2

Theoretical Perspectives on Human Behavior

Elizabeth D. Hutchison, Leanne Wood Charlesworth, and Cory Cummings

Chapter Outline

Learning Objectives

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

2.2 Recognize the major themes of eight different perspectives on human behavior: systems, conflict, exchange and choice, social constructionist, psychodynamic, developmental, behavioral, and humanistic.

2.3 Analyze the merits of a multitheoretical approach to human behavior.

2.4 Apply knowledge of eight theoretical perspectives on human behavior to recommend guidelines for social work engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation.

CASE STUDY 2.1

END OF LIFE CARE FOR MARIA CHAVEZ

The hospice social worker met Maria Chavez during the initial psychosocial assessment at her daughter's home in a medium-sized city in the American Southwest. He had learned from the hospice administrators that Maria was diagnosed with end-stage Parkinson's disease and Parkinson's dementia. He had also learned that during a recent visit to her primary care provider, the provider had talked with Maria and her daughter about Maria's prognosis. Her condition was deteriorating quickly, and her provider recommended hospice care.

The social worker meets Maria's 65-year-old daughter, Sarah, upon entering the home. Sarah takes the social worker to a bedroom where 92-year-old Maria is lying in bed. After a few minutes of small talk, Sarah leaves the room so that the social worker and Maria can speak privately. The social worker learns during the interview that Maria moved in with Sarah after she'd lost the ability to live independently. Maria wasn't able to tell the social worker when she moved in with her daughter, but she thought it was a few weeks ago. Although Maria's short-term memory was poor, her long-term memory was vivid. She shared numerous stories about her past. Maria Chavez was born Maria Sarah Gallegos to Sarah and Raymond Gallegos in 1925 in New York City. The youngest of nine children, she grew up during the Great Depression, and her family experienced severe financial hardship when her father died in 1934. Her mother was unable to work, and she and her siblings were expected to support the family. Maria tells the social worker that during the Depression (and a bit thereafter) when she was a young teen, her mother sexually exploited her and her sisters to make money for the family. She never believed God loved her, and she was terrified she'd go to hell. The social worker made a note to ask the hospice chaplain to make a call on Maria as soon as possible.

After a few stories about her early life, Maria was tired and needed to rest. The social worker left Maria's room and continued the assessment with her daughter, Sarah, who was in the kitchen making lunch. Sarah filled the social worker in on details about her mother's family, religion, and work. First and foremost, Maria is a proud mother of five children: four daughters and one son. Juan, her only son, died in a car accident when he was 16 years old. Sarah and one other daughter live in the area, and the other two live back East: one in New York City and one in Washington, DC, where Maria once lived. Maria and her husband, Juan, moved to the Southwest in the late 1980s because Maria had many relatives in the area. After Juan died from cancer sometime in the 1990s, Sarah moved to the area to be closer to her mother. One of her sisters followed a few years later.

In addition to being a proud mother, Maria is also a devout Catholic. The social worker noticed that her faith held significance for her when he met with her in her room. He recalled seeing a large crucifix hanging on the wall, a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe in one corner of the room, and a Catholic Mass playing on her television set.

Sarah reported that her mother had enjoyed an impressive career. In 1944, Maria moved to Washington, DC, and joined the Women's Army Corps. Sarah shared memories of conversations she'd had with her mom about her work. She recalled stories her mother told about the mood of the country during World War II and mentioned that her parents met during a dance for army service members. She reported that Maria continued to work throughout her marriage, working for NASA in the 1960s and 1970s.

The social worker learned that Maria moved in with Sarah 3 years ago after multiple falls, two inpatient hospitalizations, and a recommendation from a hospital social worker that Maria could no longer safely live alone at home. Before Maria started to show increasing signs and symptoms of dementia, which are currently moderate but not severe, she named Sarah her durable power of attorney for all legal, financial, and health care decisions. Even though Maria has moderate dementia, Sarah feels obligated to get her mom's approval on financial decisions. Maria has always been frugal and focused on money, perhaps because of growing up with such economic hardship. In addition, there is a will, and the sisters are concerned that Sarah not spend too much of Maria's money. Maria still has a house that she does not want to sell, and she has a savings account. And yet Sarah reports that she is struggling to make ends meet. She is divorced and doesn't receive any financial support from her ex-husband. She says that her siblings don't provide any assistance, financially or instrumentally. She also reports that they come for visits, complain about the bad job Sarah is doing, give advice about how she could do better, and then leave.

As she talks about her current financial difficulties, Sarah starts to cry. She states that she was managing financially for the first few months after her mother moved in with her because her son, David, had moved in to be Maria's full-time caregiver. With that assistance she was able to continue working full-time as a certified

nursing assistant (CNA). Being a CNA has been a life-saver because she knows how to help her mother with all her daily living activities. However, she quit her job 6 months after her mother moved in when she learned that David was stealing Maria's anti-anxiety and pain medications. When she confronted David, she learned that he'd been using opiates and benzodiazepines for years. Sarah convinced David to go into an inpatient substance abuse treatment program where he seemed to do well. After leaving the treatment program, he moved back in with Sarah to provide care for Maria so Sarah could return to work. However, 2 months after he was discharged, David overdosed on heroin and died. Now, on top of all this, Sarah is beginning to have her own health problems, including hypertension, and type 2 diabetes. She expresses fear about her own future health and financial well-being.

—Bryan Norman

Multiple Perspectives for a Multidimensional Approach

As you think about the details of the unfolding story of Maria Chavez and her daughter, Sarah, you may discover that you have some theory or theories of your own about what is happening with them and what can and should be done to be helpful to them. If we asked you what caught your attention as you read the story, we would begin to learn something about your theory or theories of human behavior, as you have developed it or them so far. There is much information in the case material as presented, but the case may have raised questions for you as well, and left you wanting more information. What you see as gaps in the information might also tell us something about your theory or theories. Theories help us organize vast and multifaceted information. The purposes of this chapter are twofold: first, to help you identify and refine your own theory or theories of human behavior and, second, to help you think critically about commonly used formal theories of human behavior that have been developed by behavioral science scholars and used to guide social work practice.

As noted in Chapter 1, social work has a long tradition of being guided by a person and environment construct for understanding human behavior. Different theories have been considered essential to understanding person and environment in different time periods, but theory has always been an important resource for social work practice in all settings. In its 2015 Educational Policy Statement, the Council on Social Work Education reiterated the important role that theory plays in social work practice, noting the way that theory supports the development of four social work competencies. It states that "social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge" to facilitate

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

"with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities" (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, pp. 8–9).

Although different theories have been considered essential knowledge for social workers in different periods of time, there is general agreement that contemporary social workers must use a range of theories that draw on a number of disciplines to help us understand the practice situations we encounter and to see the possibilities for change. As we have come more and more to recognize that human behavior is multidimensional, we have also recognized the need for multiple disciplines and a multitheoretical framework to understand it (Bell, 2012; Melchert, 2013; Sapolsky, 2017). There are many theories from which to draw, general theories of human behavior as well as theories designed to understand the specific dimensions of person and environment covered in this book. There are also a number of ways of organizing existing theories into categories or perspectives. We have organized them into eight broad perspectives: the systems perspective, conflict perspective, exchange and choice perspective, social constructionist perspective, psychodynamic perspective, developmental perspective, behavioral perspective, and humanistic perspective. An overview of the big ideas, major concepts, and related theories of each perspective is presented in Exhibit 2.1. This exhibit can be a helpful review as you continue to learn more about human behavior.

EXHIBIT 2.1 ● Big Ideas, Major Concepts, and Related Theories of Eight Theoretical Perspectives			
Theoretical Perspective	**Big Ideas**	**Major Concepts**	**Related Theories**
Systems	- Systems are made of interrelated members 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.	- Boundary - Interactions - Interrelated parts - Feedback mechanisms - Closed system - Open system - Homeostasis - Interdependence - Mutual influence - Holistic - Complexity - Risk factors - Protective factors - Autopoietic	- General systems theory - Ecological theory - Bioecological perspective - Risk and resilience theory - Globalization theory - Autopoietic systems theory - Fuzzy set theory - Deep ecology theory
Conflict	- All social systems have inequalities in the distribution of valued resources. - Power is unequally divided, and powerful social groups impose their will on nondominant groups. - Conflict and the potential for conflict underlie unequal social relationships. - Members of nondominant groups often become alienated from society. - Social change may occur when nondominant groups recognize patterns of inequality and injustice and take action to increase their own power.	- Conflict - Dominance - Oppression - Inequality - Exploitation - Power - Capitalism - Neoliberalism - Dominant groups - Nondominant groups - Alienation - Microaggressions - Privilege - Empowerment	- Critical theory - Prosumer capitalism theory - Postcolonial theory - Neoliberalism theory - Critical race theory - Feminist theories - Intersectionality theories - Pluralistic theory of social conflict - Empowerment theories
Exchange and choice	- Individual and collective actors engage in social exchange of material and nonmaterial resources and make choices in pursuit of those resources. - Choices in social exchange are based on self-interest as well as community interest. - Choices in social exchange are based on both reason and emotion and on values, norms, and expectations.	- Resources - Choices - Social exchange - Benefits/costs - Reciprocity - Norms - Networks - Values	- Social exchange theory - Rational choice theory - Social network theory - Social capital theory - Interaction ritual chain theory - Actor-network theory - Polis model of policy analysis

Theoretical Perspective	Big Ideas	Major Concepts	Related Theories
	• Social exchange operates on a norm of reciprocity, but exchange relationships are often unbalanced. • Power comes from unequal resources in exchange.	• Expectations • Exchange network • Expectations • Social capital • Interaction ritual chain • Market model • Polis model	
Social constructionist	• People construct meaning, a sense of self, and a social world through their interactions with each other. • Social reality is created when people, in social interaction, develop shared meaning, a common understanding of their world. • There is no singular objective reality but rather the multiple realities that are created in different contexts. • Social interaction is grounded in language customs, as well as cultural and historical contexts. • People can modify meanings in the process of interaction.	• Meaning • Sense of self • Social interaction • Shared meanings • Symbols • Social constructions • Multiple realities • Subjective reality • Essentialist/ essentialism • Impression management • Human consciousness • Looking-glass self • Generalized other • Reification • Claims making • Labeling • Standpoint • Bifurcation of consciousness • Entrainment • Re-storying	• Symbolic interaction theory • Postmodern theories • Phenomenological sociology • Standpoint theory • Queer theory • Affect theory • Solution-focused practice theory • Narrative practice theory
Psychodynamic	• 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 throughout life.	• Needs • Drives • Emotions • Eros/Thanatos • Mastery • Conscious • Preconscious	• Ego psychology • Object relations theory • Self psychology • Relational-cultural theory • Drive or instinct theory • Topographical theory of the mind

(Continued)

EXHIBIT 2.1 ●   (Continued)

Theoretical Perspective	Big Ideas	Major Concepts	Related Theories
	• Individuals may become overwhelmed by internal or external demands. • Individuals frequently use ego defense mechanisms to avoid becoming overwhelmed by internal or external demands.	• Unconscious • Connectedness • Id • Ego • Superego • Ego strengths • Adaptation • Defense mechanisms	• Structural model of the mind • Psychosexual stage theory • Attachment theory
Developmental	• 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.	• Developmental stages • Developmental tasks • Epigenetic principle • Psychosocial crisis • Cohort effect • Historical trends • Developmental transitions • Interdependent lives • Diversity in life course trajectories • Developmental risk/developmental protection • Cumulative advantage • Cumulative disadvantage • Turning point	• Life span/life cycle theory • Epigenetic model of human development • Psychosexual stage theory (Freud) • Psychosocial stage theory (Erikson) • Cognitive development theory (Piaget) • Moral development theories (Kohlberg & Gilligan) • Life course perspective • Social identity theory
Behavioral	• Human behavior is learned when individuals interact with the environment. • Human behavior is learned through different mechanisms of learning, including association of environmental stimuli, reinforcement, imitation, and personal expectations and meaning. • All human problems can be formulated as undesirable behavior. • All behavior can be defined and changed.	• Respondent conditioning • Unconditioned stimulus/conditioned stimulus • Unconditioned response/conditioned response • Instrumental conditioning • Reinforcement • Reward/punishment • Behavioral consequence/behavioral antecedent	• Classical conditioning • Operant conditioning • Cognitive social learning theory • Cognitive behavioral theory/therapy • Dialectical behavioral theory/therapy • Cognitive processing theory/therapy

Theoretical Perspective	Big Ideas	Major Concepts	Related Theories
		• Observation • Expectation • Model • Self-efficacy • Efficacy expectation • Agency (personal, proxy, collective) • Learned helplessness • Systematic desensitization	
Humanistic	• 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 internal frame of reference of the person. • Human behavior is driven by a desire for growth, personal meaning, and competence and by a need to experience a bond with others.	• Freedom of action • Search for meaning • Mystical moments • Hierarchy of needs • Physiological needs • Safety needs • Belonging needs • Esteem needs • Self-actualization • Self-understanding • Self-directed behavior • Dignity and worth of individuals • Empathy • Warmth • Genuineness • Suffering • Personal growth • Human strengths • Human virtues • Human competence • Learned optimism • Core capabilities • Phenomenal self	• Humanistic psychology • Existential psychology • Positive psychology • Capabilities approach • Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs • Transpersonal theory • Rogers's client-centered approach to therapy • Posthumanist approach • Humanistic theory of organizations • Appreciative inquiry theory

We have selected these eight perspectives for a number of reasons. Each has a wide range of applications across dimensions of human behavior and is used in empirical research. Each has been reconceptualized and extended over time to keep current with rapid knowledge development. Each paid little attention to diversity, and most paid little attention to inequality in early versions, but each has evolved over time to address both diversity and inequality. Each is European American in heritage, but in recent years, each has been

influenced by thinking in other regions of the world, although there is still a need for much more international input. Some of the perspectives had multidisciplinary roots in their early versions, and each has benefited by collaboration across disciplines in more recent refinement and elaboration. Some blurring of the lines between perspectives has begun to occur. 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 can see, theory, like other aspects of human behavior, is ever-changing.

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

In this chapter, in addition to presenting an overview of 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. This analysis is in keeping with the recommendations in the 2015 CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards for Competencies 6, 7, 8, and 9, noted earlier, that call for social workers to "critically evaluate and apply" theories of human behavior (pp. 8–9). With the analysis of testability and empirical support, it assists with the development of Competency 4: Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice (p. 8). With the analysis of diversity and power arrangements, it assists with the development of Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice and Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice (pp. 7–8). The discussion of

usefulness for social work practice includes discussion of policy implications, helping to develop Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice (p. 8). It also analyzes whether the theoretical perspective can be used in practice in a way that is consistent with the NASW Code of Ethics, thereby assisting in the development of Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior (p. 7).

Systems Perspective

When you read the case study at the beginning of this chapter, you may have thought of it as a story about a family system—a story about Maria, Sarah, David, and Sarah's unnamed siblings—rather than "Maria Chavez's story," even though the hospice case file reads "Maria Chavez." You may have noted how Maria's, Sarah's, and David's lives have been interrelated in recent years and the impact each has had on the overall well-being of the family. You may be thinking about the changing health statuses of Maria, Sarah, and David over time, and about how Sarah and David kept adjusting their caregiving roles as other circumstances in the family changed. 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 have questions about whether sibling relationships can be enhanced to provide more financial and emotional support for Sarah as she cares for Maria. Given the importance of religion in Maria's life, besides a referral to the hospice chaplain, it is essential to explore the relationship that Sarah and Maria have with the neighborhood Catholic parish and what resources the parish can offer to the family. Medicare coverage for hospice care is an important resource for the family and will bring important support services for both Maria and Sarah. These are some of the ideas that the systems perspective suggests for understanding what is happening in the Maria Chavez family.

The **systems perspective** sees human behavior as the outcome of interactions within and among systems of interrelated parts. Its roots are very multidisciplinary, and there are many theoretical variations. 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**—processes that use the conditions of one component to regulate the functions of another or

by which outputs of the system are fed back as inputs in a circular manner—to develop military and communication technologies. The development of the computer and sophisticated computer models for analyzing information has influenced continuous revision of the systems perspective. Exhibit 2.2 provides a visual representation of the systems perspective, and Exhibit 2.1 lists the big ideas, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

Social workers were attracted to the systems perspective in the 1960s, and *general systems theory* was the dominant theoretical perspective in the social work literature during the 1960s and 1970s. This approach was based primarily on the work of biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, who defined systems as "sets of elements standing in interrelation" (von Bertalanffy, 1969, p. 38). He proposed that any element is best understood by considering its interactions with its constituent parts as well as its interactions with larger systems of which it is a part. For example, Maria Chavez's family is best understood by considering the interactions among the family members as well as the interactions the family has with other social systems, such as their neighborhood, the health care system, and workplace systems. Von Bertalanffy identified two types of systems: closed systems and open systems. A *closed system* is isolated from other systems in its environment. An *open system* is in constant interaction with other systems. He emphasized that

feedback mechanisms produce both stability (homeostasis) and change within and across systems. Socially and geographically isolated families and communities could be considered examples of closed systems. Internet-based social networks are examples of open systems. It is not yet clear to Maria Chavez's social worker how open or closed the Maria Chavez family system is.

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

EXHIBIT 2.2 ● Systems Perspective
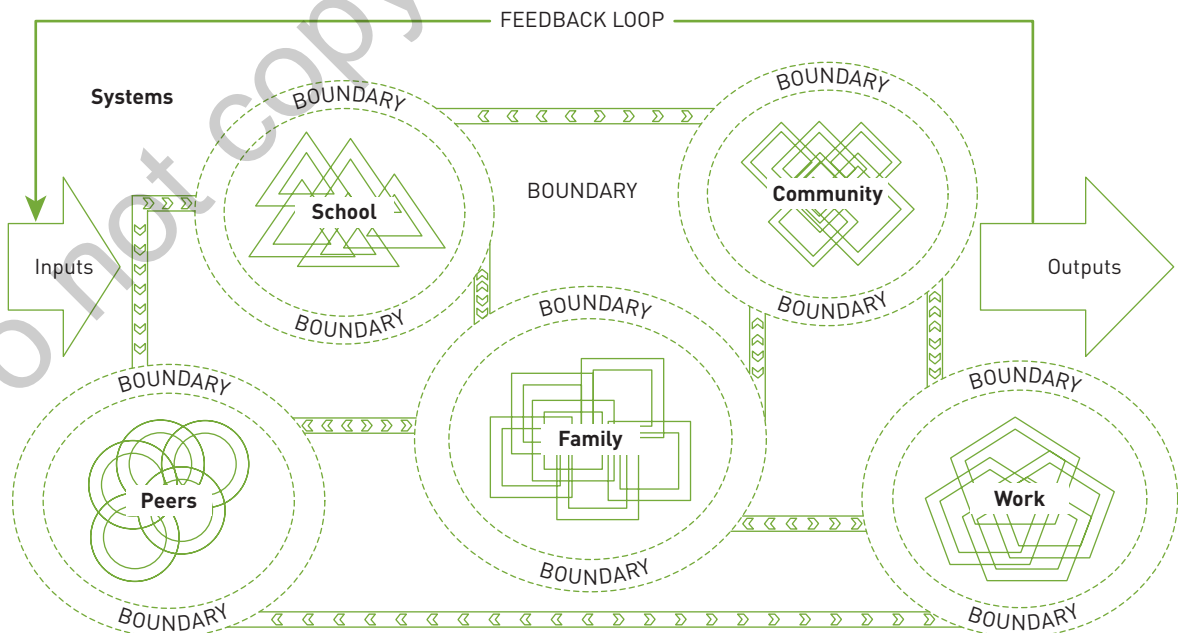
work competencies in the 2015 CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards.

Influenced by scientific inquiry in a number of disciplines, several new systems theories have emerged in the last 2 decades or so. Taken as a whole, these new theories are attempting to explain the *complexity* of contemporary life. Five systems approaches are currently "hot" and relevant to contemporary social work. The first of these approaches focuses on individual behavior and is an extension of Bronfenbrenner's *bioecological perspective*, which he revised to pay more attention to biomedical factors (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). As it evolves, the bioecological approach includes the many and varied attempts to incorporate ongoing neuroscience research into theorizing about the ways that biological factors are intertwined with psychological and sociocultural factors in the creation of human behavior. This approach considers gene–environment interactions; the impact of the environment on brain development; and the intertwined nature of biology, cognition, and emotion. One theoretical approach often used in social work is *risk and resilience theory*, which is an extension of the ecological perspective. It draws on concepts from epidemiology and public health to explain the complexity of influences on human behavior. This theory proposes risk factors and protective factors in both the person and the environment. Risk factors increase the likelihood of a harmful outcome of person and environment interactions, and protective factors support a positive outcome (see Jenson & Fraser, 2016). Proponents of the risk and resilience approach acknowledge the complexity of influences on human behavior.

A second recent systems approach is *globalization theory*. As discussed in Chapter 1, globalization is the process by which the world's people are becoming more interconnected economically, politically, environmentally, and culturally. Globalization theory (see Robinson, 2007) emerged in reaction against earlier social theories about the globalization process that were thought to present a Western bias, focusing on developments in the West, and implying if not explicitly arguing that the rest of the world had little choice but to become increasingly like the West. There are many versions of globalization theory, but all of them shift the focus from the West to consider transnational cultural, economic, and political processes that flow in many directions, not just from the West to the rest of the world. They call attention to processes of cultural imperialism, whereby a culture of a large and powerful country, organization, or other social entity has a great influence on another less powerful country, or other social entity. Here are two examples. Anthony Giddens (2000) writes

of the "runaway world" of globalization, suggesting that globalization creates risk and undermines local cultures but can also help to revive local cultures as they put their own local twist on aspects of global culture. Ulrich Beck (2007) criticizes theorists who present a purely economic analysis of globalization, arguing that globalization is much more multidimensional and multidirectional than that. He writes about transnational actors who crisscross and undermine the boundaries of nation-states. He is interested in the identities and differential power of these actors. With this attention to power and exploitation, globalization theories begin to merge with the conflict perspective.

Globalization theories focus on how the open boundaries of global systems produce complexity. European social workers (see Ahmed-Mohamed, 2011; Kihlström, 2012) are drawing on a third type of systems theory that conceptualizes the openness of systems in a very different way. German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (2011) has proposed a systems theory that suggests that in highly complex societies, systems must find a way to reduce complexity to make life more manageable. They do this by developing cultures and structures that clearly differentiate the system from other systems. Systems are open to interaction with other systems, but they are operatively closed, meaning that system behavior is influenced only by the system's operations—its language, culture, and processes—not by the language, culture, and processes of other systems. The environment can affect the system only by causing it irritations or

© iStockphoto.com / Vipin Babu

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.

disruptions, but the system will have its own conditions for responding to these irritations. Luhmann argues that systems are *autopoietic*, meaning they are self-created and reproduced. For example, think about social workers who work in child protective services. They assess child safety issues in the context of their social work knowledge of child development and family dynamics, and in the process, they often interact with medical professionals and the court system. When interacting with those two systems, they must recognize that those systems use their own very different language, culture, and processes to think about child safety.

Other newer systems theories take other positions on the issue of boundaries. Here is a fourth type of systems theory. *Fuzzy set theory*, developed in mathematics, proposes that membership of a set is not binary—with *binary* meaning you are either a member or you are not. Fuzzy set theory acknowledges that you may be a member to a certain degree. In fuzzy sets, objects are assigned a number from 0 to 1 to indicate the degree to which the object belongs in the set—either not at all (0) or completely (1). From this perspective, what value would you give to Maria Chavez's daughters who are not involved in her caregiving? Would you give them a value of 0 or 1, or would you say their family membership lies somewhere between "member" and "not member"? Reisch and Jani (2012) suggest that social workers should consider such theories that recognize the blurring of system boundaries in complex societies. As DePoy and Gilson (2012) suggest, fuzzy set theory could be a useful way to think about issues related to group membership, including race, ethnicity, and gender. This nonbinary way of thinking about social identities receives further attention in Chapter 8, Cultures.

Other systems theories emphasize the openness of systems. *Deep ecology*, a fifth newer systems approach, has emerged with an emphasis on the notion of the total interconnectedness of all elements of the natural and physical world (Besthorn, 2012). 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. As discussed in Chapter 7, The Physical Environment, deep ecology is an important perspective for thinking about environmental justice.

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

- *Coherence and conceptual clarity.* Early systems theories were often criticized as vague and somewhat ambiguous. Although consistency in use of terms has improved in recent theorizing,

concepts in some versions of systems theories remain highly abstract and often confusing in their generality. Recent bioecological theories, particularly risk and resilience theory, are derived from multidisciplinary research, and a great deal of coherence and conceptual clarity is developing in the literature on this systems approach.

- *Testability and empirical support.* Even with poorly defined and highly abstract concepts in early systems theorizing, a long tradition of research supporting a systems perspective can be found in anthropology and sociology (see White, Klein, & Martin, 2015, 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 neuroscience, epidemiology, and a rapidly expanding empirical literature on ecological risk and resilience. Mathematicians have developed fuzzy logic systems for analyzing membership in fuzzy sets that are beginning to be used in the social as well as natural sciences but are not yet used by social work researchers.

- *Comprehensiveness.* Clearly, the systems perspective is devoted to the ideal of comprehensiveness, or holism. It incorporates the various dimensions of human systems as well as various dimensions of environmental systems, nonhuman as well as human. It does better than any other perspective discussed here in accommodating rapid developments in neuroscience. 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. Bioecological theories and research are shedding light on the complex interactions of various biological systems with each other and with the physical and social environments. Recent formulations have explicitly added a time dimension to accommodate both past and future influences on human behavior (see Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Globalization theory calls attention to the impact of rapid communications on world systems. Deep ecology calls attention to the complex interplay of humans and the physical environment.

- *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, although 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 influenced by functionalist sociology assumed that social systems are held together by social consensus and shared values. The emphasis on system stability 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, and some versions of globalization theory call attention to how powerful nations exploit the cultures, economies, and political arrangements of less powerful nations (McMichael, 2017).

- *Usefulness for social work practice.* The systems perspective is perhaps more useful for assessment and practice evaluation than for directing social work engagement and interventions, but several social work practice textbooks were based on the systems perspective in the 1970s and 1980s. Systems thinking is consistent with the NASW ethical principle "Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships." The greatest value of the systems perspective is that it can be used at any level of practice, including individual, family, group, organization, or community. 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. The risk and resilience approach is informative for social work assessment with individuals and communities as well as for program and policy development, suggesting ways to reduce risk and increase protection. Globalization theory is consistent with social work's ethical stance on social justice and is an essential perspective for social workers involved in international social work, in work with immigrants and refugees, and in international disaster relief work. It is a useful perspective for engaging with and assessing individuals, families, and communities who feel left out or left behind by globalization, including those who currently approach life with a fierce nationalism. Autopoietic systems theory is helpful when social workers are engaged in advocacy; it reminds us that to be effective advocates we must make the effort to understand the language, culture, and processes of the social systems we target with our advocacy efforts. Fuzzy set theory reminds social workers to avoid approaching new practice situations with a fixed binary lens regarding such social categories as gender and gender identity, race, social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and so on. Deep ecology is useful for thinking about how to promote environmental justice.

Conflict Perspective

As he thinks about Maria Chavez and her family, the hospice social worker is struck by the precarious financial and health situation that Sarah finds herself in as she cares for her mother. She has worked most of her life in a job that is valuable to society but one that has not been well paid. She is beginning to face health problems, and it is not clear what her health care options are. The social worker is reminded of ongoing political debates in the United States about health care funding for people with limited economic resources. Although the systems perspective helps us think about how interdependent the family members are, you may be thinking that Sarah and her siblings have some competing interests in relation to resources of time and money. The hospice social worker knows that communications about time and money can become tense in such families. He wonders why it is that Sarah is the one carrying the financial, physical, and emotional costs of Maria's care, as seems to be the case. These are some of the observations about the Maria Chavez family suggested by the conflict perspective.

The **conflict perspective** has become popular over and over again throughout history, with roots that can be traced back to German philosopher Georg Hegel (1770–1831) and Italian philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527), and perhaps even further back, drawing attention to conflict, dominance, and oppression in social life. The conflict perspective emphasizes conflicts that arise because of inequalities in the distribution of resources. It typically looks for sources of conflict in the economic and political arenas, and more recently in the cultural arena. Exhibit 2.3 provides a visual representation of the conflict perspective, and Exhibit 2.1 lists the big ideas, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

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 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. 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. George Ritzer (2013) suggests that the same might be said about the time we spend on social media.

Marx emphasized the exploitation involved in the production of goods, and the critical theorists emphasize the exploitation involved in consumer capitalism. George Ritzer (2015) suggests that we have entered a new form of capitalism that he calls *prosumer capitalism*, in which the lines between production and consumption are blurred. In prosumer capitalism, we are engaged in economic activities in which we are simultaneously producers and consumers. We buy (consume) a new Mac or iPhone and are responsible for setup and installation,

EXHIBIT 2.3 ● Conflict Perspective

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.

in what is often frustrating work, especially as we try to protect against such privacy threats as a camera getting hacked or a search history being exposed. We consume fast food and clean our own tables. We pump our own gas and use self-checkout at the grocery store. Facebook and other social media is another example. Paid employees at Facebook provide an architecture for our participation. But we are unpaid prosumers who provide the content that entice other people to join the site. We build and share profiles that generate data that can be sold for profit. Ritzer suggests that prosumer capitalism creates a new type of exploitation. It turns us into free workers while eliminating or downgrading the skill set and compensation of some paid work positions. It uses the labor of prosumers to create great wealth for a relatively small group of economic elites in a process that is usually not transparent to the prosumer. It is made possible by new technologies such as self-scanner machines, 3-D printers, ATMs, and medical technologies that allow us to measure basic biological functions at home.

Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) 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.

Postcolonial theory focuses on the ongoing impact of 18th- and 19th-century colonialism on the social, cultural, political, and economic development of both the colonizing nations and the colonies. It considers how colonizers racialized people they were colonizing (as non-White) and examines the ways that a colonial mentality continues to influence how we think and talk about race and ethnicity. It argues that contemporary Western societies have created an image of themselves grounded in their encounter with colonized people, an image that nourishes and sustains Western privilege and power. The end of the colonial era did not destroy the power structures established by colonialism. Many postcolonial theorists argue that we now live in a neocolonial world in which a philosophy of *neoliberalism* puts great faith in the rationality of a free market and opposes any form of collectivism, state planning, or safety net for those who are economically disadvantaged, using the argument that any governmental involvement would

hurt economic growth. Neoliberalism became prominent at the end of the colonial era, ensuring that those who held power during the colonial era were well situated to continue to hold power (see Go, 2013).

Power relationships are a major 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. **Critical race theory** (CRT) was developed by legal scholars in the United States who wanted to draw attention to racial oppression in the law and society (see Delgado, 2017). They began by questioning why racism persists in spite of civil rights laws that challenge it. They rejected the liberal position that racism is only a relic of the past carried forward by poorly educated or troubled individuals. Rather, it is an ordinary and normal part of contemporary society (Harris, 2015). CRT calls attention to how *microaggressions*, brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages and insults to people of color or members of any other minority identity group, create alienation for members of the group (Cappicci, Chadha, Bi Lin, & Snyder, 2012). Recent critical race theorists have incorporated the work of cognitive psychologists who examine implicit bias, a concept examined in Chapter 8, Cultures.

Feminist theories focus on male domination of the major social institutions and present a vision of a just world based on gender equity. As feminist theories have evolved over time, they have raised several basic questions about the organization of social life. Patricia Lengermann and Gillian Niebrugge (2018) trace the development of feminist theory, suggesting that it has moved through the following sequence of questions being raised:

1. And what about the women? Where are the women in any situation being reported? What are their contributions to the situation? If they are not present in the situation, why not?

2. Why is all this the way it is? What social forces are involved in the way women are situated in the world?

3. And what about the differences among women? Feminist and critical race theorists have developed **intersectionality theory**, which recognizes vectors of oppression and privilege, including not only gender but also class, race, global location, sexual orientation, and age (see Collins, 2012).

4. How can we change and improve the social world so as to make it a more just place for all people, not just women?

5. How and why does gender inequality persist in the modern world? This is a similar question to the one raised about race in CRT.

Before the development of contemporary intersectionality theory, 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.

Early social workers in the settlement house tradition recognized social conflict and structured inequality, and focused on eliminating oppression of immigrants, women, and children. Concepts of power and social conflict were revived in the social work literature in the 1960s. In the past 2 decades, 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; Lee & Hudson, 2017; Rose, 1992, 1994; Solomon, 1976, 1987). 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 empirical support.* Conflict theory has developed, in the main, through attempts to codify persistent themes in history. The preferred research method is empirical research that looks at large-scale patterns of history (see McMichael, 2017; Skocpol & Williamson, 2012; Wallerstein, 2004). As with other methods of research, critics have attacked some interpretations of historical data from the conflict perspective, but the historical analyses of 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 Zimbardo, 2007) and naturalistic inquiry to study social ranking in interaction rituals (Collins, 2004). 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 (White et al., 2015). Both feminist and critical race theorists have proposed storytelling as a form of empirical investigation. Maria Chavez would have an important story to tell about the early experiences of women in the U.S. military.

- *Comprehensiveness.* Traditionally, the conflict perspective focused on large-scale social institutions and social structures, such as economic and political institutions, even global ones. In the contemporary era, conflict theorists integrate conflict processes at the societal level with those at the community, small-group, and family levels. They suggest that we should recognize conflict as a central process in social life at all levels. Family theorists propose a conflict theory of families (White et al., 2015). Some 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, empirical historical research is the method many conflict theorists prefer.

- *Diversity and power.* The conflict perspective is about inequality, power arrangements, and systems of oppression. It, more than any other perspective presented in this chapter, helps us look at group-based patterns of inequality. In that way, it also assists us in understanding diversity. Intersectionality theory, which recognizes that individuals have overlapping memberships in a variety of status groups, is 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 societal, organizational, community, group, family, and dyadic relationships, as well as the power differential between social worker and client. Clearly, the conflict perspective is crucial to social work because it shines a spotlight on how domination and oppression might be affecting human behavior; it illuminates processes by which people become estranged and discouraged; and it encourages social workers to consider the meaning of their power relationships with clients, particularly nonvoluntary clients. The conflict perspective is essential to the social justice mission of social work. 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. 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.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS 2.1

What resources might be drawn from systems external to the Maria Chavez family to maximize Maria's end of life care? Sometimes, hospice social workers find that unresolved family conflicts are complicating end of life care for a parent or other family member. How important do you think it is for Maria Chavez's social worker to try to improve sibling relationships between Sarah and her sisters?

Exchange and Choice Perspective

Another way to think about the Maria Chavez family is to consider the choices that were made by Maria, Sarah, her sisters, and David when Maria could no longer safely live alone. Those choices included with whom Maria would live; who would provide her care; who would provide which financial and emotional resources; and who would be responsible for legal, financial, and health care decisions related to Maria. One might wonder about the history of family relationships in this family: Who feels they owe what to whom? What does Sarah consider the rewards and costs of caring for her mother? And how did her sisters calculate the rewards and costs of providing such care themselves? What expectations does Maria have for each of her daughters, and what expectations do the sisters have for each other? What expectations do the sisters have for how Sarah manages Maria's finances? How do they understand the fairness of the current caregiving arrangements and of the will that spells out the terms for sharing Maria's estate? This way of thinking about the Maria Chavez family is suggested by the exchange and choice perspective.

The various streams of the **exchange and choice perspective**, which has roots in behavioral psychology, economics, anthropology, philosophy, and sociology, share the common focus on the processes whereby individual and collective actors seek and exchange resources and the choices made in pursuit of those resources. Resources may be material or nonmaterial; for example, time, money, material goods, sex, affection, loyalty, social contacts. These ideas are visually represented in Exhibit 2.4, and Exhibit 2.1 lists the big ideas, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

Social exchange theory, originally proposed by George Homans (1958), considered *social exchange*, defined as an interaction in which resources are exchanged, as the core process in social life. Homans started with the premise that social exchange is based on the desire to maximize benefits and minimize costs, a basic belief that social relationships occur in a social marketplace in which people give in order to get. Homans focused on individual motivation in exchanges in dyadic relationships. He saw individuals as always calculating the rewards and costs of relationships and making choices based on those calculations. The theory recognizes that values, norms, and expectations are considered in the evaluation of benefits and costs of relationships.

Peter Blau (1964) developed a social exchange theory that focused on how exchange works in organizations and complex institutions. He proposed that such exchanges are governed by a norm of **reciprocity**, that receiving resources requires giving resources of relatively equal value. He suggested that such exchanges build trust over time. Blau acknowledged, however, that imbalance of exchange occurs, and, when this happens, actors with the greatest resources hold power. He suggested that the most comfortable exchanges are those in which actors have equality of resources and that trust is fragile in unequal relationships.

The closely related *rational choice theory* (Coleman, 1990) shares with exchange theories the view that humans are rational (weighing benefits and costs), purposive, and motivated by self-interest. But rational choice theorists are particularly interested in the group dynamics that occur when rational actors make strategic decisions based on values, norms, expectations, and resources. They are interested in the norms and networks formed by social exchanges and how, once created, norms and networks facilitate as well as constrain the behavior and choices of individuals. Coleman used rational choice theory to explore possible public

EXHIBIT 2.4 ● The Exchange and Choice Perspective
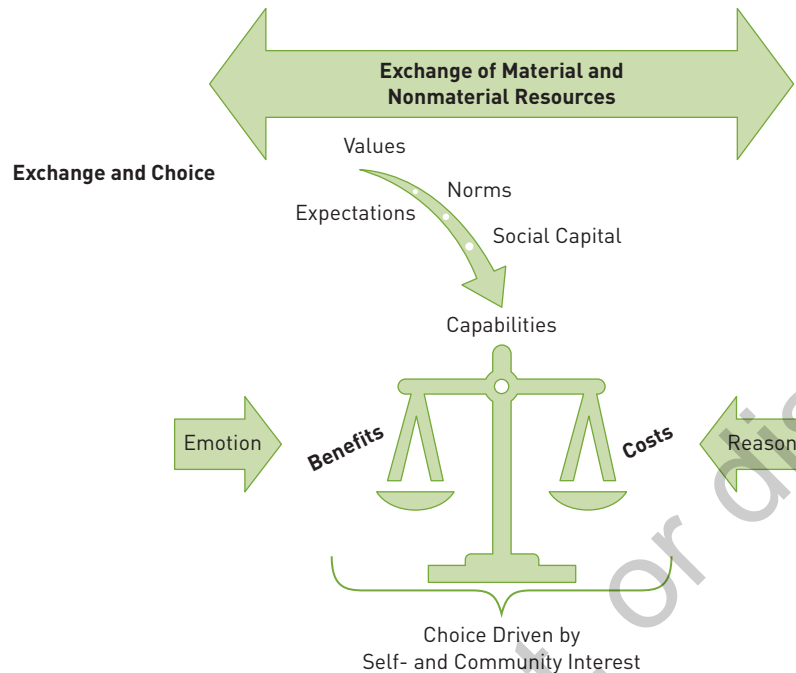
policies that would offer incentives for actors to behave in ways that are more beneficial to others. Rational choice theory is currently popular in sociology, health promotion, and family studies.

Theorists in the rational choice tradition advanced **social network theory** (Cook, 1987). They introduced the concept of *exchange network*, which is a set of actors linked together, both directly and indirectly through exchange relationships. Social networks are typically presented visually, with members of the network—individuals, groups, or organizations—represented as points. Lines are drawn between pairs of points to demonstrate a relationship between them. Arrows are often used to show the flow of exchanges in a relationship. These graphic displays illuminate such issues as network size, density of relationships, strength of relationships, reciprocity of relationships, and access to power and influence. *Social capital theory* is a recent outgrowth of social network theory. Social networks provide **social capital**, both direct and indirect connections to others that are potential sources of a number of types of resources.

Traditional exchange and choice theories have been criticized on a number of grounds. Some critics have noted that exchange theory has a difficult time accounting for altruistic behavior. Others note that recent neuroscience and cognitive psychology research indicates that humans are not as rational as the theories have suggested. Still other critics note that traditional exchange theory does not address why some rewards are valued more than others. In response to these theoretical concerns, some behavioral scientists have proposed nonrational models of exchange and choice.

Sociologist Randall Collins (2004) introduced a form of exchange theory he calls *interaction ritual chains*. He proposes that social structures are developed by the aggregation of many exchanges over long periods of time. Rituals, or patterned sequences of behavior, develop out of these ongoing exchanges. Interaction rituals become linked or chained together by individuals who are members of multiple networks. Collins suggests that emotion, not reason, is the driving force of social exchange; emotional energy is the motive behind all exchanges. People are more likely to repeat interactions from which they take away emotional energy, and they engage in altruistic behavior because of the emotional energy they receive in the exchange. Collins proposes that physical co-presence is necessary

for rituals to develop; co-presence produces common emotional mood, focused attention, and collective emotional energy. He supports this assertion by citing research indicating that the brain waves of participants in ritualized interactions become synchronized. Collins suggests that the self emerges from patterns of interaction; who we hang out with is the key to who we become.

A recent twist of social network theory is a theory called *actor-network theory* (ANT) (Haraway, 2008; Latour, 2007). The basic premise of this theory is that networks, and societies, are not made up of humans alone. They are made up of both human and nonhuman actors, including such things as animals, aspects of the physical environment, electrons, and computers and other types of technologies. Entities within the network, human as well as nonhuman, can only be understood in relation to other entities. ANT theorists suggest that our study of networks should decenter humans and recognize the important roles that other entities play in network exchanges. They call attention to the important role that material entities—such as keyboards, computer screens, websites, and medical technologies—play in human relationships, suggesting that these entities are more than resources; they are also important actors in network interactions.

Political scientist Deborah Stone (2012) has criticized the dominance of rational choice models of policy analysis that are often used in social work education. She refers to rational choice models as *market* models and proposes, instead, a *polis model*, which starts from the point of view of the community rather than the individual. She suggests that a theory of the political process must recognize the values of altruism and public interest as well as self-interest. She acknowledges that reasonable people can disagree about what the public interest is and proposes that the political process involves a negotiation of ideas about that. In the political process, participants are influenced in their choices by people in their networks and by their loyalties, operating by "laws of passion," rather than "laws of reason." They form alliances to gain power. Stone argues that whereas the market model proposes that participants in the political process have access to accurate and complete information for making political choices, in reality, information about policy issues is "ambiguous, incomplete, often strategically shaded, and sometimes deliberately withheld" (Stone, 2012, p. 30). She argues that we cannot be effective in influencing policy if we do not understand the nonrational aspects of the policy development process.

Here is an analysis of how well the exchange and choice perspective meets the criteria for judging social work theory.

- *Coherence and conceptual clarity.* There is much consistency within each stream of the exchange and choice perspective. There is also much consistency across streams about the important role of exchange and choice in human behavior, but the theories differ in their focus on micro versus macro relationships. There is a great deal of inconsistency across theories, however, about issues of rationality and self-interestedness. Although concepts are sometimes presented at a high level of abstraction, most theories in the perspective define and measure terms in a clear and consistent manner.

- *Testability and empirical support.* The exchange and 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 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 Sutphin, 2010). Researchers across a wide range of disciplines are using statistical methods to calculate the balance of costs and benefits 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). Collins's (2004) theory about the important role of emotions in social exchange is supported by neuroscience research that indicates that brain waves of people in ritualized interactions become synchronized.

- *Comprehensiveness.* Although all streams of the exchange and choice perspective are interested in human interactions, the different streams focus on different dimensions in which interactions occur. The perspective has been used to study dyads, families, small groups, networks, communities, organizations, and

institutions (see White et al., 2015). In general, the exchange and choice perspective is weak in exploration of personal dimensions, but Homans (1958) was interested in human motivation, and Randall Collins (2004) has been explicit in identifying the biological mechanisms involved in the emotional energy he sees as the engine of social exchange. ANT adds an important dimension by considering the role that nonhuman elements, especially technologies, play in human relationships. This approach suggests that the person and environment construct should include nonhuman elements as well as human elements (human behavior in the environment rather than human behavior in the *social* environment). The exchange and choice perspective attends to time in terms of the history of past exchanges.

- *Diversity and power.* Although they were designed to look at patterns, not diversity, early exchange and 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 but do not consider differential power that has been assigned to different identity groups. Although the exchange and 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 the exchange and choice perspective 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, the perspective can be very useful for promoting the social work value of the importance of human relationships. It can be particularly useful to enhance social workers' understanding of the decision-making process involved in deciding whether to disclose

sexual abuse and in deciding whether to leave or stay in relationships involving intimate partner violence. In the assessment process, social workers can engage both individual and collective clients in identifying their networks of exchange, including their exchanges with nonhuman elements. Such assessments can lead to interventions focused on strengthening positive network relationships and eliminating or diminishing negative relationships (with both human and nonhuman elements). Furthermore, such assessment and intervention activities can serve as a concrete map for practice evaluation. Social network theory, with its recent emphasis on social capital, suggests tools for enhancing the resources of individuals and groups, including networks of social service providers. It can also be used for evaluating the effectiveness of social work practice for such enhancements. Randall Collins's (2004) theory of exchange rituals suggests ways to create and reinforce altruism and group solidarity. Deborah Stone's (2012) polis model provides tools for thinking about the complexities of the policymaking process and can help social workers be more realistic about how they might influence that process.

Social Constructionist Perspective

As the hospice social worker drives back to the office, the Maria Chavez family is on his mind. He thinks about the stories he heard from both Maria and Sarah and about the meaning these stories have for them. From Maria, he heard stories of early financial hardship and early sexual exploitation. He wonders what meaning Maria makes of these stories as she approaches the end of her life. He also heard a story about fear of rejection by God and thinks it is important for Maria to have some help in reworking this story as she approaches death. From Sarah, he heard stories about Maria being a proud mother and devout Catholic. He heard Sarah's pride in her mother's work history. He also heard Sarah's love of her son, David, and her grief over his death. He heard fear about her financial and health future, and he thought he heard resentment about the lack of support from her sisters. He hopes he can be a good listener for both Maria and Sarah as they make meaning of the life that Maria has lived and the care that Sarah

has provided. This way of thinking about the Maria Chavez family is consistent with the social constructionist perspective.

To understand human behavior, the **social constructionist perspective** focuses on how people construct meaning, a sense of self, and a social world through their interactions with each other. They learn, through their interactions, to classify the world and their place in it. People interact with each other and the physical world based on *shared meanings*, or shared understandings about the world. In this view, people develop their understandings of the world and themselves from social interaction, and these understandings shape their subsequent social interactions. A visual representation of this way of thinking about human behavior is presented in Exhibit 2.5, and Exhibit 2.1 lists the big ideas, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

The early roots of the social constructionist perspective come from *symbolic interaction theory* developed by sociologists in the United States in the mid-20th century. This theory proposes that as humans interact, they develop symbols to which they attach meaning. Words are symbols, but so are piercings, tattoos, national flags, crucifixes, fashion styles, and the types of homes we build. The symbolic interactionist would be interested in what meaning Maria Chavez's daughter, Sarah, attaches to the words *addiction* and *caregiving*. For the symbolic interactionist, society is constructed by human beings engaging in symbolic interaction.

You may recall that social exchange theorists are also concerned with social interaction, but their focus is on social interaction as an exchange of resources rather than on how social interaction produces meaning, a sense of self, and social life (society), which is the focus of the interactionist (Blumer, 1998).

To the social constructionist, there is no singular objective reality, no true reality that exists "out there" in the world. There are, instead, multiple realities based on the shared subjective realities created as people interact in different contexts. Social constructionists actually disagree about whether there is, in fact, some objective reality out there. Radical social constructionists believe there is not. They believe there is no reality beyond our personal experiences. Most *postmodern theorists* fall in this category, arguing that there are no universals, including no universal truth, reality, or morality (Dybicz, 2011; Lyotard, 1984). They emphasize that social categories, such as race and gender, are social constructions, and they oppose *essentialist* beliefs in the inevitability of traits of such categories. More moderate social constructionists believe 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 (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

EXHIBIT 2.5 ● Social Constructionist Perspective
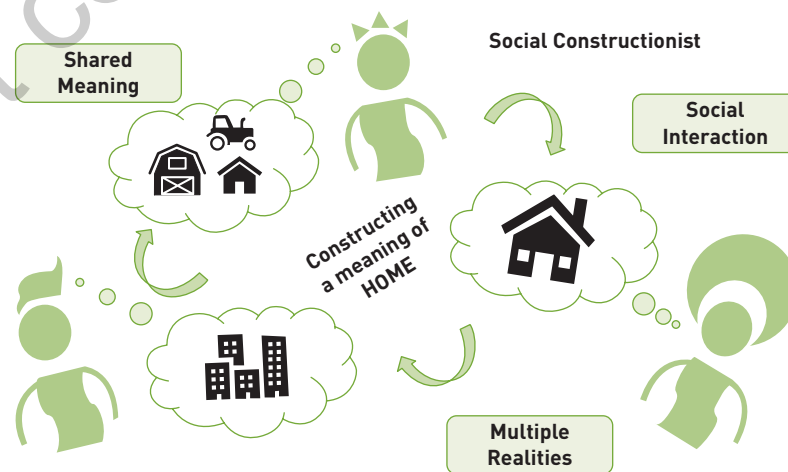
actors are always performing for their social audiences, based on their understanding of community standards for human behavior (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Goffman, 1959). Although this idea has been around for a while, it is taking on new meaning in the current world of proliferating communication technology, which provides us with many modalities for performing for our audiences, for engaging in what Goffman (1959) refers to as *impression management.* 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 constructed by their predecessors.

The social constructionist perspective sees human understanding, or human consciousness, as both the product and the driving force of social interaction. Social constructionists 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.

Some social constructionists put greater emphasis on the nature of social interactions than on human consciousness, 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. Social constructionists call attention to the human tendency toward *reification*, treating something abstract as a physical thing. For example, a flag comes to represent the abstract concept of patriotism. These social constructionists also see social problems as social constructions, created through claims making, labeling, and other social processes. Social workers have used the social constructionist approach to understand how society has constructed the meaning of phenomena such as parental incapability (Ben-David, 2011) and homelessness (Cronley, 2010) over time, as well as the processes by which these socially constructed definitions become internalized.

Three adaptations of postmodern theory are receiving a lot of attention in social work and the behavioral sciences: standpoint theory, queer theory, and affect theory. *Standpoint theory* argues that what people know

and believe is shaped by where they stand in society, their geographies, cultures, socioeconomic statuses, races, genders, and so on. While recognizing that no two people have exactly the same standpoint, we must also recognize our own standpoints and be reflective about them. At the core of standpoint theory is the belief that not all standpoints are equally valued and that marginalized people must live with a *bifurcation* of consciousness (from one's own perspective as well as the perspective of dominant standpoints) while dominant groups enjoy the privilege of remaining oblivious to nondominant standpoints. You may have noticed that standpoint theory is a blend of the social constructionist and conflict perspectives. It was first developed as feminist standpoint theory, but Dorothy Smith (2005) has begun to focus not only on gender but also on the exclusion and oppression of other standpoints, such as those based on class, race, sexual orientation, and ablebodiness.

Queer theory attacks the essentialism (the belief that every entity has a set of attributes that are necessary to its identity and function) of identity categories, particularly those related to sexuality. The theory argues that sexuality is not fixed and stable and does not determine who we are. It is a social construction that, as such, is always open to transformation. Queer theory argues that not only has sexuality been institutionalized as a binary structure, but one element of the binary has been constructed as inferior to the other. A controversial version of queer theory has criticized the gay and lesbian rights movement for fighting for rights based on minority identity, arguing that this only perpetuates a false binary approach to sexuality and contributes to the essentializing of sexual identity. Others have argued that it is important to recognize the way that gay and lesbian identities, as well as other minority identities, can be a powerful tool for collective action (Burgess, 2011). Both neuroscience research and cognitive psychology research (see Kahneman, 2011; Sapolsky, 2017) indicate that categorizing and identity building are an inherent part of human cognition, but the importance of queer theory is that it reminds us of the critical role that culture and other environmental systems play in shaping these cognitions. Queer theory is a reminder, also, of the important role that sexuality plays in human behavior.

Affect theory is a significant departure from other postmodern theory because it calls attention to the independent role that biology and matter play in the construction of reality (see Blackman & Venn, 2010). It calls for breaking down the artificial barriers between the natural and social sciences, noting that both

biology and social processes play important roles in creating human reality. In affect theory, *affect* refers to a nonconscious, automatic form of emotion. Emotion is what happens to affect once it undergoes the social processes that make it conscious. Affect theorists are interested in the way that human bodies affect each other as they interact, calling attention to a process of *entrainment* identified by neurologists—a process in which the nervous and hormonal systems of interacting people are brought into alignment (Brennan, 2004). You may recall that this idea is also prominent in Collins's theory of interaction ritual chains. Like the actor-network theory discussed earlier, affect theory takes seriously the important role of nature and other nonhuman elements in human behavior.

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. That situation is consistent, however, with postmodernist understanding of multiple realities. 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 but also attests to the usefulness of that concept. In addition, social constructionist theorists have begun to incorporate principles from the conflict perspective. There is inconsistency among the various streams of the perspective about how constraining history is on human interaction and how free humans are to reconstruct their social interactions.

- *Testability and empirical support.* Because of the vagueness of its concepts, the social constructionist perspective has been criticized for being difficult to operationalize for empirical research. Like DePoy and Gilson (2012), we think the constructionist perspective has made a great contribution to scientific inquiry by calling attention to the limitations of positivist

research methods to explain all of human behavior, and for pointing out the possibilities for bias in those research methods. Social constructionists propose alternative research methodology that focuses more on narrative and storytelling. Social constructionism has stimulated a trend in the behavioral sciences to use a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to accommodate both objective and subjective reality. This is providing a richer picture of human behavior. Affect theory, the newest theory discussed here, has incorporated findings from the natural sciences, and many ideas of the theory are well supported by empirical research. For example, the distinction between affect and emotion is supported by neuroscience research that finds that much of human behavior is an unconscious or automatic response mediated by the amygdala, whereas emotional responses shaped by cognitive activities in the frontal cortex are a slower process (Sapolsky, 2017).

- *Comprehensiveness.* Until the development of affect theory, social constructionism had paid little attention to the role of biology in human behavior. In some versions of social constructionism, cognitive processes are central, and the social construction of emotions is considered in others. With the emphasis on meaning making, social constructionism is open to the role of religion and spirituality in human behavior. With its emphasis on social interaction, the social constructionist perspective is strong in attention to the social environment. It has been criticized for failing to pay sufficient attention to the macro world of social institutions and social structure, but standpoint theory and queer theory correct for this omission. 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.

- *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 for failure to provide the theoretical tools necessary for the analysis of power relationships. Some critics have suggested

that many 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 (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. As you have seen, however, this criticism does not apply to standpoint theory and queer theory. Social work scholars have been attracted to those versions of the social constructionist perspective that have incorporated pieces of the conflict tradition (see Freeman & Couchonnal, 2006), particularly the early work of Michel Foucault (1969) on the relationship between power and knowledge. They propose that in contemporary society, minority or "local" knowledge is 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. Most theorizing about empowerment integrates conflict and social constructionist thinking.

- *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. It is certainly useful for engagement and assessment, but it is also useful for social work intervention. 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 (Greene & Lee, 2011). 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

(Walsh, 2014). 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). Joseph Walsh (2014) 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 Maria Chavez 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 (Riera, 2005). That kind of process is much needed in the world today.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS 2.2

Both the exchange and choice and the social constructionist perspectives focus on social interactions. What do you see as the main difference in these two perspectives? What resources, both material and nonmaterial, do you seeing being exchanged in the Maria Chavez family? What resources must be secured by interactions with people and systems outside the family? What shared meanings do you think Maria and Sarah hold? If you were their social worker, how would the meanings you hold about the social world be similar to and different from theirs? In what contexts have you developed your sense of self and your understandings of the social world?

Psychodynamic Perspective

Maria Chavez seems to have had much success in her adult life, but the few memories she shares with the social worker focus on early hardship and exploitation, and those early experiences could have played a role in her current need for antianxiety medication. Her daughter, Sarah, has been a devoted care provider to Maria, but her fears about her future are apparent in her first meeting with the hospice social worker—and easy to understand. Think about the losses and stresses Sarah has faced in the past few years: new caregiving responsibilities, worry over her son's addictions, grief over her son's death, financial worries, health worries, and the

impending death of her mother. This accumulation of loss and stress would challenge the adaptive capacities of most any human. In the midst of all that loss, we also note the attachment Sarah has for her mother and the strong commitment she has made to her care. We do not see the same level of commitment from Sarah's sisters and do not know the history of that. As we explore the Maria Chavez family's situation from the psychodynamic perspective, 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 Sigmund Freud. More recent formulations of the perspective include ego psychology, object relations, self psychology, and relational-cultural theories. We elaborate on these more recent developments later. Exhibit 2.6 presents a visual representation of the psychodynamic perspective, and Exhibit 2.1 lists the big ideas, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

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 shortly.

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). Revisions of drive theory have suggested that human behavior is also motivated by drives for mastery (see Goldstein, 1996) and for connectedness (Berzoff, Flanagan, & Hertz, 2016).

- *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

EXHIBIT 2.6   ●   Psychodynamic Perspective
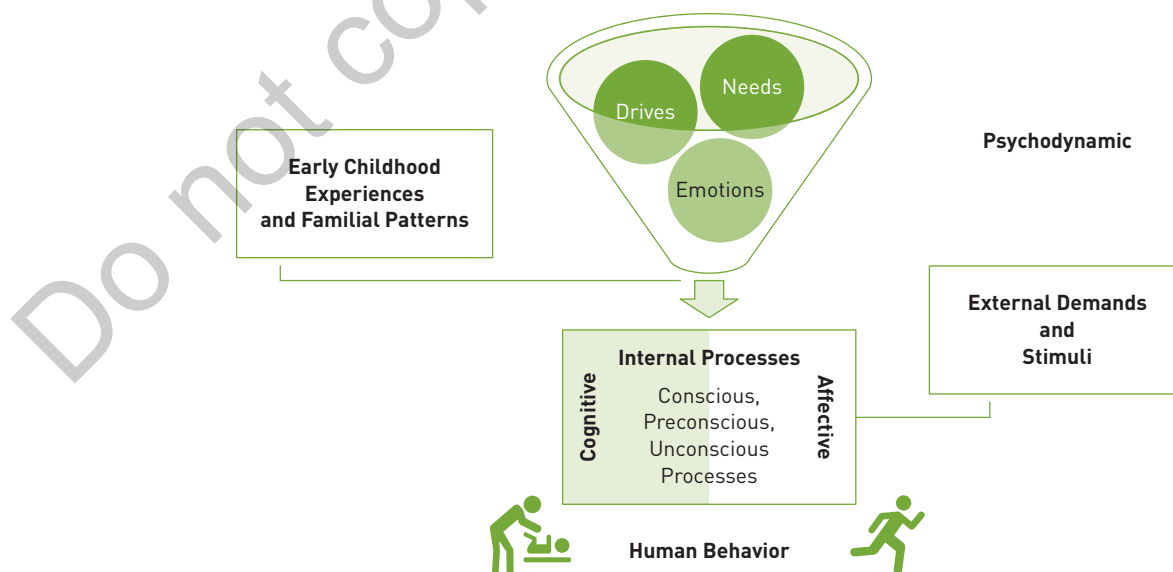
censor of the id; and the *ego*, which is the rational part of personality that mediates between the id and the superego. Freud and his early followers were most interested in the id and the pathologies that emanate from it, but later followers have focused primarily on ego strengths and the drive for 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 to 6), when the search for pleasure is centered in the genitals; the *latency phase* (ages 6 to 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 also 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 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 (Flanagan, 2016a). In this tradition, John Bowlby's attachment theory has become the basis for a psychobiological theory of attachment (Shilkret & Shilkret, 2016). *Self psychology* focuses on the individual need to organize the personality into a cohesive sense of self and to build relationships that support it (Flanagan, 2016b). *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 (Berzoff, 2016).

In recent years, social workers who practice from a psychodynamic perspective have drawn on both biological research and propositions from conflict theorists to extend the psychodynamic perspective. Joan Berzoff (2011) writes about why psychodynamically oriented social work practice with "vulnerable, oppressed, and at-risk clients" must be informed by biological research, particularly neuroscience research, concepts of power and privilege, and critical race theory with its emphasis on intersectionality (p. 132). She also analyzes the contribution that traditional psychodynamic theories can make to understanding discrimination, scapegoating, and oppression.

Like other behavioral science theorizing, psychodynamic theory was developed before neuroscientists and cognitive psychology scientists had the tools to study the biological mechanisms involved with cognition and emotion. Recent research in these fields is giving credence to some of the inclinations of both Freudian and neo-Freudian theory while filling in the gaps related to biological mechanisms. There is much more to be learned, but here is some of what is known already. (Cognition and emotion are the focus of Chapter 4, The Psychological Person.)

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

Second, the ego psychologists were right that both unconscious and conscious processes and both emotion and cognition are key to human behavior. Neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky (2017) argues that the distinction

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

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

Fourth, the psychodynamic approach is correct in asserting that early childhood experiences play an important role in behavior across the life course. There is strong evidence from several disciplines that early life experiences shape the structure and functions of the brain in ways that influence behavior throughout the life course.

Fifth, empirical investigation of polyvagal theory is demonstrating how physiological states are associated with stress reactions (see Flores & Porges, 2017; Porges, 2001). Polyvagal theory identifies two distinct branches of the vagus, the tenth cranial, nerve in the autonomic nervous system. The dorsal vagal, the more evolutionary primitive branch, responds by freezing and conserving resources in all bodily systems when threatened. The ventral branch, the more evolutionary advanced branch, works to regulate defensive reactions to stress by stimulating self-soothing and communication with others. Such vagal activity augments the ongoing interactions between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala.

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.* Freud's original concepts and propositions 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 sometimes criticized for the vague and abstract nature of their concepts but perhaps no more than most other theoretical perspectives.

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

- *Comprehensiveness.* Early psychodynamic theories were primarily concerned with internal psychological processes. Strong attention was 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., Berzoff, 2011). 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, often drawing on Eastern psychological theories (see Nagai, 2007). 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 this is changing.

- *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 European American, heterosexual, middle-class men. 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; Nagai, 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 (see Berzoff et al., 2016). Psychodynamic theories are strong in their recognition of power dynamics in parent–child relationships and in exploration of the lifeworlds of children. Until recently, they have been weaker in looking at power issues in other relationships, however, including gender relationships. In the contemporary era, psychoanalytic feminists have reworked Freud's ideas to focus on patriarchy (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 2018). 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, theory that can be used for

engagement, assessment, intervention, and practice evaluation. 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. Supported by recent neuroscience research, the psychodynamic perspective reminds social workers that many emotions and cognitions happen at the unconscious, automatic level, and are not easily accessed for conscious exploration. This is especially true of traumatic memories. As psychodynamic theorists embrace neuroscience research, the perspective continues to be useful for understanding how trauma is stored and processed. Given our commitment to evidence-based practice, social workers should be aware of empirical evidence of the benefits of a number of adjunct nontalking, somatic interventions for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) (van der Kolk, 2014), neurofeedback (van der Kolk et al., 2016), and yoga (Mitchell et al., 2014; van der Kolk et al., 2014). In exploratory study, music therapy has also been found to produce improvement in PTSD symptoms (Lightstone, Bailey, & Voros, 2015). Polyvagal theory is being used to develop both biological and interpersonal interventions to stimulate and improve functioning in the vagus nerve, interventions that are considered promising for symptom improvement in treatment-resistant major depression. Such interventions include electrical stimulation of the vagus nerve (Tisi, Franzini, Messina, Savino, & Gambini, 2014), yoga (Tyagi & Cohen, 2016), and group therapy (Flores & Porges, 2017). Mindfulness meditation has been found to build better connections between the amygdala and prefrontal cortex (see Davidson & Begley, 2012) and to improve stress reactivity and anxiety symptoms associated with generalized anxiety disorder (Hoge et al., 2013). Not all of these intervention methods are used by social workers, but social workers can work collaboratively with practitioners who are trained in them. It is important to note that 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 financial and legal counseling for Maria Chavez's daughter Sarah—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. In general, however, the psychodynamic perspective does not suggest practice principles at the level of communities, organizations, and social institutions.

Developmental Perspective

Another way to think about the Maria Chavez family is to view their situation in terms of the developmental tasks they face. You might note that Maria is in very late adulthood and engaging in some life review as she faces the end of life. A part of that life review seems centered on early hardship and exploitation. You might also note that her daughter, Sarah, faced a number of stressful situations in late middle age—assuming caregiving responsibilities for her mother, loss of her son, and financial worries related to an unplanned early departure from the labor market. The caregiving responsibilities are not uncommon at Sarah's life stage, especially for women,

but the loss of her son while she was still in late middle age is an uncommon life experience. Like many single women, she enters late adulthood with financial risk. These observations are consistent with the central ideas of the developmental perspective.

The focus of the **developmental perspective**, perhaps the most widely used of the perspectives presented in this chapter, 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. A visual representation of these ideas is presented in Exhibit 2.7, and Exhibit 2.1 lists the big ideas, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

Although there are a great number of developmental theories, they can be categorized into two streams of theorizing, one based in psychology and one based in sociology. *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. Erikson (1963) proposed an *epigenetic model of human development*, in which the psychological

© Brand X Pictures/ Thinkstock

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.
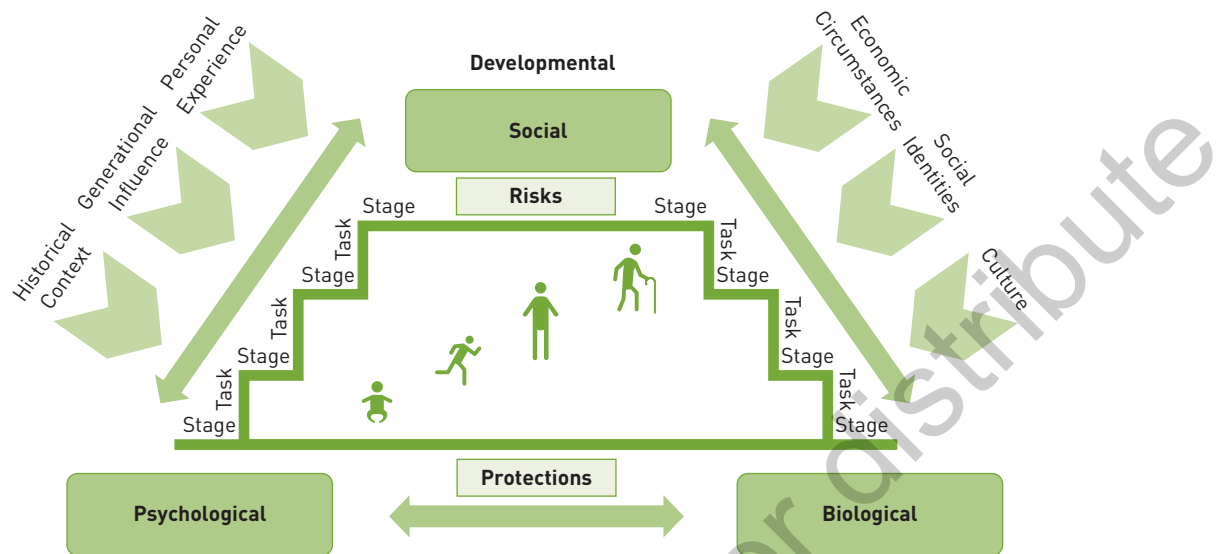
unfolding of personality takes place in sequences influenced by biological, psychological, and social forces. Healthy development depends on the mastery of life tasks at the appropriate time in the sequence. Although life span theorists tend to agree with this epigenetic principle, there is also growing 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 (Kuther, 2017). For example, Maria Chavez and her siblings assumed financial responsibilities while they were still children and adolescents after their father's death.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stage 8 (late adulthood): integrity versus despair

Chapter 4, The Psychological Person, and Chapter 5, The Psychosocial Person, in this book include several other developmental theories, including Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Kohlberg's and Gilligan's theories of moral development, and social identity theory. In addition, there are a vast number of related theories that use a developmental framework to focus on one particular developmental phase. Examples include theories of perspective taking in middle childhood, theories of sexual identity development in adolescence, and theories of emerging adulthood.

Early life span theorists, including Erikson, saw their models of development as universal, applying equally well to all groups of people. This idea has been the target of much criticism, with suggestions that the traditional models are based on the experiences of European American, 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 multidisciplinary *life course perspective*. 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

- Developmental risk and protection

As you may recall, the life course perspective is the conceptual framework for the companion volume to this book: *Dimensions of Human Behavior: The Changing Life Course*.

The life course perspective would emphasize how the life course trajectories of Maria Chavez and her siblings were altered by the early death of their father and how what happens in one generation reverberates up and down the extended family line. Think about how David and Sarah reorganized their work and personal lives to care for Maria Chavez. Give some thought to how Sarah's late midlife might have been different if Maria had not required care at that time and if David had not struggled with addiction. 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. The life course perspective has begun to develop considerable coherence and 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, although the two models have become much more similar on this issue over time, agreeing that there is considerable diversity in development across the life course.

- *Testability and empirical support.* Many of Erikson's ideas have been employed and verified in empirical research, but until recently, much of developmental research was based on European American, heterosexual, middle-class males. A major concern is that by defining normal as statistical average, life span 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 emphasized 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 that suggests that age-graded differences in behavior reflect both developmental factors and historical trends (see Elder & Giele, 2009). The life course perspective is a leading perspective driving longitudinal study of physical and mental health behaviors and outcomes.

- *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 limited attention to the political, economic, and cultural environments of human behavior; the life course perspective pays limited 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 primary 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 European American, middle-class, heterosexual 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 Seabrook & Avison, 2012).

- *Usefulness for social work practice.* Developmental theory is often used for assessment purposes in social work practice, to evaluate biological, psychological, and social development of individuals. The theoretical perspective can also aid indirectly in the identification of potential personal and social developmental resources. The life course perspective is more promising than traditional life span theories for understanding diverse persons in diverse environments. It suggests that individuals must always be assessed within familial, cultural, social, economic, 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." The developmental perspective is particularly useful for suggesting how to engage people of specific life stages, particularly children and adolescents and for indicating stage-appropriate interventions. Because the developmental perspective sees

individuals as having the possibility to rework their inner experiences, as well as their family relationships, clients may be assisted in finding new strategies for getting their lives back on course. The life course perspective's use of the concept of "turning points" provides clues for how social workers can help individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities to use life situations as turning points to get their lives and social groupings back on track. The life course perspective, with its emphasis on developmental risk and protection, is being used to develop public health interventions that develop and enhance protective factors related to both physical and mental health. Such interventions are preventive in nature and may occur at the individual, family, or community level. Life course research also has abundant implications for social policy and for practice evaluation.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS 2.3

Both the psychodynamic and developmental per-spectives provide stage theories of human behavior, but they put different emphases on the importance of childhood experiences. How important do you think Maria Chavez's childhood experiences are to her current situation? The psychodynamic perspective sees emotion as holding a central place in human behavior. What emotions do you experience as you read the story of the Maria Chavez family? How do you think these emotions are related to your own childhood experiences? How do you think those emotions might be helpful for work with the Maria Chavez family? How might they not be helpful?

Behavioral Perspective

The hospice social worker thinks about how Maria Chavez's daughter, Sarah, is serving as a caregiver for her mother but also has worked as a certified nursing assistant, a paid caregiving role. He is curious, as he often is when interacting with paid caregivers, about whether she had particular role models for the caregiv-ing role in her family or other relationships. He is struck by Sarah's statement that she feels obligated to get her mother's approval for financial decisions even though her mother has dementia and has assigned power of attorney over financial matters to Sarah. He hears that Maria has always kept a tight control over money and thinks that she has modeled this behavior for Sarah. He is wondering, however, about the behaviors Maria has

engaged in to shape and reinforce Sarah's carefulness about her mother's money. He also hears that Sarah's sisters want her to be frugal with her mother's money and he wonders how they go about reinforcing this idea with Sarah. This is an issue that could be explored during his next visit. He also wants to explore whether the fears about the future that Sarah expressed toward the end of their conversation is based on being overwhelmed with the current situation or is a long-term pattern of doubting her own personal competence. Viewing the Maria Chavez family from a behavioral perspective can lead to such questions.
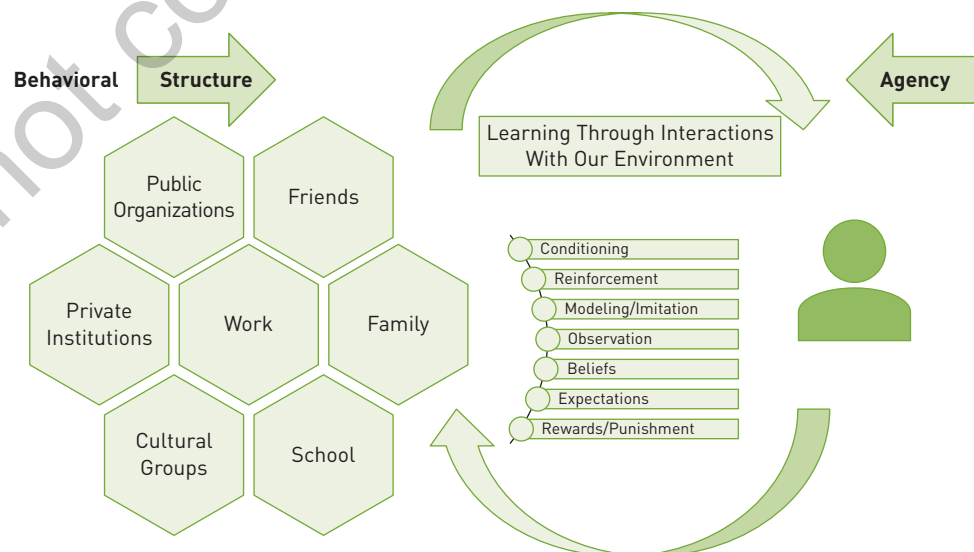
Theories in the **behavioral perspective** suggest that human behavior is learned as individuals interact with their environments. There are disagreements among the different streams of behavioral theory, however, about the processes by which behavior is learned. Over time, three major versions of behavioral theory have been presented, proposing different mechanisms by which learning occurs. The general themes of the behavioral perspective are represented visually in Exhibit 2.8, and Exhibit 2.1 lists the big ideas, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

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 another stimulus of significance. Biomedical research indicates that many bodily functions are affected by classical conditioning, and neuroscience research has found that fear responses in the amygdala are trained through classical conditioning (Farmer, 2009; Sapolsky, 2017). Classical conditioning plays a role in understanding many problems that social work clients experience. For example, someone like Maria Chavez's grandson, David, who had a drug addiction problem may have experienced urges to use when in a location where he often engaged in drug using behavior 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. After a traumatic experience, the body and the brain are conditioned to reexperience the traumatic situation when exposed to sights, sounds, smells, and other sensory stimuli associated with the original traumatic experience (van der Kolk, 2014). This approach looks for antecedents of behavior—stimuli that precede behavior—as the mechanism for learning.

Operant conditioning theory, sometimes known as instrumental conditioning, sees behavior as the result of reinforcement. It is built on the work of two American

EXHIBIT 2.8 ● Behavioral Perspective

Behavioral — Structure

Agency

Learning Through Interactions With Our Environment

Public Organizations

Friends

Private Institutions

Work

Family

Cultural Groups

School

Conditioning
Reinforcement
Modeling/Imitation
Observation
Beliefs
Expectations
Rewards/Punishment

PHOTO 2.4 Classical conditioning is traced to an experiment Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov performed with dogs.

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 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 we find pleasing, in hopes of strengthening those behaviors. Negative reinforcers are also used regularly in social life to stop or avoid unpleasant behavior. For example, an adolescent girl cleans her room to avoid parental complaints. Avoiding the complaints reinforces the room-cleaning behavior.

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. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), developed in the 1960s, focuses

on helping people to better understand the thoughts and emotions that lead to problematic behavior and to develop new ways of thinking and behaving. 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 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 behavioral theorizing disagree about the mechanisms by which behavioral learning occurs, there is agreement that all human problems can be defined in terms of undesirable behaviors. Furthermore, all behaviors can be defined, measured, and changed.

This is how the 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 behavioral perspective, within each stream ideas are logically developed in a consistent manner. The behavioral perspective gets high marks for conceptual clarity; concepts are very clearly defined in each of the streams.

- *Testability and empirical support.* 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 behavioral perspective, however, because laboratory experiments by design eliminate much of the complexity of person–environment interactions. In general, however, all streams of the behavioral perspective have attained a relatively high degree of empirical support. Biomedical researchers have found that many bodily functions are affected by classical conditioning, including immune functioning and brain functioning. Neuroscientists have found that CBT has a powerful effect on the brain activity involved in depression (Davidson & Begley, 2012). On the other hand, recent research in Sweden (Werbart, Levin, Andersson, & Sandell, 2013) found that CBT produced no better results than psychodynamic or integrative therapy in outpatient psychiatric care. Davidson and Begley (2012) suggest that the skill level of the CBT therapist for targeting specific neural circuits is an important variable, but understanding of this is in the early stages.

- *Comprehensiveness.* Overall, the behavioral perspective sacrifices multidimensional understanding to gain logical consistency and testability. Little attention was paid to biology in early theorizing, but in his later work, Bandura (2001, 2002) recognized the role of biology in human behavior. Even so, biological research provides some of the best evidence for behavioral theory, with the research noted earlier about the benefits of CBT and research about how bodily functions are classically conditioned. 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. For this reason, social behaviorism is sometimes seen as dehumanizing. Although environment

plays a large role in the behavioral perspective, the view of the environment is quite limited in classical and operant conditioning. Typically, the behavioral perspective searches for the one environmental factor, or contingency, that has reinforced or has the possibility of reinforcing one specific behavior. The identified contingency is usually in the micro system (such as the family) or sometimes in the meso system (e.g., a school classroom), but these systems are not typically put in social, economic, political, or historical contexts. One exception is Bandura's cognitive social learning theory, which acknowledges broad systemic influences on the development of gender roles. Time is important in this perspective only in terms of the juxtaposition of stimuli and reinforcement. The behaviorist is careful to analyze antecedents and consequences of behavior.

- *Diversity and power.* The 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. Neuroscientist Sapolsky (2017) suggests that behaviorists were often right about human behavior but were wrong in one big way: They failed to acknowledge that we are not all born the same, and the same training will not produce the same results in all humans. Likewise, the 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. 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** in which a person's prior experience with environmental forces has led to low self-efficacy and expectations of efficacy. Maier and Seligman (2016) recently analyzed the neural circuitry of learned helplessness.

- *Usefulness for social work practice.* A major strength of the behavioral perspective is the ease with which principles of behavior modification can

be extrapolated, and it is probably a rare social worker who has not used behavioral principles for social work assessment and intervention at some point. Behavioral theories are not particularly useful for social work engagement, however. Social workers and psychologists have used 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 (Walsh, 2014). Cognitive behavioral therapy has been found to be particularly useful for reducing symptoms of major depression (Davidson & Begley, 2012). Cognitive processing therapy, which teaches clients to challenge their trauma-related beliefs and assumptions, has been found to have long-term benefit for reducing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Iverson, King, Cunningham, & Resick, 2015). However, although the potential exists, 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 interested in changing social conditions that produce atypical or problematic behaviors in contrast with contemporary use of the theory to modify undesirable behaviors. 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) 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 Maria Chavez family believes in the dignity and worth of all humans. His experiences as a hospice social worker have reinforced his belief that each person is unique, and even though he has worked with many hospice patients, he expects Maria Chavez's story to be in some ways unlike any other story he has heard. He is eager to hear more about how Maria understands her situation and whether there are any things that are particularly important to her in the limited time she has left. He takes note of the resilience that Maria demonstrated as she transcended early hardships to build a robust career while raising a family in a time when that was not a typical path for women. He wants to acknowledge that with Maria. He also notes Sarah's pride in her mother's accomplishments, her courage in the face of an accumulation of stress, her strength in convincing her son to seek addiction treatment, and her commitment to her mother's care, and he wants to give that affirming feedback to Sarah. He also wants to hear more about what is important to Sarah during Maria's final days. His thoughts and planned course of action reflect the humanistic perspective.

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. We are using the term **humanistic perspective** to include humanistic psychology and existential psychology, both of which emphasize the individual's freedom of action and search for meaning. We also extend the term to include the growing movement of positive psychology and the capabilities approach. The main ideas of the humanistic perspective are presented visually in Exhibit 2.9, and Exhibit 2.1 lists the big ideas, major concepts, and related theories of the perspective.

Perhaps the most influential contributions to humanistic psychology were made by Carl Rogers (1951) and Abraham Maslow (1962). Abraham Maslow (1962) 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

EXHIBIT 2.9 ● Humanistic Perspective

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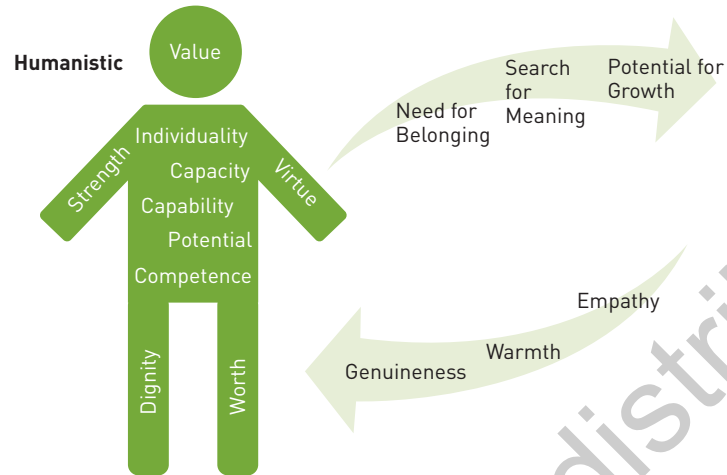
3. *Belongingness and love needs*: affection, intimacy

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

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

Maslow is considered one of the founders of *transpersonal psychology*, which he labeled as the "fourth force" of psychology. We include transpersonal psychology under the umbrella of the humanistic perspective, but it is not discussed here because it receives considerable attention in Chapter 6, The Spiritual Person.

Carl Rogers (1951) 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.

Existential psychology, which developed out of the chaos and despair in Europe during and after World War II, presented four primary themes (Krill, 2017):

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 other versions of humanism.

Maslow is said to have coined the term *positive psychology* when he used it as a chapter title in his 1954 book, *Motivation and Personality*. As we know it today, **positive psychology** 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. Martin Seligman (1998, 2002), one of the authors of the concept of learned helplessness, has been at the forefront of positive psychology, contributing the important concept of *learned optimism*. 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, a work ethic, and interpersonal skills (Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). The positive psychology approach is drawing on both Western and Eastern worldviews. A large focus on hope is rooted in Western thinking about individualism, whereas emphasis on balance, compassion, and harmony comes more from Eastern collectivist thinking (Snyder, Lopez, Pedrotti, & McKnight, 2011).

The capabilities approach to social justice, described in Chapter 1, can be classified with the humanistic perspective. The *capabilities approach* was proposed by welfare economist and political philosopher Amartya Sen (1999). Like other humanistic thinkers, Sen focuses on human agency or people's ability to pursue and realize goals that they value. He and collaborator Martha Nussbaum (2001) see humans as active, creative, and able to act on behalf of their aspirations. In contrast to earlier humanistic theorists, however, the capabilities approach puts individuals in a wider context and focuses on the idea that social arrangements should aim to support and expand people's capabilities. As suggested in Chapter 1, Nussbaum lists 10 core capabilities that all people in all societies must have to be able to pursue and realize valued goals. Sen argues, instead, that no such list can be arbitrarily delineated because of the great diversity of people and environments in the world. He recognizes the intersectionalities of diversity that exist in social life, that one person can belong to many different groups. He thinks that individuals should be left to decide which capabilities they choose to enhance or neglect.

In sociology, a *posthumanist* approach has recently developed (see Franklin, 2007). Posthumanists criticize the humanist perspective for separating humanity from the nonhuman world. They are particularly critical of what they see as an elevation of the importance of humans over nature and other nonhuman elements. This is a similar argument to the one made by actor-network theory and is compatible with the ecological justice movement, discussed in Chapter 7, which argues that all human activities must align with the rights of nature and natural systems.

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." As you will see in Chapter 6, The Spiritual Person, 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, and Nussbaum's core capabilities are quite explicit.

- *Testability and 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, Wilson, & Monte, 2009). Recent research across several disciplines has demonstrated that a high level of practitioner empathy is associated with positive client outcomes (Gerdes & Segal, 2011). 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 (see Chaves, Lopez-Gomez, Hervas, & Vazques, 2017). Some researchers have suggested that neuroscience research is calling the notion of free will (human agency) into question, arguing that it provides clear evidence that human behavior is determined by the gene–environment interactions that shape the brain (Kurzweil, 2012). Other neuroscientists provide evidence that humans have the power to "live our lives and train our brains" in ways that shift emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (Davidson & Begley, 2012, p. 225). That is a high endorsement for some of the tenets of the humanistic perspective.

- *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 a search for meaning, the humanistic perspective is the only perspective presented in this chapter to explicitly recognize the role of spirituality in human behavior. (Other theories of spirituality are discussed in Chapter 6.) In addition, Maslow recognizes the importance of satisfaction of basic biological needs. Most theorists in the humanistic tradition give limited attention to the environments of human behavior. 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 (Snyder et al., 2011). The capabilities perspective calls for social institutions to support and expand people's capabilities.

- *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 one exception is Sen's capabilities perspective, which emphasizes the great diversity of human capabilities and values. 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 Maria Chavez family may be a novel experience for each family member, and the social worker may, indeed, hear very different stories from

what he expects to hear. Rogers developed his respect for the personal self, and consequently his client-centered approach to therapy, when he realized that his perceptions of the worlds of his low-income clients in the Child Guidance Clinic were very different from their own perceptions.

- *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 strong in recommendations for engaging with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. 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. 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 that Maria Chavez's past courage in the face of early hardships and Sarah's strong commitment to caring for her mother are strengths that the social worker can emphasize in his interactions with them. 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. Appreciative inquiry is another organizational model that focuses on identifying the positives and dreams of what might be in organizations (Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore, 2016). Positive psychology is popular in clinical work and is beginning to propose guidelines for developing positive environments in schools, workplaces, and communities.

The Merits of Multiple Perspectives

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

We have provided an overview of eight theoretical perspectives in this chapter and discussed some of the theories related to them. In Chapters 3 through 14, you will encounter other theories related to these perspectives, theories used to understand specific dimensions of person and environment. To help you see the connections between the perspectives discussed here and theories discussed in subsequent chapters, Exhibit 2.10 cues you to where you will find these related theories in the chapters that follow.

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 Maria Chavez family. 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 such as that provided by theoretical perspectives only to generate hypotheses to be tested in specific situations, not as facts inherent in every situation.

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 system changes that may be affecting the client system. Assist families and groups to renegotiate unsatisfactory system boundaries. Develop networks of support for persons experiencing challenging life transitions.

EXHIBIT 2.10 ● Where Related Theories of Eight Theoretical Perspectives Are Found in Chapters 3–14	
Perspective	**Found in Later Chapters**
Systems	Chapter 3: Proximal to distal environment approach; systems perspective on the human body; ecobiodevelopmental framework Chapter 4: Information processing theory; multiple intelligences theory Chapter 5: Risk and resilience framework; social network theory Chapter 7: Behavior settings theory; deep ecology Chapter 8: Materialist perspective; practice orientation; gene-culture-co-evolutionary theory Chapter 9: Functional theories of inequality Chapter 10: Systems perspective on families; family stress, coping, and resilience perspective; family economic stress model Chapter 12: Systems perspective on organizations: political economy model, institutional theory, learning organization theory Chapter 13: Social systems approach to communities
Conflict	Chapter 7: Ecocritical theories, ecofeminist theories Chapter 8: Neo-Marxist critical theory Chapter 9: Marxist theory of inequality; Weber's life chance theory of inequality; dependency theory; Wallerstein's world systems perspective Chapter 10: Feminist perspective and families Chapter 12: Critical perspective on organizations: theory of gendered organizations, organizations as multiple oppressions, and nonhierarchical organizations Chapter 13: Conflict approach to communities Chapter 14: Political opportunities perspective on social movements
Exchange and choice	Chapter 5: Social network theory Chapter 10: Exchange and choice perspective on families Chapter 11: Status characteristics and expectation states theory; exchange theory and groups Chapter 12: Rational perspective on formal organizations: ideal-type bureaucracy theory, scientific management, human relations theory, management by objective, decision-making theory Chapter 13: Social capital approach to communities Chapter 14: Mobilizing structures perspective on social movements
Social constructionist	Chapter 3: Constructivist perspective on disability Chapter 4: James Averill's social constructionist theory of emotions, the self as shared symbolic experience Chapter 8: Mentalist perspective, poststructuralism, and postmodernism approaches to culture Chapter 10: Symbolic interaction perspective on families Chapter 11: Symbolic interaction and groups Chapter 12: Interactional/interpretive perspective on formal organizations: organizational culture model, managing diversity model, and appreciative inquiry model Chapter 14: Cultural perspective on social movements

(Continued)

EXHIBIT 2.10 ● (Continued)	
Perspective	**Found in Later Chapters**
Psychodynamic	Chapter 4: Greenberg's theory of primary and secondary emotions; fight or flight stress theory; differential emotions theory; psychoanalytic theory; ego psychology; attribution theory; theory of emotional intelligence; the self as organizing activity
	Chapter 5: Relational theory; attachment theory; psychoanalytic feminist theory; gender feminist theory; multicultural theory
	Chapter 7: Control theories of the relationship between the physical environment and human behavior
	Chapter 10: Bowen's theory of differentiation of self; family stress, coping, and resilience perspective
	Chapter 11: Psychodynamic theory and groups
Developmental	Chapter 3: Ecobiodevelopmental framework
	Chapter 4: Piaget's cognitive theory; Kohlberg's and Gilligan's theories of moral intelligence
	Chapter 5: Social identity theory; Erikson's psychosocial theory
	Chapter 10: Life course developmental perspective on families; family economic stress model
	Chapter 11: Self-categorization theory; stage models of group development
Behavioral	Chapter 4: Social learning theory; cognitive behavioral theory/therapy; the self as cognitive structure
	Chapter 7: Stimulation theories, attention restoration theory, and psychophysiological stress recovery theory of the relationship between physical environments and human behavior
Humanistic	Chapter 4: The self as unfolding potential; the self as flow of experience
	Chapter 6: Fowler's stages of faith development; transpersonal theory; Wilber's integral theory of consciousness
	Chapter 10: Family resilience perspective
	Chapter 12: Appreciative inquiry model of organizational change

- 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 network maps where useful. Assist individuals, families, and organizations to renegotiate unsatisfactory patterns of exchange, when possible. Recognize the role of both reason and emotion in the policymaking process.

- 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.

- Engage clients by listening to how they see their situations, what kinds of changes they would like to see, and what methods they would like to use to accomplish those changes. Be aware of the potential for significant differences between your assessment of the situation and the client's own assessment. Focus on strengths rather than pathology; recognize the possibility of learned hopefulness as well as learned helplessness.

Key Terms

agency 64

behavioral perspective 63

boundary 38

classical conditioning theory 63

cognitive social learning theory 64

conflict perspective 42

critical race theory 45

critical theorists 43

developmental perspective 59

efficacy expectation 64

empowerment theories 45

exchange and choice perspective 47

feedback mechanisms 38

feminist theories 45

hierarchy of needs 66

humanistic perspective 66

intersectionality theory 45

learned helplessness 65

operant conditioning theory 63

phenomenal self 69

positive psychology 67

psychodynamic perspective 55

reciprocity 47

self-efficacy 64

social capital 48

social constructionist perspective 51

social exchange theory 47

social network theory 48

systems perspective 38

Active Learning

1. Reread the case study of the end of life care for Maria Chavez. Next, review the big ideas of the eight theoretical perspectives as presented in Exhibit 2.1. Choose three specific big ideas that you think are most helpful in thinking about the Maria Chavez 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. Discuss why these particular choices, and not others, were made by each of your classmates.

2. Choose one of the theoretical perspectives described in this chapter. Spend 5–8 minutes thinking about how you would describe that perspective to a class of 6th graders. Prepare an outline of the presentation you would make to the 6th graders. Post your outline for your classmates to review and provide feedback.

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.

Web Resources

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.

International Humanistic Psychology Association: http://ihpaworld.org

Site maintained by the International Humanistic Psychology Association contains links to events, capacity-building training projects, professional collaboration and development, research, dialogues and networking, and publications and resources.

Personality Theories: 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, Jean Piaget, and Buddhist psychology.

Richards on the Brain: Behavioral Theories: www.richardsonthebrain.com/ behavioral-theories

An online library maintained in Parker, Colorado, with the mission to bring together the findings of neuroscience, psychology, and biology. The behavioral theory page includes information on behavioral theory, humanistic psychology, and psychoanalytic theory.

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 interaction theory, conflict theory, network theory, and rational choice theory.

William Alanson White Institute: www .wawhite.org

Site contains contemporary psychoanalysis journal articles, training programs, and a psychoanalysis-in-action blog.