abstract concepts are difficult to translate into measurable variables for research. Nevertheless, a long tradition of research supporting a systems perspective can be found in anthropology and sociology (see J. White & Klein, 2008d, for a discussion of the use of the systems perspective to study family systems). The systems perspective has been greatly strengthened in recent years with developments in brain research, epidemiology, and a rapidly expanding empirical literature on ecological risk and resilience (Corcoran & Walsh, 2006; M. Fraser, 2004; Hutchison, Matto, Harrigan, Charlesworth, & Viggiani, 2007). Research methods, such as lengthy time series analyses, have been developed in the natural and social sciences for studying concepts of chaos and complexity, but these methods are still rarely used in social work.

• *Comprehensiveness.* Clearly, the systems perspective is devoted to the ideal of comprehensiveness, or holism. It can, and has, incorporated the various dimensions of human systems as well as various dimensions of environmental systems, nonhuman as well as human. Systems theorists recognize—even if they do not always make clear—the social, cultural, economic, and political environments of human behavior. They acknowledge the role of external influences and demands in creating and maintaining patterns of interaction within the system. Early theorizing in the systems perspective did not deal with the time dimension—the focus was always on the present. But recent formulations have attempted to add a time dimension to accommodate both past and future influences on human behavior (see Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Ford & Lerner, 1992; Hannerz, 1992; Wachs, 1992). Certainly, chaos theory and complexity theory give implicit, if not always explicit, attention to time with their emphasis on dynamic change. Globalization theory calls attention to the impact of speedy communications on world systems (Giddens, 2000; Virilio, 2000).

• *Diversity and power.* Although diversity is not addressed in most systems theorizing, recent versions of the systems perspective, with their attention to complexity and continuous dynamic change, open many possibilities for diversity. Furthermore, while most systems theorists do not address the role of power in systems transactions, some
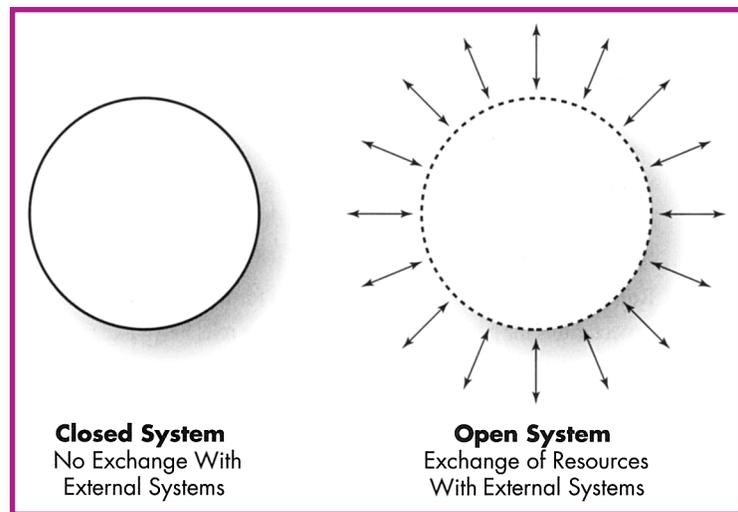
can accommodate the idea of power differentials better than others. Traditional systems theories that were influenced by functionalist sociology assumed that social systems are held together by social consensus and shared values. The emphasis on system equilibrium and on the necessity of traditional roles to hold systems together can rightly be criticized as socially conservative and oppressive to those who lack power within the system. Contemporary systems theory has begun to recognize power and oppression; conflict is seen as necessary for change in chaos theory, and some versions of globalization theory call attention to how powerful nations exploit the cultures, economies, and political arrangements of less powerful nations (McMichael, 2008).

- *Usefulness for social work practice.* The systems perspective is more useful for understanding human behavior than for directing social work interventions, but several social work practice textbooks were based on the systems perspective in the 1970s and 1980s (see Germain & Gitterman, 1980; C. Meyer, 1983; Pincus & Minahan, 1973; Siporin, 1975). The primary value of the systems perspective is that it can be used at any level of practice. It also has merit because it surpasses other perspectives in suggesting that we should widen the scope of assessment and intervention and expect better outcomes from multidimensional interventions (Hutchison, Matto, et al., 2007). Chaos theory can even be used by social workers to input information into a client system to facilitate rapid change, thereby enhancing possibilities for brief treatment, and group process can be used as reverberating feedback to produce change (K. Warren et al., 1998). In fact, social workers who work from a family systems perspective (e.g., Carter & McGoldrick, 2005a) have for some time used methods such as family genograms, and other forms of feedback about the family, as information that can produce change as it reverberates through the family system. Mo Yee Lee (2008) provides a number of examples of how clinical social workers can use chaos and turbulence to help clients open to new ways of looking at and resolving problems.

CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE

As she thinks about the McKinley family, the hospice social worker is struck by Stanley and Marcia's growing sense of powerlessness to manage the trajectories of their lives. A major theme in their story, like the stories of so many other families during the current recession, is lack of power in both the labor market and the housing market. Worries about access to health care are another part of the story, and one is reminded of recent political debates about health care funding. It remains to be seen what impact the federal health insurance law passed in March 2010 will have on families like the McKinleys. While the systems perspective helps us think about how interdependent the family members are, you may be thinking that they have some competing interests in relation to scarce resources of time and money. For example, Bethany's educational goals are in competition with the caregiving needs of Ruth and Marcia. The hospice social worker knows that communications can become tense in families facing similar situations of scarce resources, as members assert their self-interests, and she wants to know more about how the McKinley family negotiates competing interests. She is also curious about the history of gender roles in this family and how those have been affected by Stanley's unemployment. Compare these observations with the central ideas of the conflict perspective, presented in Exhibit 2.3.

The **conflict perspective** has become popular over and over again throughout history, with roots that can be traced back to German philosopher George Hegel (1770–1831) and Italian philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527), and perhaps even further, drawing attention to conflict, dominance, and oppression in social life (R. Collins, 1994; Ritzer, 2008b). The conflict perspective typically looks for sources of conflict and causes of human behavior in the economic and political arenas, and more recently in the cultural arena. In sociology, the conflict perspective has two traditions: a utopian tradition that foresees a society in which there is no longer a basis for social conflict, and a second tradition that sees conflict as inevitable in social life.

The roots of contemporary conflict theory are usually traced to the works of Karl Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels, as well as the works of Max Weber. Marx (1887/1967) and Engels (1884/1970) focused on economic

- Groups and individuals try to advance their own interests over the interests of others as they compete for scarce resources.
- Power is unequally divided, and some social groups dominate others.
- Social order is based on the manipulation and control of nondominant groups by dominant groups.
- Lack of open conflict is a sign of exploitation.
- Members of nondominant groups become alienated from society.
- Social change is driven by conflict, with periods of change interrupting long periods of stability.

▲ **Exhibit 2.3** Big Ideas of the Conflict Perspective

structures, suggesting that the capitalist economic system is divided into capitalists and workers. Capitalists decide what is to be done and how to do it, and they own the products produced by the workers as well as the means of production. Capitalists pay workers as little as they can get away with, and they, not the workers, reap the benefits of exploiting natural resources. According to Marx, this system produces *false consciousness:* Neither capitalists nor workers are aware that the system is based on exploitation; workers think they are getting a fair day's pay, and capitalists think workers are fairly rewarded. Marx proposed, however, that workers are capable of recognizing the exploitation and achieving *class consciousness,* but capitalists are incapable of recognizing the exploitation in the system.

Weber (1904–1905/1958) rejected this singular emphasis on economics in favor of a multidimensional perspective on social class that included prestige and power derived from sources other than economics. Contemporary conflict theory tends to favor Weber's multidimensional perspective, calling attention to a confluence of social, economic, and political structures in the creation of inequality (Allan, 2007; Appelrouth & Edles, 2007; Ritzer, 2008b). Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1981/1987) and other **critical theorists** argue that as capitalism underwent change, people were more likely to be controlled by culture than by their work position. Our lives became dominated by the culture industry, which is controlled by mass media. Critical theorists suggest that the culture industry plays a major role in turning workers into consumers, calling attention to the role of the advertising industry in exploiting consumers. They suggest that in the contemporary world, workers work very hard, sometimes at second and third jobs, in order to consume. They describe the exploitation of consumers as a pleasant kind of control: People spend more and more time working to be able to shop, and shopping becomes the major form of recreation. Working and shopping leave little time for reflective or revolutionary thinking. Of course, this approach to conflict theory continues to recognize the supremely important role of the economic system, which is a very important part of the McKinley family situation at the current time.

Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1979) is a neo-Marxist who has focused on international inequality. He proposed that the capitalist world system is divided into three geographic areas with greatly different levels of power: A *core* of nations dominates the capitalist worldwide economy and exploits the natural resources and labor in other nations. The *periphery* includes nations that provide cheap raw materials and labor that are exploited to the advantage of the core. The *semiperiphery* includes nations that are newly industrializing; they benefit from the periphery but are exploited by the core.

Power relationships are the focus of the conflict perspective. Some theorists in the conflict tradition limit their focus to the large-scale structure of power relationships, but many theorists, especially critical theorists, also look at the reactions and adaptations of individual members of nondominant groups. These theorists note that oppression of nondominant groups leads to their *alienation,* or a sense of indifference or hostility.

Lewis Coser (1956) proposed a **pluralistic theory of social conflict,** which recognizes that more than one social conflict is going on at all times, and that individuals hold cross-cutting and overlapping memberships in status groups. Social conflict exists between economic groups, racial groups, ethnic groups, religious groups, age groups,

gender groups, and so forth. Thus, it seeks to understand life experience by looking at simultaneous memberships—for example, a White, Italian American, Protestant, heterosexual, male semiskilled worker, or a Black, African American, Catholic, lesbian, female professional worker. Feminist theorists have developed a pluralistic approach called *intersectionality theory,* which recognizes vectors of oppression and privilege, including not only gender, but also class, race, global location, sexual orientation, and age (see P. H. Collins, 1990).

Although early social workers in the settlement house tradition recognized social conflict and structured inequality, and focused on eliminating oppression of immigrants, women, and children, most critics agree that social workers have not drawn consistently on the conflict perspective over time (Robbins et al., 2006a). Concepts of power and social conflict were revived in the social work literature in the 1960s (Germain, 1994). In the past decade or so, with renewed commitment to social justice in its professional code of ethics and in its curriculum guidelines, social work has drawn more heavily on the conflict perspective to understand dynamics of *privilege,* or unearned advantage, as well as discrimination and oppression. Social workers have used the conflict perspective as a base to develop practice-oriented **empowerment theories,** which focus on processes that individuals and collectivities can use to recognize patterns of inequality and injustice and take action to increase their own power (e.g., Gutierrez, 1990, 1994; J. Lee, 2001; S. Rose, 1992, 1994; Solomon, 1976, 1987). Both in their renewed interest in domination and oppression and in their development of practice-oriented empowerment theories, social workers have been influenced by **feminist theories,** which focus on male domination of the major social institutions and present a vision of a just world based

▲ **Photo 2.2** This homeless woman on a street in prosperous Beverly Hills, California, is one of many examples of unequal power in the global economy, a focus of the conflict perspective.

on gender equity. Feminist theories emphasize that people are socialized to see themselves through the eyes of powerful actors. Like Marx, most feminist theorists are not content to ask, "Why is it this way?" but also ask, "How can we change and improve the social world?" Scanzoni and colleagues (Scanzoni & Szinovacz, 1980) have been interested in whether and, if so, how gender power arrangements change as women become the more stable economic provider in families, a situation that has now occurred in the McKinley family as well as many other families around the world.

Here is how the conflict perspective rates on the five criteria for evaluating social work theory:

- *Coherence and conceptual clarity.* Most concepts of the conflict perspective are straightforward—conflict, power, domination, inequality—at least at the abstract level. Like all theoretical concepts, however, they become less straightforward when we begin to define them for the purpose of measurement. Across the various versions of the conflict perspective, concepts are not consistently used. One major source of variation is whether power and privilege are to be thought of as objective material circumstances, subjectively experienced situations, or both. In general, theories in the conflict tradition are expressed in language that is relatively accessible and clear. This is especially true of many of the practice-oriented empowerment theories developed by social workers. On the other hand, most recent conflict theorizing in the critical theory tradition is stated at a high level of abstraction.

- *Testability and evidence of empirical support.* Conflict theory has developed, in the main, through attempts to codify persistent themes in history (R. Collins, 1990). The preferred research method is empirical historical research that looks at large-scale patterns of history (see Mann, 1986; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; McMichael, 2008; Skocpol, 1979; Wallerstein, 1974, 1979). As with other methods of research, critics have attacked some interpretations of historical data from the conflict perspective, but the historical analyses of Michael Mann, Theda Skocpol, and Immanuel Wallerstein are some of the most influential works in contemporary sociology. In addition to historical analysis, conflict theorists have used experimental methods to study reactions to coercive power (see Willer, 1987; Zimbardo, 2007) and naturalistic inquiry to study social ranking through interaction rituals (R. Collins, 1981). Contemporary conflict theorists are also drawing on network analysis, which plots the relationships among people within groups, and are finding support for their propositions about power and domination. Family researchers have used conflict theory, specifically the concept of power, to study family violence (J. White & Klein, 2008a).

- *Comprehensiveness.* Traditionally, the conflict perspective focused on large-scale social institutions and social structures, such as economic and political institutions. In the contemporary era, Randall Collins (1990) is a conflict theorist who has made great efforts to integrate conflict processes at the societal level with those at the community, small group, and family levels. Collins suggests that we should recognize conflict as a central process in social life at all levels. Family theorists propose a conflict theory of families (J. White & Klein, 2008d). Traditional conflict theories propose that oppression of nondominant groups leads to a sense of alienation, and recent empowerment theories give considerable attention to individual perceptions of power. The conflict perspective does not explicitly address biology, but it has been used to examine racial and social class health disparities. Most conflict theories do consider dimensions of time. They are particularly noteworthy for recommending that the behavior of members of minority groups should be put in historical context, and indeed, as discussed above, empirical historical research is the research method that many conflict theorists prefer.

- *Diversity and power.* The conflict perspective is about inequality, power arrangements, and systems of oppression. It helps us look at group-based patterns of inequality. In that way, it also assists us in understanding diversity. The pluralist theory of social conflict and feminist intersectionality theory, both of which recognize that individuals have overlapping memberships in a variety of status groups, are particularly useful for considering human diversity. A major strength of the conflict perspective is that it discourages pathologizing members of minority groups by encouraging recognition of the historical, cultural, economic, and political context of their behavior. Empowerment theories guide practice interventions that build on the strengths of members of minority groups.

- *Usefulness for social work.* Concepts from the conflict perspective have great value for understanding power dimensions in community, group, and family relationships, as well as the power differential between social worker and client. Clearly, the conflict perspective is crucial to social work because (a) it shines a spotlight on how domination and oppression might be affecting human behavior; (b) it illuminates processes by which people become estranged and discouraged; and (c) it encourages social workers to consider the meaning of their power relationships with clients, particularly nonvoluntary clients (Cingolani, 1984). The conflict perspective is essential to the social justice mission of social work. In recent years, social workers have been in the forefront of developing practice-oriented empowerment theories, and the conflict perspective has become as useful for recommending particular practice strategies as for assisting in the assessment process. Empowerment theories provide guidelines for working at all system levels (e.g., individual, family, small group, community, and organization), but they put particular emphasis on group work because of the opportunities presented in small groups for solidarity and mutual support. With the addition of empowerment theories, the conflict perspective can not only help us to understand how the McKinley family came to feel powerless, but also help us think about how we can assist individual family members, as well as the family as a whole, to feel empowered to improve their situation. Social movement theories (see Chapter 14), which are based in the conflict perspective, have implications for the mobilization of oppressed groups, but the conflict perspective in general provides little in the way of specific policy direction.

RATIONAL CHOICE PERSPECTIVE

Another way to think about the McKinley family is to focus on the resources that each member brings to the ongoing life of the family, and each member's sense of fairness in the exchange of those resources. You might note that Ruth has diminishing resources to offer to the family, but the rest of the family seems to derive satisfaction from caring for her. Marcia indicates that it is only fair that they care for her now because of the care Ruth provided to Bethany when she was a young child (not to mention the care she provided to Stanley in his formative years). Stanley's ability to provide economic resources to the family has diminished, and we might wonder how this has affected his sense of providing his "fair share" of resources to the family. Marcia has gotten satisfaction over the years from her caregiving role in the family, and her ability to bring this resource to the family has been compromised. On the other hand, the economic resources she brings into the family have become more important since Stanley became unemployed. Bethany provides economic resources as well as caregiving resources, and there is no evidence that she considers her contributions to the family to be unfair. She is weighing the long-term rewards of education against the short-term costs of adding a rigorous educational program to an already overtaxed life. Exhibit 2.4 reveals a fit between these observations about the McKinley family and the central ideas of the rational choice perspective.

The **rational choice perspective** sees human behavior as based on self-interest and rational choices about effective ways to accomplish goals. Human interaction is seen as an exchange of resources, and people make judgments about the fairness of the exchange. The perspective is interdisciplinary, with strong roots in utilitarian philosophy, economics, and social behaviorism. Social workers are most familiar with the rational choice perspective as it is manifested in social exchange theory in sociology, rational choice models of organizations, public choice theory in political science, and the emerging social network theory. The rational choice perspective comes out of a very old tradition in social thought (J. White & Klein, 2008c), but the roots of contemporary sociological theories of rational choice are generally traced to Claude Lévi-Strauss, George Homans, and Peter Blau. Other major theorists include John Thibaut and Harold Kelley, James March and Herbert Simon, Michael Hechter, James Coleman, James Buchanan, Richard Emerson, and Karen Cook.

Social exchange theory starts with the premise that social behavior is based on the desire to maximize benefits and minimize costs. A basic belief is that social relationships occur in a social marketplace in which people give in order to get. Persons with greater resources in a social exchange hold what is often unacknowledged power over other actors in the exchange. In the early development of social exchange theory, Homans (1958) insisted that behavior could be understood only at the psychological level, denying the relevance of the cultural and social environments. Homans was particularly forceful in attacking the view that individual behavior is influenced by role expectations that emanate from sociocultural systems. More recent formulations of social exchange theory have moved from this

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- People are rational and goal-directed.
- Human interaction involves trade of social resources, such as love, approval, information, money, and physical labor.
- Social exchange is based on self-interest, with actors trying to maximize rewards and minimize costs.
- Values, norms, and expectations, as well as alternatives, influence the assessment of rewards and costs.
- Reciprocity of exchange is essential to social life.
- Power comes from unequal resources in an exchange.

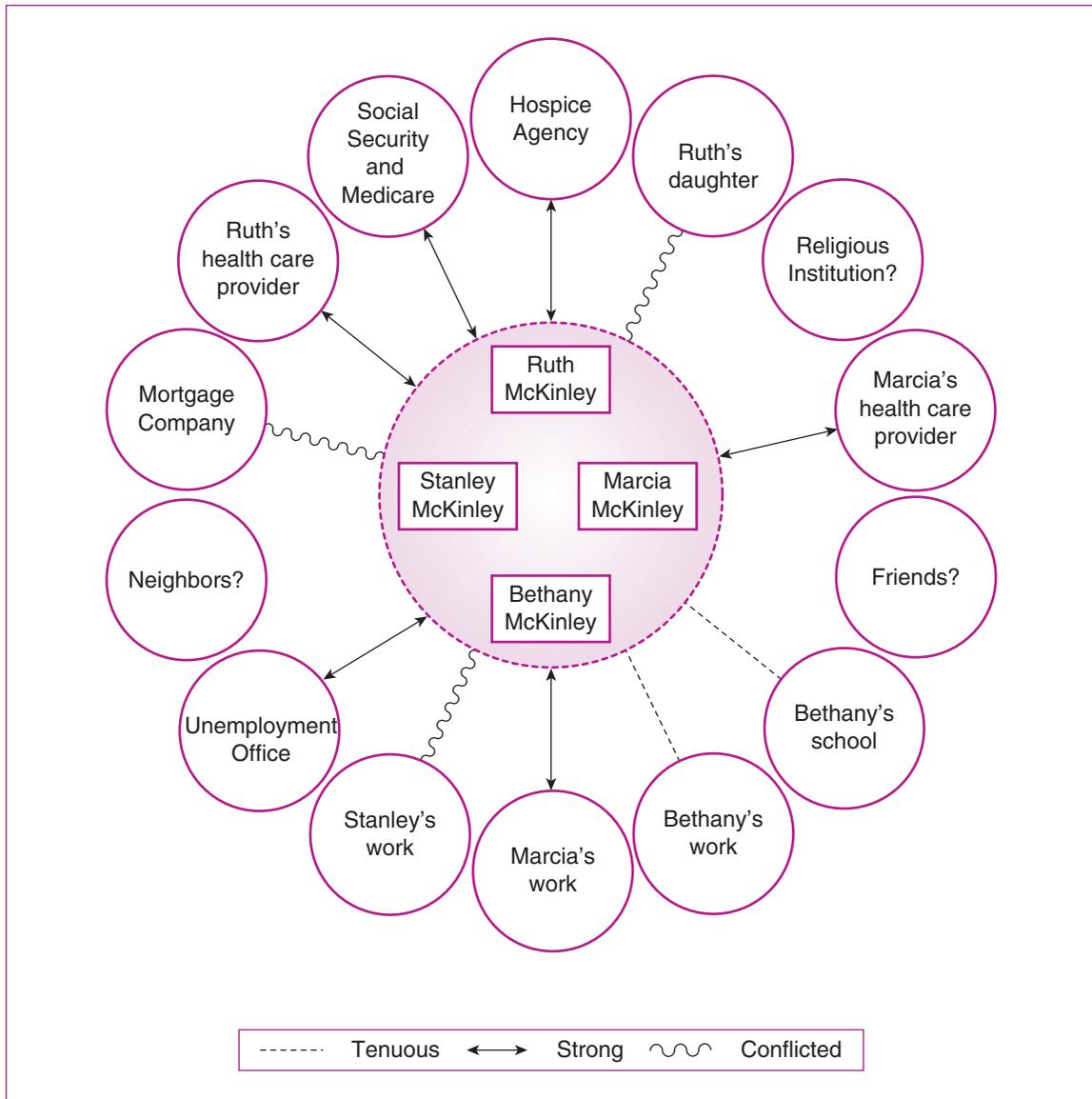▲ **Exhibit 2.4**   Big Ideas of the Rational Choice Perspective

position toward a greater emphasis on the social, economic, political, and historical contexts of social exchanges (see Levi, Cook, O'Brien, & Faye, 1990; Markovsky, 2005). These formulations would emphasize how relationships in the McKinley family are influenced by the structure of the labor market and political decisions about governmental support systems, including health care. Beginning with the work of Peter Blau (1964), social exchange theorists and researchers have taken a strong interest in how power is negotiated at all levels, from interactions between two people to *Realpolitik,* or balance of power, among nations. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are Emerson's (1972a, 1972b) power-dependency theory and Cook's (1987) exchange network theory.

Rational choice theory is currently popular in sociology, health promotion, and family studies. In sociology, James Coleman (1990) used rational choice theory to explore possible incentives to encourage actors to behave in ways that are more beneficial to others. For example, he has proposed lifting the legal immunity of members of corporate boards to encourage them to act in a more prosocial manner. In the health promotion literature, a number of rational models have been proposed to understand risky health behaviors and to extrapolate prevention strategies from them. Two of those models are the *health belief model* (HBM) (M. Becker, 1974; M. Becker & Joseph, 1988) and the *theory of reasoned action* (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Hornik, 1991). In family studies, social exchange theory has been used to understand mate selection, divorce, and caregiver burden (Dainton & Zelley, 2006).

Some feminists have criticized exchange theory on the grounds that its emphasis on rational calculation of personal advantage is a male attitude and does not represent the female perspective (Ritzer, 2008b). This criticism might be shared by ethnic groups who have traditionally been more collectivist, and less individualist, than White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans. In fact, Homans (1958) developed his American version of exchange theory partially in reaction to Lévi-Strauss's French collectivist version, which argued that social exchange is driven by collective, cultural, and symbolic forces and is not based simply on self-interest (Ekeh, 1974). Karen Cook and her colleagues (Cook, O'Brien, & Kollock, 1990) have undertaken a synthesis of social exchange and symbolic interaction theories (see the discussion of the social constructionist perspective in this chapter), recognizing the possibility that different people hold different definitions of fairness and positive outcomes in social exchange. We can imagine, for example, that some young adults in Bethany McKinley's position would consider it unfair to be involved in provider and caregiving roles in their family of origin.

Thibaut and Kelley's concepts of comparison level and comparison level alternatives are also useful in understanding different definitions of rewards and costs (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). *Comparison level,* a standard for evaluating the rewards and costs of a given relationship, is based on what the evaluator expects from the relationship. It has been used to understand why some people stay in abusive relationships. *Comparison level alternative* is the lowest level of outcomes a person will accept in light of alternative opportunities. This concept has been used to understand how people make decisions about seeking divorce. Some rational choice theorists have used the concept of *opportunity costs* to refer to the cost of forgoing the next-most attractive alternative when choosing a particular action. Researchers across a wide range of disciplines are using statistical methods to calculate the opportunity costs of particular courses of action, such as conserving natural habitats (Naidoo & Adamowicz, 2006) or prescribing antidepressant medications instead of cognitive behavioral therapy (Hollinghurst, Kessler, Peters, & Gunnell, 2005).

Theorists in the rational choice tradition are also advancing **social network theory,** which actually has intellectual roots in the systems perspective. Still in the early stages of development, social network theory already provides useful tools for person and environment assessments and holds great promise for the future. Social networks are typically presented visually as sociograms, which illustrate the relations among network members (see Hartman, 1995; C. Meyer, 1993). Members of the network—individuals, groups, or organizations—are represented as points, and lines are drawn between pairs of points to demonstrate a relationship between them. Arrows are often used to show the flow of exchanges in a relationship. These graphic displays illuminate such issues as network size, density of relationships, strength of relationships, reciprocity of relationships, and access to power and influence. Sociograms are usually called **ecomaps** in the social work literature. An ecomap of the McKinley family is presented in Exhibit 2.5.

▲ **Exhibit 2.5**   Ecomap of the McKinley Family

Here is an analysis of how well the rational choice perspective meets the criteria for judging social work theory:

• *Coherence and conceptual clarity.* As the rational choice perspective has developed, two conceptual puzzles have emerged, one at the individual level and one at the collective level. At the individual level, there is a question about the individual's capacity to process information and make rational decisions. At the collective level, the question is how is collective action possible if each actor maximizes rewards and minimizes costs. To their credit, recent theorists have embraced these puzzles. New developments in the rational choice perspective emphasize the limits to rational choice in social life (see Cook et al., 1990; Emerson, 1972a, 1972b; Levi et al., 1990; March & Simon, 1958). James Coleman (1990) is particularly noted for his attempts to employ rational choice theory to activate collective action

for the purpose of social justice. There is still much internal inconsistency among most rational choice theories, however, about the nature and extent of rationality, with some theorists more willing than others to recognize the limits of human rationality.

- *Testability and empirical support.* The rational choice perspective has stimulated empirical research at several levels of analysis, with mixed results. Cognitive psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1982, 1984) dealt a blow to the rational choice perspective in the 1980s. They reported research findings that individual choices and decisions are often inconsistent with assumed rationality and that, indeed, situations are often too complicated for individuals to ascertain what is the most rational choice. On the other hand, more than modest support for the perspective has been found in research on dyads and families (see G. Becker, 1981; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2005; Sprecher, 2005). A number of scholars have pointed out the difficulty of measuring rewards, costs, and fairness, because they are subjectively evaluated—what is rewarding to one person may not be rewarding to another. In response, researchers have developed the Marital Comparison Level Index (Sabatelli, 1984) and Parental Comparison Level Index (Waldron-Hennessey & Sabatelli, 1997). Researchers in a number of disciplines are attempting to find precise ways of measuring opportunity costs of alternative policies.

- *Comprehensiveness.* Although all strains of the rational choice perspective are interested in human interactions, the different strains focus on different dimensions of those configurations. Homans as well as Thibaut and Kelley were primarily interested in dyads. Ivan Nye (1982) has used the rational choice perspective to understand family life. Peter Blau (1964) came to be interested in larger structures. Coleman (1990) is interested in how individual actions get aggregated into collective action at the organizational and societal level. Network theory focuses on social interactions at the community, organizational, and institutional levels. In general, the rational choice perspective is weak in exploration of personal dimensions. It has also ignored the time dimension, except to respect the history of rewards and costs in past exchanges.

- *Diversity and power.* Although they were designed to look at patterns, not diversity, early rational choice theories provided some tools for understanding diversity in behaviors that come out of particular social exchanges. All theories in this perspective recognize power as deriving from unequal resources in the exchange process. Some versions of rational choice theory emphasize the ways in which patterns of exchange lead to social inequalities and social injustices. Although the rational choice perspective does not explicitly pathologize members of minority groups, those versions that fail to put social exchanges in historical, political, and economic contexts may unintentionally contribute to the pathologizing of these groups.

- *Usefulness for social work practice.* Some versions of rational choice theory serve as little more than a defense of the rationality of the marketplace of social exchange, suggesting a noninterventionist approach. In other words, if all social exchanges are based on rational choices, then who are we to interfere with this process? This stance, of course, is inconsistent with the purposes of social work. However, some theorists in this tradition, most notably James Coleman, have begun to propose solutions for creating social solidarity while recognizing the self-interestedness that is characteristic of Western, industrialized societies. These attempts have led Randall Collins (1994) to suggest that, out of all current social theories, contemporary rational choice theories have the greatest chance of informing social policy. On the other hand, Deborah Stone (2002) has skillfully demonstrated that the rational choice model is not a sufficient fit, and maybe not even a good fit, with the messy, nonlinear policy-making process. Family therapists use social exchange theory to guide prevention and intervention in marital and parent–child relationships, assisting family members to increase rewarding interactions and decrease unrewarding exchanges (J. White & Klein, 2008c). Social workers make use of social network theory at the micro level, to assess and enhance the social support networks of individual clients and families (K. Johnson, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2005; Pinto, 2006; Tracy & Johnson, 2007). Social work administrators and planners use social network theory to understand and enhance the exchange of resources in networks of social service providers (see Streeter & Gillespie, 1992).

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST PERSPECTIVE

As the hospice social worker drives back to the office, the McKinley family is on her mind. She thinks about Ruth and her end-of-life reflections about her life and social relationships. She hopes that she can be a good listener and a partner with Ruth as she makes meaning of her life. She recalls other clients who have made some changes in their life stories as they had a chance to reflect on them with her. She is curious about the story of the estrangement between Ruth and her daughter and wants to hear more about that from Ruth. She wonders if Ruth has been able to talk with Stanley and Bethany about her concerns for them and what meaning they might make of those concerns. The social worker also thinks about the story she heard from Stanley, Marcia, and Bethany. She thinks of Marcia's words, "nothing goes our way," and wonders whether this understanding of the world is shared by Stanley and Bethany—and, if so, how she might help them construct a different ending to the story they are telling themselves. The social worker also reflects on the way gender roles are defined in the family and would like to know more about how these roles have been negotiated over time in the family. You can see how her reflections are consistent with the social constructionist perspective by exploring Exhibit 2.6.

To understand human behavior, the **social constructionist perspective** focuses on how people learn, through their interactions with each other, to classify the world and their place in it. People are seen as social beings who interact with each other and the physical world based on *shared meanings,* or shared understandings about the world. In this view, people develop their understandings of the world and themselves from social interaction, and these understandings shape their subsequent social interactions.

The intellectual roots of the social constructionist perspective are usually traced to the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, as well as to the philosophical pragmatism of John Dewey and early theorists in the symbolic interaction tradition, including Charles Horton Cooley, W. I. Thomas, and George Herbert Mead. More recent theorists include Herbert Blumer, Erving Goffman, Alfred Schutz, Harold Garfinkel, Peter Berger, and Thomas Luckmann. Randall Collins (1994) suggests that social constructionist theorizing is the type of sociology that American sociologists do best.

To the social constructionist, there is no singular objective reality, no true reality that exists "out there" in the world. There are, instead, the shared subjective realities that are created as people interact. Constructionists emphasize the existence of multiple social and cultural realities. Both persons and environments are dynamic processes, not static structures. The sociopolitical environment and history of any situation play an important role in understanding human behavior. The social constructionist would, for example, call attention to how Stanley's understanding of himself as a worker is being influenced by the current economic recession.

The importance of subjective rather than objective reality has been summed up by the words of W. I. Thomas (Thomas & Thomas, 1928): "If men [sic] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (p. 128).

- Human consciousness, and the sense of self, is shaped by continual social interaction.
- Social reality is created when people, in social interaction, develop a common understanding of their world.
- People perform for their social audiences, but they are also free, active, and creative.
- Social interaction is grounded in language customs, as well as cultural and historical contexts.
- People can modify meanings in the process of interaction.
- Society consists of social processes, not social structures.

▲ **Exhibit 2.6**   Big Ideas of the Social Constructionist Perspective

Actually, social constructionists disagree about whether there is, in fact, some objective reality out there. Radical social constructionists believe there is not. They believe that there is no reality beyond our personal experiences. Most *post-modern theorists* fall in this category, arguing that there are no universals, including no universal truth, reality, or morality (Danto, 2008; Lyotard, 1984). The postmodernists accept that the world is "messy" and see no need to impose order on it. More moderate social constructionists believe that there are "real objects" in the world, but those objects are never known objectively; rather, they are only known through the subjective interpretations of individuals and collectivities (C. Williams, 2006).

Social constructionists also disagree about how constraining the environment is. Some see individual actors in social interactions as essentially free, active, and creative (Gergen, 1985). Others suggest that individual actors are always performing for their social audiences, based on their understanding of community standards for human behavior (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Goffman, 1959). The dominant position is probably the one represented by Schutz's (1932/1967) *phenomenological sociology.* While arguing that people shape social reality, Schutz also suggests that individuals and groups are constrained by the preexisting social and cultural arrangements created by their predecessors.

The social constructionist perspective sees human understanding, or human consciousness, as both the product and the driving force of social interaction. Some social constructionists focus on individual consciousness, particularly on the human capacity to interpret social interactions and to have an inner conversation with oneself about them (Cooley, 1902/1964; Ellis, 1989; G. Mead, 1934). They see the self as developing from the interpretation of social interaction. Cooley introduces the concept of the *looking-glass self,* which can be explained as "I am what I think you think I am." The looking-glass self has three components: (1) I imagine how I appear to others, (2) I imagine their judgment of me, and (3) I develop some feeling about myself that is a result of imagining their judgments of me. George Herbert Mead (1959) suggests that one has a self only when one is in community and that the self develops based on our interpretation of the *generalized other,* which is the attitude of the entire community. Cynthia Franklin (1995) asserts that these cognitively oriented versions of social constructionism are best known as constructivism.

Other social constructionists put greater emphasis on the nature of social interactions, calling attention to gestures and language that are used as symbols in social interaction (Charon, 1998). These symbols take on particular meaning in particular situations. These social constructionists also see social problems as social constructions, created through claims making, labeling, and other social processes (Best, 1989).

The McKinley family is coping with a great deal of change in the external world as well as within their family system. The social constructionist perspective would encourage us to be interested in how they are describing and explaining these changes. For example, how do they understand their struggles in the labor market and the housing market? How much do they attribute their struggles to personal failings, to being victims of a globalized world economy that is creating more privilege for some and more disadvantage for others, or perhaps to corporate greed that caused a meltdown in the housing and financial markets? How do their attributions affect their sense of self-worth? The social constructionist perspective would also be interested in how the McKinley family understands the meaning of family and how they have developed this understanding in their ongoing interactions with each other and the world.

This is how the social constructionist perspective measures against the criteria for judging theories:

• *Coherence and conceptual clarity.* Social constructionism, both the original phenomenological and symbolic interactional concepts as well as the contemporary postmodern conceptualizations, is often criticized as vague and unclear. Over the past few decades, a great diversity of theorizing has been done within this broad theoretical perspective, and there is much fragmentation of ideas. Sociologists in the conflict and rational choice traditions have begun to incorporate social constructionist ideas, particularly those related to meaning making, which has further blurred the boundaries of this perspective. One challenge to the consistency of the social constructionist perspective

is that it denies the one-absolute-truth, objective approach to reality while arguing that it is absolutely true that reality is subjective. It criticizes grand theorizing while presenting a grand theory of human behavior.

- *Testability and evidence of empirical support.* Because of the vagueness of its concepts, the social constructionist perspective has been criticized for being difficult to operationalize for empirical research. Social constructionists have responded in two different ways to this criticism. Some argue that it is naïve to think that any theory can be evaluated based on empirical evidence (Cole, 1992). However, many social constructionist proponents have challenged the criticism and offered alternative criteria for evaluating theory (see Witkin & Gottschalk, 1988). They also propose an alternative research methodology, constructivist research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which is sensitive to the context of the research, seeks the views of key parties, and takes into account the interactions involved in the research process (Schutt, 2009; C. Williams, 2006). Research in the postmodern tradition is interested in stories, not facts (Danto, 2008). Social constructionism has stimulated a trend in the behavioral sciences to use a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to accommodate both objective and subjective reality.

- *Comprehensiveness.* Social constructionism pays little attention to the role of biology in human behavior, with the exception of a few constructivist biologists (Maturana, 1988; J. Stewart, 2001; Varela, 1989). In some versions of social constructionism, cognitive processes are central (Mahoney, 1991), and the social construction of emotions is considered in others (Ellis, 1989). With the emphasis on meaning making, social constructionism is open to the role of religion and spirituality in human behavior. With its emphasis on social interaction, the social constructionist perspective is strong in attention to the social environment. It has been criticized, however, for failing to pay attention to the macro world of social institutions and social structure. Time, and the role of history, is respected in the social constructionist perspective, with many authors drawing attention to the historical era in which behavior is constructed. Reality, to the social constructionist, is a moving target (C. Williams, 2006).

- *Diversity and power.* With its emphasis on multiple social realities, the social constructionist perspective is strong in its ability to accommodate diversity. It has been criticized, however, for failure to provide the theoretical tools necessary for the analysis of power relationships (Coser, 1975; Ritzer, 2008b; C. Williams, 2006). Some critics have suggested that many contemporary postmodern versions of social constructionism, by ignoring power while focusing on multiple voices and multiple meanings in the construction of reality, reduce oppression to mere difference (C. Williams, 2006). These critics suggest that this reduction of oppression to difference masks the fact that some actors have greater power than others to privilege their own constructions of reality and to disadvantage the constructions of other actors. This criticism cannot be leveled at all versions of social constructionism, however. Social work scholars have been attracted to those versions of the social constructionist perspective that have incorporated pieces of the conflict tradition (E. Freeman & Couchonnal, 2006; Laird, 1994; Saleebey, 1994), particularly the early work of Michel Foucault (1969) on the relationship between power and knowledge. They propose that in contemporary society, minority or "local" knowledges are denied credibility in majority-dominated social arenas and suggest that social work practitioners can bring credibility to minority viewpoints by allowing oppressed individuals and groups to tell their own stories.

- *Usefulness for social work practice.* Social constructionism gives new meaning to the old social work adage, "Begin where the client is." In the social constructionist perspective, the social work relationship begins with developing an understanding of how the client views the situation and what the client would like to have happen. The current strong interest in solution-focused and narrative and storytelling therapies is based on the social constructionist perspective. Solution-focused approaches attempt to help clients construct solutions rather than solve problems. They are based on the assumption that clients want to change and are capable of envisioning the change they would like to see. Narrative therapy starts with the assumption that we all tell ourselves stories about our lives, developing dominant story lines and forgetting material that does not fit into them. A goal of therapy is to help clients see more realities in their story lines, with other possible interpretations of events (J. Walsh, 2010). The social worker should engage the client in thinking about

the social, cultural, and historical environments in which his or her version of reality was constructed, which, for members of oppressed groups, may lead to empowerment through *restorying,* or revision of the story line (Greene & Cohen, 2005; Laird, 1994; Saleebey, 1994). Joseph Walsh suggests that narrative therapy can be particularly helpful to hospice patients who are reflecting on their life stories. That is, indeed, the approach of the hospice social worker who is working with Ruth McKinley and her family. At the level of groups and organizations, the social constructionist perspective recommends getting discordant groups to engage in sincere discussion of their disparate constructions of reality and to negotiate lines of action acceptable to all (C. Fox & Miller, 1995).

Critical Thinking Questions 2.1

The systems, conflict, rational choice, and social constructionist perspectives all pay attention to the environment that is external to individuals. It could be argued that the hospice social worker should only be focusing on Ruth McKinley's personal needs and reactions. How would you argue in favor of that approach? How would you argue against it?

PSYCHODYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Both Stanley and Marcia McKinley's despondence and loss of hope are apparent in their first meeting with the hospice social worker—and easy to understand. Think about the losses they have faced in the past year: loss of job (Stanley), loss of income (Stanley and Marcia), loss of valued roles (provider for Stanley and caregiver for Marcia), and loss of health (Marcia). They also face the impending loss of Ruth, the last surviving parent for them, and the possible loss of their home. This rapid accumulation of loss would challenge, even overwhelm, the adaptive capacities of most any human. Bethany is thinking of dropping out of school, a decision that will involve loss of a dream, at least temporarily. In the midst of all that loss, we also note the deep attachment that all four family members—Ruth, Stanley, Marcia, and Bethany—have for each other. This suggests that early nurturing environments supported the development of secure attachments. As we explore the McKinley family's situation from the psychodynamic perspective (see Exhibit 2.7), these and other ideas emerge.

The **psychodynamic perspective** is concerned with how internal processes such as needs, drives, and emotions motivate human behavior. The perspective has evolved over the years, moving from the classical psychodynamic emphasis on innate drives and unconscious processes toward greater emphasis on the adaptive capacities of individuals and their interactions with the environment. The origins of all psychodynamic theories are in the work of

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- Emotions have a central place in human behavior.
- Unconscious, as well as conscious, mental activity serves as the motivating force in human behavior.
- Early childhood experiences are central in the patterning of an individual's emotions and, therefore, central to problems of living throughout life.
- Individuals may become overwhelmed by internal or external demands.
- Individuals frequently use ego defense mechanisms to avoid becoming overwhelmed by internal or external demands.

▲ **Exhibit 2.7** Big Ideas of the Psychodynamic Perspective

Sigmund Freud; other prominent theorists in the evolving psychodynamic perspective include Carl Jung, Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, Margaret Mahler, Karen Horney, Heinz Hartmann, Robert W. White, Donald Winnicott, Otto Kernberg, Heinz Kohut, and Erik Erikson. More recent formulations of the perspective include ego psychology, object relations, self psychology, and relational-cultural theories. We will elaborate on these more recent developments later.

To trace the evolution of the psychodynamic perspective, it is essential to begin with its Freudian roots. Sigmund Freud looked at the human personality from a number of interrelated points of view; the most notable are his drive or instinct theory, topographical theory, structural theory, and psychosexual stage theory, summarized below. Freud revised each of these approaches to human personality over time, and different followers of Freud have attended to different aspects of his theoretical works, further revising each of them over time.

- *Drive or instinct theory.* This theory proposes that human behavior is motivated by two basic instincts: *thanatos,* or the drive for aggression or destruction, and *eros,* or the drive for life (through sexual gratification). Recent revisions of drive theory have suggested that human behavior is also motivated by drives for mastery (see D. Goldstein, 1996) and for connectedness (Borden, 2009).

- *Topographical theory of the mind.* Topographical theory proposes three states of mind: conscious mental activities of which we are fully aware; preconscious thoughts and feelings that can be easily brought to mind; and unconscious thoughts, feelings, and desires of which we are not aware but which have a powerful influence on our behavior. Although all psychodynamic theorists believe in the unconscious, the different versions of the theory put different emphases on the importance of the unconscious in human behavior.

- *Structural model of the mind.* This model proposes that personality is structured around three parts: the *id,* which is unconscious and strives for satisfaction of basic instincts; the *superego,* which is made up of conscience and ideals and is the censor of the id; and the *ego,* which is the rational part of personality that mediates between the id and the superego. Freud and his early followers were most interested in the id and the pathologies that emanate from it, but later followers have focused primarily on ego strengths and the drive for adaptation. Both ego psychology and self psychology are part of this later tradition.

- *Psychosexual stage theory.* This theory proposes a five-stage model of child development, based on sexual instincts: the oral phase (birth to about 18 months), when the search for pleasure is centered in the mouth; the anal phase (from about 18 months to 3 years), when the search for pleasure is centered in the anus; the phallic phase (ages 3–6), when the search for pleasure is centered in the genitals; the latency phase (ages 6–8), when erotic urges are repressed; and the genital phase (adolescence onward), when the search for pleasure is centered in the genitals and sexual intimacy. Freud asserted that there was no further personality development in adulthood. Recent revisions of psychodynamic theory, starting with the work of Erik Erikson (1963), have challenged that idea. Although they still give primacy to the childhood years, they suggest that personality continues to develop over the life course. Recent theories put less emphasis on sexual instincts in stage development.

Let's turn now to some revisions of Freudian theory. *Ego psychology* gives primary attention to the rational part of the mind and the human capacity for adaptation. It recognizes conscious as well as unconscious attempts to cope, and the importance of both past and present experiences. Defense mechanisms, unconscious processes that keep intolerable threats from conscious awareness, play an important role in ego psychology (see E. Goldstein, 2001). *Object relations theory* studies how people develop attitudes toward others in the context of early nurturing relationships, and how those attitudes affect the view of the self as well as social relationships. In this tradition, John Bowlby's attachment theory has become the basis for a psychobiological theory of attachment (Barnekow & Kraemer, 2005; Kraemer, 1992). *Self psychology* focuses on the individual need to organize the personality into a cohesive sense of self and to build relationships that support it (see E. Goldstein, 2001). *Relational-cultural theory*, also known as relational feminist theory,

proposes that the basic human drive is for relationships with others. The self is understood to develop and mature through emotional connectedness in mutually empathic relationships, rather than through a process of separation and independence as proposed by traditional object relations theory. Human connectedness is emphasized, human diversity acknowledged, and human difference normalized rather than pathologized (Borden, 2009; Freedberg, 2007). You will read more about the psychodynamic perspective in Chapter 4.

Here are the criteria for evaluating theories as applied to the psychodynamic perspective:

- *Coherence and conceptual clarity.* Criticisms that the psychodynamic perspective lacks logical consistency are directed primarily at Freud's original concepts and propositions, which were not entirely consistent because they evolved over time. Ego psychology and object relations theorists strengthened the logical consistency of the psychodynamic perspective by expanding and clarifying definitions of major concepts. Theories in the psychodynamic perspective are also criticized for the vague and abstract nature of their concepts.

- *Testability and evidence of empirical support.* Later psychodynamic theorists translated Freud's ideas into more measurable terms. Consequently, much empirical work has been based on the psychodynamic perspective. Contradictions in the research findings may be due in large part to the use of different definitions and measures. Some concepts, such as mastery or competence, have strong empirical support, but this support has been generated primarily by other schools of thought, such as developmental psychology and Albert Bandura's social behaviorism. Recent long-term longitudinal studies support the importance of childhood experiences, but also indicate that personality continues to develop throughout life (see E. Werner & Smith, 2001). There is growing evidence of the supremely important role that attachment plays in shaping development over the life course (see Trees, 2006).

- *Comprehensiveness.* Early psychodynamic theories were primarily concerned with internal psychological processes. Strong attention is paid to emotions, and in recent formulations, cognitions are also acknowledged. Although Freud assumed that biology determines behavior, he developed his theory several decades before neurological science began to uncover the biological base of emotions. Recently, however, psychodynamic theorists have begun to incorporate new developments in neurological sciences about early brain development into their formulations (see, e.g., Applegate & Shapiro, 2005). With the exception of Carl Jung, early psychodynamic theorists were not interested in the spiritual aspects of human behavior, typically viewing them as irrational defenses against anxiety. Recently, psychodynamically oriented social workers have attempted to integrate spirituality into their practice (see Northcut, 2000). As for environments, most psychodynamic theory conceptualizes them as sources of conflicts with which the individual must struggle. Relational-cultural theory, with its emphasis on supporting the growth of relationships and community, takes exception to that view. Overall, however, environments beyond the family or other close interpersonal relationships are ignored. This has led to criticisms of "mother blaming" and "family blaming" in traditional psychodynamic theories. Social, economic, political, and historical environments of human behavior are probably implied in ego psychology, but they are not explicated. As for time, the focus is on how people change across childhood. There has traditionally been little attempt to account for change after childhood or to recognize the contributions of historical time to human behavior, but the relational-cultural theory looks at relationships across the life course.

- *Diversity and power.* Traditional psychodynamic theories search for universal laws of behavior and their applicability to unique individuals. Thus, diversity of experience at the group level has been quite neglected in this tradition until recently. Moreover, in the main, "universal" laws have been developed through analysis of heterosexual men of White, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class culture. Feminists, as well as members of racial and ethnic minority groups, have criticized the psychodynamic bias toward thinking of people as autonomous individuals (Freedberg, 2007). These critics suggest that viewing this standard as "normal" makes the connectedness found among many women and members of racial and ethnic minority groups seem pathological. Recently, proponents of the psychodynamic perspective have tried to correct for these biases and develop a better understanding of human diversity (E. Goldstein, 1995).

Psychodynamic theories are strong in their recognition of power dynamics in parent–child relationships and in exploration of the lifeworlds of children. They are weaker, overall, in looking at power issues in other relationships, however, including gender relationships. Early on, Freud recognized gender differences, even gender inequality, but attributed them to moral deficits within women. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development has a somewhat greater emphasis on social forces. However, Erikson's work has been criticized for its lack of attention to the worlds of women, racial minorities, and sexual minorities. It did not take into account the persistently hostile environments in which minority group members interact or the extraordinary coping strategies needed to negotiate those environments. In the contemporary era, psychoanalytic feminists have reworked Freud's ideas to focus on patriarchy, asking the question, "Why do men work so hard to maintain patriarchy and why do women put so little energy into challenging patriarchy?" (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2007). They propose that the answer to this question is found in the gender-based early child-rearing environment. African American social workers have proposed that social workers can help to empower African American clients by integrating empowerment theory and an Afrocentric perspective with the ego-strengthening aspects of ego psychology (Manning, Cornelius, & Okundaye, 2004). Relational-cultural theory was developed out of concerns about the male bias in existing psychodynamic theories.

- *Usefulness for social work practice.* Most versions of the psychodynamic perspective have included clinical theory as well as human behavior theory. Differences of opinion about principles of practice reflect the theoretical evolution that has occurred. Practice principles common to all versions of the psychodynamic perspective include the centrality of the professional–client relationship, the curative value of expressing emotional conflicts and understanding past events, and the goals of self-awareness and self-control. In contrast to the classical psychodynamic approach, recent formulations include directive as well as nondirective intervention, short-term as well as long-term intervention, and environmental manipulations—such as locating counseling regarding possible mortgage foreclosure for the McKinley family—as well as intrapsychic manipulations such as emotional catharsis. Ego psychology has also been used to develop principles for prevention activities in addition to principles of remediation (D. Goldstein, 1996). In general, however, the psychodynamic perspective does not suggest practice principles at the level of communities, organizations, and social institutions. Thus, from this perspective, it would not help you to think about how to influence public policy related to housing, income security, or access to health care.

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Another way to think about the McKinley family is to view their situation in terms of the developmental tasks that they face. You might note that Ruth McKinley is in late adulthood and engaged in a review of her life journey, attempting to make peace with the life she has lived. You might also note that Stanley and Marcia assumed caregiving responsibilities for Ruth 5 years ago while also continuing to provide support to Bethany as she moved into young adulthood. At the current time, their struggles to stay employed and hold onto their house are situations that were once thought to be "off time," or atypical, for individuals in middle adulthood, but have become more common for the current cohort of midlife adults. Bethany assumed a caregiving role with Ruth as she emerged into adulthood, and that also may seem off time. We can think about where she stands with the developmental markers typically associated with young adulthood: education/work, intimate relationship, leaving home, and starting career. These observations are consistent with the central ideas of the developmental perspective, summarized in Exhibit 2.8.

The focus of the **developmental perspective** is on how human behavior unfolds across the life course, how people change and stay the same over time. Human development is seen to occur in clearly defined stages based on a complex interaction of biological, psychological, and social processes. Each new stage involves new tasks and brings changes in social roles and statuses. Currently, there are two streams of theorizing in the developmental perspective, one based in psychology and one based in sociology.

- Human development occurs in clearly defined, age-graded stages.
- Each stage of life is qualitatively different from all other stages.
- Each stage builds on earlier stages.
- Human development is a complex interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors.
- Moving from one stage to the next involves new tasks and changes in statuses and roles.

▲ **Exhibit 2.8**   Big Ideas of the Developmental Perspective

▲ **Photo 2.3** Families are composed of people in different life stages, occupying different statuses and playing different roles, as suggested by the developmental perspective.

Life span or *life cycle theory,* based in psychology, focuses on the inner life during age-related stages. The study of life span development is rooted in Freud's (1905/1953) theory of psychosexual stages of childhood development, but Erikson (1963) has been the most influential developmental theorist to date because his model of development includes adult, as well as child, stages of development. Other early life cycle theorists include Margaret Mahler, Harry Stack Sullivan, and Jean Piaget. More recent developmental theorists include Daniel Levinson, George Vaillant, Roger Gould, Lawrence Kohlberg, Robert Havighurst, Joan Borysenko, Barbara Newman, and Philip Newman.

Erikson (1963) proposed an *epigenetic model of human development,* in which the psychological unfolding of personality takes place in sequences. Healthy development depends on the mastery of life tasks at the appropriate time in the sequence. Although life span theorists tend to agree with this epigenetic principle, there is also growing agreement that the stages are experienced in a more flexible way than Erikson proposed, with cultural, economic, and personal circumstances leading to some differences in timing and sequencing (Sollod, Wilson, & Monte, 2009).

For example, Bethany McKinley is thinking of postponing school and career development to be a support to her extended family in a stressful period in the life of the family. Stanley McKinley is faced with a need to rethink his occupational career at the age of 50.

Erikson divided the life cycle into eight stages, each with a special psychosocial crisis:

Stage 1 (birth–1 year): basic trust versus mistrust

Stage 2 (ages 2–3): autonomy versus shame, doubt

Stage 3 (ages 3–5): initiative versus guilt

Stage 4 (ages 6–12): industry versus inferiority

Stage 5 (ages 12–18 or so): identity versus role confusion

Stage 6 (early–late 20s): intimacy versus isolation

Stage 7 (late 20s–50s): generativity versus stagnation

Stage 8 (late adulthood): integrity versus despair

Early life span theorists, including Erikson, saw their models of development as universal, applying equally well to all groups of people. This idea has been the target of much criticism, with suggestions that the traditional models are based on the experiences of Anglo, White, heterosexual, middle-class men and do not apply well to members of other groups. This criticism has led to a number of life cycle models for specific groups, such as women (Borysenko, 1996), gay and lesbian persons (e.g., Troiden, 1989), and African Americans (Cross, Parham, & Black, 1991). Life span theories have also been criticized for failing to deal with historical time and the cohort effects on human behavior that arise when groups of persons born in the same historical time share cultural influences and historical events at the same period in their lives.

These criticisms have helped to stimulate development of the life course perspective in sociology. This relatively new perspective conceptualizes the life course as a social, rather than psychological, phenomenon that is nonetheless unique for each individual, with some common life course markers, or transitions, related to shared social and historical contexts (George, 1993). Glen Elder Jr. (1998) and Tamara Hareven (2000) have been major forces in the development of the life course perspective. In its current state, there are six major themes in this perspective: interplay of human lives and historical time; biological, psychological, and social timing of human lives; linked or interdependent lives; human capacity for choice making; diversity in life course trajectories; and developmental risk and protection. As you may recall, the life course perspective is the conceptual framework for the companion volume to this book.

The life course perspective would suggest that the timing of young adult transition markers for Bethany McKinley has been influenced by historical trends toward increasing levels of education and delayed marriage. It would also call attention to the impact of the global economic recession that began in December 2007 on Stanley's occupational trajectory. This perspective would emphasize how the life course trajectories of Stanley, Marcia, Bethany, and Ruth are intertwined, and how what happens in one generation reverberates up and down the extended family line. For example, Stanley, Marcia, and Bethany reorganized their work and family lives to care for Ruth after her stroke. Give some thought to how their life journeys might have been different if Ruth had not required care at that time. Or imagine what decision Bethany might be making about school if Marcia was in stronger health. This notion that families are linked across generations by both opportunity and misfortune is a central idea of the life course perspective, but you may also recognize it as consistent with the system perspective's emphasis on interdependence. The evolving life course model respects the idea of role transition that is so central

to the developmental perspective, but it also recognizes the multiplicity of interacting factors that contribute to diversity in the timing and experience of these transitions.

Here is how the criteria for evaluating theories apply to the developmental perspective:

• *Coherence and conceptual clarity.* Classical developmental theory's notion of life stages is internally consistent and conceptually clear. Theorists have been able to build on each other's work in a coherent manner. Still in its early stages, the life course perspective has developed some coherence and beginning clarity about the major concepts. When viewing these two developmental streams together, contradictions appear in terms of universality versus diversity in life span/life course development.

• *Testability and evidence of empirical support.* Many of Erikson's ideas have been employed and verified in empirical research, but until recently, much of developmental research has been based on White, heterosexual, middle-class males. Another concern is that by defining normal as average, developmental research fails to capture the lifeworlds of groups who deviate even moderately from the average, or even to capture the broad range of behavior considered normal. Thus, empirical support for the developmental perspective is based to some extent on statistical masking of diversity. The life course perspective has offered a glimpse of diversity, however, because it has been developed, in general, from the results of longitudinal research, which follows the same people over an extended period of time. The benefit of longitudinal research is that it clarifies whether differences between age groups are really based on developmental differences or whether they reflect cohort effects from living in particular cultures at particular historical times. There is a growing body of longitudinal research in the life course tradition (see Elder & Giele, 2009).

• *Comprehensiveness.* The developmental perspective, when both theoretical streams are taken together, gets relatively high marks for comprehensiveness. Both the life span and the life course streams recognize human behavior as an outcome of complex interactions of biological, psychological, and social factors, although most theorists in both streams pay little attention to the spiritual dimension. The traditional life span approach pays too little attention to the political, economic, and cultural environments of human behavior; the life course perspective pays too little attention to psychological factors. Both approaches attend to the dimension of time, in terms of linear time, but the life course perspective attends to time in a more comprehensive manner, by emphasizing the role of historical time in human behavior. Indeed, the developmental perspective is the only one of the eight perspectives discussed here that makes time a major focus.

• *Diversity and power.* The early life span models were looking for universal stages of human development and did not attend to issues of diversity. More recent life span models have paid more attention to diversity, and diversity of pathways through life is a major theme in the life course perspective. Likewise, the traditional life span approach did not take account of power relationships, with the possible exception of power dynamics in the parent–child relationship. Moreover, traditional life span models are based on the average White, middle-class, heterosexual, Anglo-Saxon male and ignore the worlds of members of nondominant groups. Newer models of life span development have attempted to correct for that failure. Daniel Levinson's (1996) study of women's lives is noteworthy in that regard; it includes a sample of women diversified by race and social class and acknowledges the impact of gender power differentials on women's development. The life course perspective recognizes patterns of advantage and disadvantage in life course trajectories, and life course researchers have done considerable work on the accumulation of advantage and disadvantage over the life course (see Ferraro & Shippee, 2009).

• *Usefulness for social work practice.* Erikson's theory has often been used for assessment purposes in social work practice, and in a positive sense, the theory can aid indirectly in the identification of potential personal and social developmental resources. Traditional life span theories should be applied, however, only with recognition of the ethnocentrism expressed in them. They have traditionally suggested, for example, that there is one right way to raise a

child, one "appropriate" type of relationship with the family of origin, and one "healthy" way to develop intimate relationships in adulthood. Although it is harder to extrapolate practice principles from the more complex, still-emerging life course perspective, it seems more promising for understanding diverse persons in diverse environments. It suggests that individuals must always be assessed within familial, cultural, and historical contexts. Overall, the developmental perspective can be viewed as optimistic. Most people face difficult transitions, life crises, and developmental or other challenges at some point, and many people have been reassured to hear that their struggle is "typical." Because the developmental perspective sees individuals as having the possibility to rework their inner experiences, as well as their family relationships, clients may be assisted in finding new strategies for getting their lives back on course. For example, Stanley McKinley could explore untapped talents and interests that might be used to get his occupational career moving again.

SOCIAL BEHAVIORAL PERSPECTIVE

The hospice social worker observed Bethany McKinley's warm and gentle interaction with her grandmother, Ruth. Therefore, she wasn't surprised later to hear Bethany describe Ruth as kind. She imagined that Ruth modeled kind behavior as she cared for Bethany when she was a young child. She also observed that Stanley, Marcia, and Bethany seemed to reinforce kind behavior in each other. She noticed how Stanley and Bethany put their arms around Marcia when she began to cry. The social worker was also struck by statements by both Stanley and Marcia that seem to indicate that they have lost confidence in their ability to make things happen in their lives. She understood how recent events could have undermined their confidence, but she was curious whether she had simply caught them on a down day or if, indeed, they no longer have expectations of being able to improve their situation. Viewing the McKinley family from a social behavioral perspective (see Exhibit 2.9) can lead to such assessment and questions.

Theories in the **social behavioral perspective,** sometimes called the social learning perspective, suggest that human behavior is learned as individuals interact with their environments. But behaviorists disagree among themselves about the processes by which behavior is learned. Over time, three major versions of behavioral theory have been presented, proposing different mechanisms by which learning occurs:

1. **Classical conditioning theory,** also known as respondent conditioning, sees behavior as learned through association, when a naturally occurring stimulus (unconditioned stimulus) is paired with a neutral stimulus (conditioned stimulus). This approach is usually traced to a classic experiment by Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov, who showed, first, that dogs naturally salivate (unconditioned response) to meat powder on the tongue (unconditioned stimulus). Then, a ringing bell (conditioned stimulus) was paired with the meat powder a number of times. Eventually, the dog salivated (conditioned response) to the ringing of the bell (conditioned stimulus). In other words, an initially neutral stimulus comes to produce a particular behavioral response after it is repeatedly paired with

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- Human behavior is learned when individuals interact with the environment.
- All human behavior is learned by the same principles of learning: association of environmental stimuli, reinforcement, imitation, and personal expectations and meaning.
- All human problems can be formulated as undesirable behavior.
- All behavior can be defined and changed.

▲ **Exhibit 2.9**   Big Ideas of the Social Behavioral Perspective

another stimulus of significance. Classical conditioning plays a role in understanding many problems that social work clients experience. For example, a woman with an alcohol abuse problem may experience urges to drink when in a location where she often engaged in drinking alcohol before getting sober. Anxiety disorders are also often conditioned; for example, a humiliating experience with public speaking may lead to a deep-seated and long-lasting fear of it, which can result in anxiety attacks in situations where the person has to speak publicly. This approach looks for antecedents of behavior—stimuli that precede behavior—as the mechanism for learning.

2.   **Operant conditioning theory,** sometimes known as instrumental conditioning, sees behavior as the result of reinforcement. It is built on the work of two American psychologists, John B. Watson and B. F. Skinner. In operant conditioning, behavior is learned as it is strengthened or weakened by the reinforcement (rewards and punishments) it receives or, in other words, by the

▲ **Photo 1.4** Classical conditioning is traced to an experiment Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov performed with dogs.

consequences of the behavior. Behaviors are strengthened when they are followed by positive consequences and weakened when they are followed by negative consequences. A classic experiment demonstrated that if a pigeon is given a food pellet each time it touches a lever, over time the pigeon learns to touch the lever to receive a food pellet. This approach looks for consequences—what comes after the behavior—as the mechanism for learning behavior. We all use operant conditioning as we go about our daily lives. We use *positive reinforcers,* such as smiles or praise, to reward behaviors that we find pleasing, in the hopes of strengthening those behaviors. *Negative reinforcers* are also used regularly in social life to stop or avoid unpleasant behavior. For example, the adolescent girl cleans her room to avoid parental complaints. Avoiding the complaints reinforces the room-cleaning behavior.

3.   **Cognitive social learning theory,** also known as cognitive behavioral theory or social cognitive theory, with Albert Bandura as its chief contemporary proponent, suggests that behavior is also learned by imitation, observation, beliefs, and expectations. In this view, the "learner" is not passively manipulated by elements of the environment but can use cognitive processes to learn behaviors. Observing and imitating models is a pervasive method for learning human behavior. Bandura (1977a, 1986) proposes that human behavior is also driven by beliefs and expectations. He suggests that **self-efficacy** (a sense of personal competence) and **efficacy expectation** (an expectation that one can personally accomplish a goal) play an important role in motivation and human behavior. Bandura (2001, 2002) has recently extended his theory of self-efficacy to propose three models of **agency** (the capacity to intentionally make things happen): *personal agency* of the individual actor, *proxy agency* in which people reach goals by influencing others to act on their behalf, and *collective agency* in which people act cooperatively to reach a goal.

Although the different streams of social behavioral theorizing disagree about the mechanisms by which behavioral learning occurs, there is agreement that differences in behavior occur when the same learning processes occur
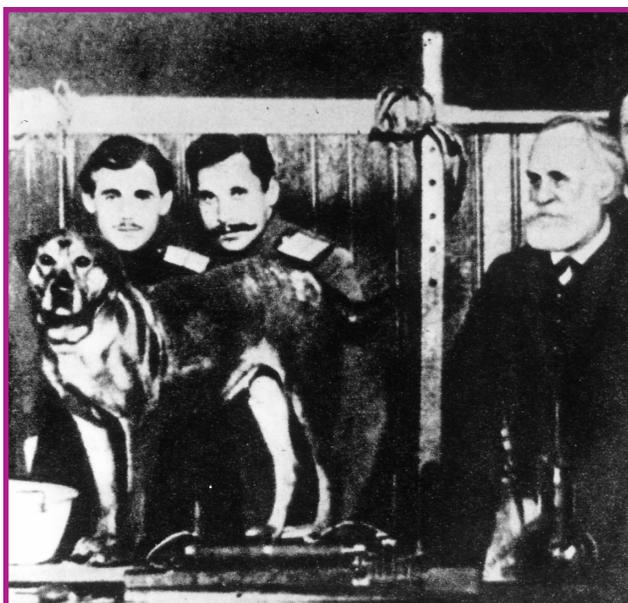
in different environments. In this perspective, all human problems of living can be defined in terms of undesirable behaviors, and all behaviors can be defined, measured, and changed.

This is how the social behavioral perspective rates on the criteria for evaluating theories:

● *Coherence and conceptual clarity.* Although there are disagreements about the mechanisms of learning among the various streams of the social behavioral perspective, within each stream, ideas are logically developed in a consistent manner. The social behavioral perspective gets high marks for conceptual clarity; concepts are very clearly defined in each of the streams.

● *Testability and evidence of empirical support.* Social behavioral concepts are easily measured for empirical investigation because theorizing has been based, in very large part, on laboratory research. This characteristic is also a drawback of the social behavioral perspective, however, because laboratory experiments by design eliminate much of the complexity of person–environment configurations. Furthermore, all versions have had their "share of confirmations and disconfirmations" (Monte & Sollod, 2003, p. 578). In general, however, it seems fair to say that all streams of the social behavioral perspective have attained a relatively high degree of empirical support.

● *Comprehensiveness.* Overall, the social behavioral perspective sacrifices multidimensional understanding to gain logical consistency and testability. Although it accepts biology's impact on learning, little attention is paid to biology, except for the recent work of Bandura (2001, 2002), which recognizes the role of biology in human behavior, noting that in most spheres, while biology sets constraints on behavior, it also permits a wide range of behaviors. It is also important to note that contemporary research on neurophysiology and the immune system indicate that classical conditioning plays a role in physiological functioning (Farmer, 2009; Pert, 1997). Cognition and emotion are not included in theories of classical and operant conditioning, but they do receive attention in social cognitive theory. Spiritual factors are considered unmeasurable and irrelevant in classical and operant conditioning theories. They would be relevant only to the extent that they reinforce behavior. For this reason, many theorists and social workers see social behaviorism as dehumanizing. Although environment plays a large role in the social behavioral perspective, the view of the environment is quite limited in classical and operant conditioning. Typically, the social behavioral perspective searches for the one environmental factor, or contingency, that has reinforced one specific behavior. The identified contingency is usually in the micro system (such as the family) or sometimes in the meso system (e.g., a school classroom), but these systems are not typically put in social, economic, political, or historical contexts. One exception is Bandura's social cognitive theory, which acknowledges broad systemic influences on the development of gender roles. Social work scholars applying behavioral principles have also made notable efforts to incorporate a broader view of the environments of human behavior (Mattaini, 1997). Time is important in this perspective only in terms of the juxtaposition of stimuli and reinforcement. The social behaviorist is careful to analyze antecedents and consequences of behavior.

● *Diversity and power.* The social behavioral perspective receives low marks in terms of both diversity and power issues. Very little attention has been paid to recognizing diversity in human behaviors, and it is assumed that the same mechanisms of learning work equally well for all groups. Likewise, the social behavioral perspective attends little to issues of power and oppression. Operant behavioral theory recommends rewards over punishment, but it does not account for the coercion and oppression inherent in power relationships at every system level. It is quite possible, therefore, for the professional behavior modifier to be in service to oppressive forces. On the other hand, behavioral methods can be used to serve social work values (Thyer & Wodarski, 2007). Bandura (1986) writes specifically about power as related to gender roles. He and other theorists note that persons in nondominant positions are particularly vulnerable to **learned helplessness** (see Mikulincer, 1994; Seligman, 1992) in which a person's prior experience with environmental forces has led to low self-efficacy and expectations of efficacy. You may find the concepts of self-efficacy and learned helplessness particularly useful in thinking about both Stanley and Marcia McKinley's situations. Both have experienced some setbacks that may be leading them to expect less of themselves.

- *Usefulness for social work practice.* A major strength of the social behavioral perspective is the ease with which principles of behavior modification can be extrapolated, and it is probably a rare person who has not used social behavioral principles of action at some point. Social workers and psychologists have used social behavioral methods primarily to modify undesirable behavior of individuals. For example, systematic desensitization techniques are used to diminish or eradicate anxiety symptoms. Parent training programs often teach parents how to make more effective use of reinforcements to strengthen positive behaviors and weaken negative behaviors in their children. Social workers often model how to enact new behaviors for their clients. Dialectical behavior therapy teaches adaptive coping related to emotion regulation, distress tolerance, cognitive distortions, and interpersonal communication (J. Walsh, 2010). However, behavioral methods have not been used effectively to produce social reform. Richard Stuart (1989) reminds us that behavior modification was once a "social movement" that appealed to young social reformers who were more interested in changing social conditions that produce atypical behaviors than in changing systems for managing atypical behavior. Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948) was the impetus for attempts by these young reformers to build nonpunitive communities, which represented significant modification of social conditions (see Kinkade, 1973; Wheeler, 1973). Indeed, Bandura's (2002) recent conceptualization of proxy agency and collective agency has implications for social reform.

HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Consistent with the social work code of ethics, the hospice social worker who is making contact with the McKinley family believes in the dignity and worth of all humans. Her experiences as a hospice social worker have reinforced her belief that each person is unique, and even though she has worked with over 100 hospice patients, she expects Ruth McKinley's story to be in some ways unlike any other story she has heard. She is eager to hear more about how Ruth sees her situation and whether there are any things she would like to change in the limited time she has left. The social worker takes note of strengths she sees in the McKinley family, their love and kindness toward each other and their courage in the face of an accumulation of stress. She wants to hear more about how Stanley, Marcia, and Bethany are thinking about their relationships with Ruth and whether there are any changes they would like to make in that relationship during Ruth's final days. Her thoughts and planned course of action reflect the humanistic perspective, summarized in Exhibit 2.10.

The humanistic perspective is often called the "third force" of psychology, because it was developed in reaction to the determinism found in early versions of both the psychodynamic (behavior as intrapsychically determined) and behavioral (behavior as externally determined) perspectives (Sollod et al., 2009). We are using the term **humanistic perspective** to include humanistic psychology and existential psychology, both of which emphasize the individual's

- Each person is unique and has value.
- Each person is responsible for the choices he or she makes within the limits of freedom.
- People always have the capacity to change themselves, even to make radical change.
- Human behavior can be understood only from the vantage point of the phenomenal self—from the internal frame of reference of the individual.
- Behaving in ways that are not consistent with the true self causes anxiety.
- Human behavior is driven by a desire for growth, personal meaning, and competence, and by a need to experience a bond with others.

▲ **Exhibit 2.10** Big Ideas of the Humanistic Perspective

freedom of action and search for meaning. We also extend the term to include transpersonal theory, which focuses on the spiritual aspects of human experience; the existential sociology tradition, which presents as a dominant theme the idea that people are simultaneously free and constrained, both active and passive agents; and the growing movement of positive psychology.

Like social constructionism, the humanistic perspective is often traced to the German phenomenological philosopher Edmund Husserl (Krill, 1986). It is also influenced by a host of existential philosophers, beginning with Søren Kierkegaard and including Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Martin Buber, and Paul Tillich. Other early contributors to existential psychology include Viktor Frankl, Rollo May, Carl Jung, R. D. Laing, Karen Horney, and Erich Fromm. Perhaps the most influential contributions to humanistic psychology were made by Carl Rogers (1951) and Abraham Maslow (1962). Maslow is considered one of the founders of *transpersonal psychology*, which he labeled as the "fourth force" of psychology, and Ken Wilber (2006) has developed an increasingly influential transpersonal theory, which is discussed in Chapter 6.

Existential psychology, which developed out of the chaos and despair in Europe during and after World War II, presented four primary themes (Krill, 1996):

1. Each person is unique and has value.

2. Suffering is a necessary part of human growth.

3. Personal growth results from staying in the immediate moment.

4. Personal growth takes a sense of commitment.

It is the emphasis on the necessity for suffering that sets existentialism apart from humanism.

Abraham Maslow (1962), a humanistic psychologist, was drawn to understand "peak experiences," or intense mystical moments of feeling connected to other people, nature, or a divine being. Maslow found peak experiences to occur often among self-actualizing people, or people who were expressing their innate potentials. Maslow developed a theory of a **hierarchy of needs,** which suggests that higher needs cannot emerge in full motivational force until lower needs have been at least partially satisfied. Physiological needs are at the bottom of the hierarchy, and the need for self-actualization is at the top:

1. *Physiological needs:* hunger, thirst, sex

2. *Safety needs:* avoidance of pain and anxiety; desire for security

3. *Belongingness and love needs:* affection, intimacy

4. *Esteem needs:* self-respect, adequacy, mastery

5. *Self-actualization:* to be fully what one can be; altruism, beauty, creativity, justice

Carl Rogers (1951), another major humanistic psychologist, was interested in the capacity of humans to change in therapeutic relationships. He began his professional career at the Rochester Child Guidance Center, where he worked with social workers who had been trained at the Philadelphia School of Social Work. He has acknowledged the influence of Otto Rank, Jessie Taft, and the social workers at the Rochester agency on his thinking about the importance of responding to client feelings (Hart, 1970). He came to believe that humans have vast internal resources for self-understanding and self-directed behavior. He emphasized, therefore, the dignity and worth of each individual, and presented the ideal

interpersonal conditions under which people come to use their internal resources to become "more fully functioning." These have become known as the core conditions of the therapeutic process: empathy, warmth, and genuineness.

Maslow is said to have coined the term "positive psychology" when he used it as a chapter title in his 1954 book, *Motivation and Personality.* **Positive psychology** is a relatively recent branch of psychology that undertakes the scientific study of people's strengths and virtues and promotes optimal functioning of individuals and communities. Proponents of positive psychology argue that psychology has paid too much attention to human pathology and not enough to human strengths and virtues (see C. Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Martin Seligman (1991, 1998, 2002), one of the authors of the concept of "learned helplessness," has been at the forefront of positive psychology, contributing the important concept of "learned optimism." Positive psychologists argue that prevention of mental illness is best accomplished by promoting human strength and competence. They have identified a set of human strengths that promote well-being and buffer against mental illness, including optimism, courage, hope, perseverance, honesty, work ethic, and interpersonal skills (C. Snyder & Lopez, 2007). The positive psychology approach is drawing on both Western and Eastern worldviews. A large focus on hope is rooted in Western thinking (McKnight, Snyder, & Lopez, 2007); whereas emphasis on balance, compassion, and harmony comes more from Eastern thinking (Pedrotti, Snyder, & Lopez, 2007).

This is how the humanistic perspective rates on the criteria for evaluating theories:

- *Coherence and conceptual clarity.* Theories in the humanistic perspective are often criticized for being vague and highly abstract, with concepts such as "being" and "phenomenal self." The language of transpersonal theories is particularly abstract, with discussion of self-transcendence and higher states of consciousness. Indeed, theorists in the humanistic perspective, in general, have not been afraid to sacrifice coherence to gain what they see as a more complete understanding of human behavior. The positive psychology movement is working to bring greater consistency and coherence to humanistic concepts.

- *Testability and evidence of empirical support.* As might be expected, empirically minded scholars have not been attracted to the humanistic perspective, and consequently until recently there was little empirical literature to support the perspective. A notable exception is the clinical side of Rogers's theory. Rogers began a rigorous program of empirical investigation of the therapeutic process, and such research has provided strong empirical support for his conceptualization of the necessary conditions for the therapeutic relationship: warmth, empathy, and genuineness (Sollod et al., 2009). The positive psychology movement is focusing, with much success, on producing empirical support for the role of human strengths and virtues in human well-being.

- *Comprehensiveness.* The internal life of the individual is the focus of the humanistic perspective, and it is strong in consideration of both psychological and spiritual dimensions of the person. With its emphasis on search for meaning, the humanistic perspective is the only perspective presented in this chapter to explicitly recognize the role of spirituality in human behavior. (Other theories of spirituality are discussed in Chapter 6.) In addition, Maslow recognizes the importance of satisfaction of basic biological needs. As might be expected, most theorists in the humanistic tradition give limited attention to the environments of human behavior. Taking the lead from existential philosophers, R. D. Laing sees humans as interrelated with their worlds and frowns on the word *environment* because it implies a fragmented person. In discussions of human behavior, however, Laing (1967, 1969) emphasizes the insane situations in which human behavior is enacted. Erich Fromm (1941) was heavily influenced by Karl Marx and is much more inclusive of environment than other theorists in the humanistic perspective, emphasizing industrialization, Protestant reformation, capitalism, and technological revolution as alienating contexts against which humans search for meaning. Although existential sociologists emphasize the importance of feelings and emotions, they also focus on the problematic nature of social life under modernization (see Fontana, 1984). A dehumanizing world is implicit in the works of Maslow and Rogers, but neither theorist focuses explicitly on the environments of human behavior, nor do they acknowledge that some environments are more dehumanizing

than others. The positive psychology movement has begun to examine positive environments that can promote human strengths and virtues, including school, work, and community environments (C. Snyder & Lopez, 2007).

• *Diversity and power.* The humanistic perspective, with its almost singular consideration of an internal frame of reference, devotes more attention to individual differences than to differences between groups. The works of Fromm and Horney are striking exceptions to this statement. Karen Horney identified culturally based gender differences at a time when psychology either ignored gender or took a "biology as destiny" approach. She also lost favor among other psychodynamic theorists by reworking Freud's conceptualization of the Oedipus conflict and of feminine psychology to produce a more gender-sensitive perspective (Horney, 1939, 1967). In general, far too little attention is given in the humanistic tradition to the processes by which institutional oppression influences the **phenomenal self**—the individual's subjectively felt and interpreted experience of "who I am." Like the social constructionist perspective, however, the humanistic perspective is sometimes quite strong in giving voice to experiences of members of nondominant groups. With the emphasis on the phenomenal self, members of nondominant groups are more likely to have preferential input into the telling of their own stories. The social worker's intention to hear and honor the stories of each member of the McKinley family may be a novel experience for each of them, and she may, indeed, hear very different stories from what she expects to hear. Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby (1970) illustrate this emphasis in their identification of the different lifeworlds of members of groups of different socioeconomic statuses in a Mexican village. Most significantly, Rogers developed his respect for the personal self, and consequently his client-centered approach to therapy, when he realized that his perceptions of the lifeworlds of his low-income clients in the Child Guidance Clinic were very different from their own perceptions (Hart, 1970).

• *Usefulness for social work.* If the social constructionist perspective gives new meaning to the old social work adage, "Begin where the client is," it is social work's historical involvement in the development of the humanistic perspective that gave original meaning to the adage. It is limited in terms of providing specific interventions, but it is consistent with social work's value of the dignity and worth of the individual. The humanistic perspective suggests that social workers begin by developing an understanding of how the client views the situation and, with its emphasis on the individual drive for growth and competence, it recommends a "strengths" rather than "pathology" approach to practice (Saleebey, 2006). George Vaillant (2002), a research psychiatrist, suggests that this attention to strengths is what distinguishes social workers from other helping professionals. From this perspective, then, we might note the strong commitment to helping one another displayed by the McKinley family, which can be the basis for successful intervention. At the organizational level, the humanistic perspective has been used by organizational theorists, such as Douglas McGregor (1960), to prescribe administrative actions that focus on employee well-being as the best route to organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Positive psychology is beginning to propose guidelines for developing positive environments in schools, workplaces, and communities.

Critical Thinking Questions 2.2

When it comes to theory or perspective, some people are one-theory/perspective people and find that one theory/perspective does an adequate job of explaining the world. Other people can be described as cluster people: They can identify about three theories (or perspectives) that work well for them in most situations. Still other people can best be described as multi-theoretical—they think the world calls for a larger range of theories (perspectives) than the cluster folks. After reading this chapter, how would you characterize your current thinking about which of these groups you fall into? What factors do you think influence your theoretical preferences?

THE MERITS OF MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

You can see that each of these perspectives puts a different lens on the unfolding story of the McKinley family, and that each has been used to guide social work practice over time. But do these different ways of thinking make you more effective when you meet with clients like the McKinleys? We think so. It was suggested in Chapter 1 that each situation can be examined from several perspectives, and that using a variety of perspectives brings more dimensions of the situation into view. Eileen Gambrill (2006) has suggested that all of us, whether new or experienced social workers, have biases that predispose us to do too little thinking, rather than too much, about the practice situations we confront. We are, she asserts, particularly prone to ignore information that is contrary to our hypotheses about situations. Consequently, we tend to end our search for understanding prematurely. One step we can take to prevent this premature closure is to think about practice situations from multiple theoretical perspectives.

The fields of psychology and sociology offer a variety of patterned ways of thinking about changing person–environment configurations, ways that have been worked out over time to assist in understanding human behavior. They are tools that can help us make sense of the situations we encounter. We do not mean to suggest that all eight of the perspectives discussed in this chapter will be equally useful, or even useful at all, in all situations. But each of these perspectives will be useful in some situations that you encounter as a social worker, and therefore should be in your general knowledge base. As a competent professional, you must view the quest for adequate breadth and depth in your knowledge base as an ongoing, lifelong challenge and responsibility. We hope that over time you will begin to use these multiple perspectives in an integrated fashion so that you can see the many dimensions—the contradictions as well as the consistencies—in stories like the McKinley family's. We encourage you to be flexible and reflective in your thinking and your "doing" throughout your career. We remind you, again, to use general knowledge only to generate hypotheses to be tested in specific situations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The eight perspectives on human behavior discussed in this chapter suggest a variety of principles for social work assessment and intervention:

- In assessment, consider any recent role transitions that may be affecting the client. Assist families and groups to renegotiate unsatisfactory role structures. Develop networks of support for persons experiencing challenging role transitions.

- In assessment, consider power arrangements and forces of oppression, and the alienation that emanates from them. Assist in the development of advocacy efforts to challenge patterns of dominance, when possible. Be aware of the power dynamics in your relationships with clients; when working with nonvoluntary clients, speak directly about the limits and uses of your power.

- In assessment, consider the patterns of exchange in the social support networks of individual clients, families, and organizations, using ecomaps for network mapping when useful. Assist individuals, families, and organizations to renegotiate unsatisfactory patterns of exchange, when possible. Consider how social policy can increase the rewards for prosocial behavior.

- Begin your work by understanding how clients view their situations. Engage clients in thinking about the environments in which these constructions of self and situations have developed. When working in situations characterized by differences in belief systems, assist members to engage in sincere discussions and to negotiate lines of action.

- Assist clients in expressing emotional conflicts and in understanding how these are related to past events, when appropriate. Help them develop self-awareness and self-control, where needed. Assist clients in locating and using needed environmental resources.

- In assessment, consider the familial, cultural, and historical contexts in the timing and experience of developmental transitions. Recognize human development as unique and lifelong.

- In assessment, consider the variety of processes by which behavior is learned. Be sensitive to the possibility of learned helplessness when clients lack motivation for change. Consider issues of social justice and fairness before engaging in behavior modification.

- Be aware of the potential for significant differences between your assessment of the situation and the client's own assessment; value self-determination. Focus on strengths rather than pathology.

KEY TERMS

agency
boundary
chaos theory
classical conditioning theory
cognitive social learning theory
conflict perspective
critical theorists
developmental perspective
ecomaps
efficacy expectation

empowerment theories
feedback mechanism
feminist theories
hierarchy of needs
humanistic perspective
learned helplessness
operant conditioning theory
phenomenal self
pluralistic theory of social conflict
positive psychology

psychodynamic perspective
rational choice perspective
role
self-efficacy
social behavioral perspective
social constructionist perspective
social exchange theory
social network theory
systems perspective

ACTIVE LEARNING

1. Reread the case study of the intergenerational stresses in the McKinley family. Next, review the big ideas of the eight theoretical perspectives in Exhibits 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, and 2.10. Choose three specific big ideas from these exhibits that you think are most helpful in thinking about the McKinley family. For example, you might choose this big idea from the systems perspective: Each part of the system affects all other parts and the system as a whole. You might also choose this big idea from the humanistic perspective: Human behavior is driven by a desire for growth, personal meaning, and competence, and by a need to experience a bond with others. Likewise, you might choose another specific idea from any of the perspectives. The point is to choose the three big ideas that you find most useful. Now, in a small group, compare notes with three or four classmates about which big ideas were chosen. Try to determine why these particular choices, and not others, were made by each of your classmates.

2. Break into eight small groups, with each group assigned one of the theoretical perspectives described in the chapter. Each group's task is to briefly summarize the assigned theoretical perspective and then explain the group's interpretation of the perspective's usefulness when applied to the McKinley family or another case scenario.

3. Choose a story that interests you in a current edition of a daily newspaper. Read the story carefully and then think about which of the eight theoretical perspectives discussed in this chapter is most reflected in the story.

Conflict Theory(ies) of Deviance
www.umsl.edu/~keelr/200/conflict.html

Site presented by Robert O. Keel at the University of Missouri at St. Louis, contains information on the basic premises of conflict theory as well as specific information on radical conflict theory and pluralistic conflict theory.

Humanistic Psychology
www.ahpweb.org/aboutahp/whatis.html

Site maintained by the Association of Humanistic Psychology, contains the history of humanistic psychology, information on Carl Rogers, the humanistic view of human behavior, methods of inquiry, and humanistic psychotherapies.

Personality Theories
www.webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/perscontents.html

Site maintained by C. George Boeree at the Psychology Department of Shippensburg University, provides an electronic textbook on theories of personality, including the theories of Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Carl Jung, B. F. Skinner, Albert Bandura, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Jean Piaget.

Sociological Theories and Perspectives
www.sociosite.net/topics/theory.php

Site maintained at the University of Amsterdam, contains general information on sociological theory and specific information on a number of theories, including chaos theory, interaction theory, conflict theory, and rational choice theory.

William Alanson White Institute
www.wawhite.org

Site contains contemporary psychoanalysis journal articles, training programs, and professional meetings.