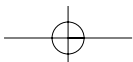
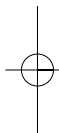
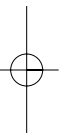


# ASPECTS OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR

PERSON, ENVIRONMENT, TIME

**Elizabeth D. Hutchison**

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- ❖ What is it about people, environments, and time that social workers need to understand?
- ❖ Why is it important for social workers to understand the roles that diversity and inequality play in human behavior?

## KEY IDEAS

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

1. This book provides a multidimensional way of thinking about human behavior in terms of changing configurations of persons and environments.
2. Although person, environment, and time are inseparable, we can focus on them separately by thinking about the relevant dimensions of each.
3. Relevant personal dimensions include the biological, the psychological, and the spiritual.
4. Nine dimensions of environment that have relevance for social work are the physical environment, culture, social institutions and social structure, dyads, families, small groups, formal organizations, communities, and social movements. These dimensions have been studied separately, but they are neither mutually exclusive nor hierarchically ordered.
5. Special attention should be paid to diversity, power relations, and patterns in opportunities and constraints.
6. General knowledge, as well as knowledge about the unique situation, is necessary for effective social work practice.
7. We use a number of ways to try to understand human behavior, but we draw heavily on two interrelated rigorous and systematic ways of building general knowledge: theory and empirical research.

## Case Study

**Sina's Determination to Survive**

Sina grew up in a suburb of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Because there were so many children in the family into which she was born, Sina and her two younger sisters were sent to be raised by relatives who lived nearby and who could not have children of their own. Sina had a happy childhood with these relatives and thinks of them as her parents. (Therefore, I will refer to them as her parents.) Sina's parents were merchants, and she worked in the store with them. Her marriage at the age of 16 was arranged. Both Sina and her husband completed the equivalent of our high school education and were considered, in Cambodia, to be quite well educated. Sina's husband worked as a mechanic until they left the Phnom Penh area.

When the Khmer Rouge soldiers came to the outskirts of Phnom Penh in April 1975, Sina had no idea that her pleasant life was about to be so radically changed. The soldiers spread the word that the Americans were planning to bomb Phnom Penh and that everyone had to leave the area for a little while. The whole city was quickly evacuated. Sina, who was pregnant, headed for the countryside with her husband, 4-year-old daughter, and very large extended families from both sides. In the countryside, people were instructed to build houses, which most of them did not know how to do. Very soon, it became apparent that all was not well. The soldiers became very dictatorial and were particularly harsh with people who appeared educated and otherwise demonstrated "Western ways." Sina and her family started trying to hide their Western ways. They got rid of eyeglasses and books, changed their linguistic style to appear less educated, and tried to fake farming skills.

Things got worse. People, particularly men, began disappearing in the night, and gunshots were heard. Stories spread about terrible things happening. Rice began to disappear, and there was not enough to eat. The evacuees were forced to go to political meetings that lasted for hours. Fear was continual, but nighttime was the worst. That was when people disappeared and the gunshots were heard. The realization that they were prisoners came slowly. But the atrocities intensified, and soon it was not uncommon to witness people, even family members, being shot in front of you. People had to work in the rice fields all day, but they were not allowed to eat the rice. Many people were starving to death. Malaria and dysentery were common. Members of Sina's extended family held up as well as could be expected, but her husband's brothers disappeared and were believed to be dead, and his sisters became ill and died. Sina's baby was underweight and sick at delivery, and Sina was relieved to have enough milk to feed her. Starvation and fear were constant companions.

Sina and her family stayed in the camp for about three years. She became pregnant again. Her husband's parents died of starvation. One night, Sina said to her husband, "We have to escape." Her husband said, "No, I am afraid." Sina insisted that they were going, that she could take no more, and she knew that there had to be a better life for her children. Sina rounded up her parents and her sisters and told them that they were going. They too were afraid and tried to dissuade her. But Sina was resolved to go, and they left in the middle of the night—pregnant Sina, her husband and two daughters, her parents, and her two sisters. Some of them were without shoes. They were very anxious about the possibility of being apprehended by the soldiers as they fled, and there were land mines everywhere.

Leaving camp, they entered the jungle. They ate whatever they could find—Sina is very vague when she talks about what they ate—and were constantly afraid of being apprehended by soldiers or stepping on a land mine. Night was still the most frightening time. Sina's husband was always near tears. After a few days, they could only travel a few miles per day, because they were too weak to walk and some were sick with

malaria and dysentery. Sina is not sure how long it took them to get to Thailand, but she estimates 4 or 5 months. They just kept moving, with no clear idea where they were headed. In Thailand, they stayed in a United Nations camp for about two years. It was months before they could take solid food, and it took them a long time to recover from the aftermath of starvation and trauma. Sina gave birth to her third child soon after reaching the camp, and a fourth child before they left the camp to come to the United States.

Sina and her family were sponsored as immigrants by a refugee resettlement organization. With the help of a sponsor and an agency social worker, they were settled into an apartment when they first arrived, and Sina and her husband soon found jobs. The social worker also helped the family to understand and navigate the school system and the health care system and to make sense of their new world. Over the years, Sina has made episodic contact with agency social workers to seek information about community organizations or to discuss challenges the family was facing. She has come on several occasions to talk about her husband's constant sadness.

Sina's husband was hired by a construction company soon after the family arrived in the United States, but in the past year that job became too strenuous for him. He currently has a job cleaning office buildings. At first, Sina worked as a hotel maid, but for several years now she has worked as a case aide with a social service organization. When money is tight, she still works part time as a maid. A fifth child was born after the family arrived in the United States, and all of the children made good adjustments to their new environment. The family's sponsor helped them to buy a house in the suburbs a number of years ago. Sina and her husband put a high value on education, and the children did well in school. Three of the children have graduated from college, and all have found work that they enjoy. All have married; two have moved to another state, but Sina is happy to have three children still living close by. Recently, she and her husband were thrilled at the birth of the first grandchild.

Sina and members of her extended family report that they still have trouble being in the dark, and they get very anxious if the food supply runs low. Sina's husband seems very sad all the time, and he sometimes still suggests that he should have stayed and died. Sina, however, thinks they had no choice but to leave, for the sake of the children, and she is matter-of-fact about their struggles. Sina is always motivated to learn something new. She has become a U.S. citizen and continues to put great efforts into learning English. She has converted from Buddhism to Catholicism, but her husband has not. Sina and her husband sometimes have a great deal of tension between them because he thinks she is more assertive than women should be. Sina is not sure if this problem would have arisen between them if they had been able to continue with their lives in Cambodia. She is more comfortable in her current environment than her husband is, but she sometimes wonders why Americans are so brash, so loud, so direct, so demanding, and so lacking in humility.

## The Complexity of Human Behavior

As eventful as it has been, Sina's story is still unfolding. As a social worker, you will become a part of many unfolding life stories, and you will want to have a way of thinking about them. The purpose of this book is to provide a way for you to think about the nature and complexities of the people and situations that are at the center of social work practice. Three major aspects of this approach to human behavior are the person, the environment, and time.

If we focus on the *person*, we observe that Sina must have been blessed with a healthy biological constitution initially and must have been nurtured well in her childhood. She was able to carry babies to term through starvation, illness, and a journey through a jungle. She

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was able to recover in the hospital camp when many others died of damaged bodies and/or broken spirits. She has emotional resilience and a belief in her own capabilities. Sina and her husband have both survived physically, but she has survived spiritually as well, with a zest for life and hope for the future that he lacks.

If we focus on the *environment*, we see many influences on Sina's story. Consider first the physical environment: Sina moved from a comfortable suburban environment into a very primitive rural prison camp. From there, she wandered in the jungle, with tigers and snakes as her fellow travelers, and torrential rains, imagined soldiers, and land mines as foes. Her next stops were a hospital camp and, finally, a city in the United States.

Culture is a powerful influence in Sina's story. She faced no stigma for being given to relatives at birth, because that was not an unusual custom in Cambodia, where there was no birth control, and extended families were close. Culture recommended that she be married at what may appear to us to be an early age and that her partner would be chosen for her. Culture also held that women lack power and influence, and yet Sina assumed a powerful role in her family's escape from the prison camp. Culture accorded a high value to humility, indirect communication, and saving face. The suburban, modernized lifestyle in which Sina was reared assigned a value to education that she and her family did not share with Cambodians who lived in rural areas. And now, Sina lives biculturally. She assists the social workers at her agency to understand the communication patterns of Cambodian and Vietnamese clients, and yet she is often baffled by the communication patterns of her native-born U.S. neighbors and coworkers. She is influenced by changing gender roles but is unhappy with the tension that such changes have produced in her marital relationship.

Sina's story has also been powerfully influenced by the geopolitical unrest of her early adulthood. Her relationships with social institutions have changed over time, and she has had to learn new rules based on her changing place in the social structure. Prior to evacuation, as an educated urban woman, she enjoyed high status and the respect that comes with it. In the prison camp, she had to learn to conceal that status and encountered greater powerlessness than she could have previously imagined. In the United States, she often experienced the loss of status that comes from the language barrier regardless of one's educational background.

Another dimension of the environment, family, is paramount to Sina. She was lucky that she did not have to leave many family members behind or see them die in the prison camp. Her husband was not so lucky. Sina's children are central to her life, and she suggests that they motivated her to survive and reach beyond survival with hope. Sina and her husband are devoted to each other, but she is sorry about the tension in their relationship and her husband's enormous sadness. She is grateful, however, that her husband has not self-medicated his grief with alcohol as she has seen other Cambodian American men do in her work. She is also pleased to see that he has found some joy in their new grandson.

Small groups, organizations, and communities have been important forces in Sina's life, but she has had little direct contact with social movements. Sina's English as a second language (ESL) class is a small group that became particularly important to her over the years; she enjoyed the companionship and the collegial sense of "we are all in the same boat" that she got from the weekly classes. She found several organizations particularly helpful in mediating her struggles with resettlement: the refugee resettlement program that sponsored her family, the social service organization for which she works, the Catholic church of which she is a member, and the schools her children attended. Sina has drawn strength and courage from her associations with these organizations, and she differs from her husband in this

regard. Sina moved from a suburban community, where she was surrounded by extended family and long-term friends, to a prison camp, where fear was the driving force of relationships and loss of loved ones a common occurrence. Next she moved to a hospital camp, where recovery and taking note of losses took all the available energy. Finally, she moved to a city in the United States, where many people were willing to help, but everything seemed strange, and the language barrier was a serious impediment. Sina has heard about the antiwar movement that opposed U.S. involvement in Vietnam, but she is not sure what to make of it.

If we now focus on the influence of *time*, we see that war and atrocity, escape, and resettlement have been powerful life events for Sina and her family. These events have left many trace effects in their current life. Experiences with past environments have left them with fear of the dark, panic regarding food shortages, and a preference for suburban environments. Both Sina and her husband have chronic medical problems from their years of hardship, but Sina's are minor, while her husband's have begun to take a toll on him. Sina's husband has no surviving member of his family of origin, and his grief, and perhaps survivor's guilt, over the massive losses continues to be severe. The language barrier is the most persistent reminder that this is not home. Luckily, Sina managed to smuggle some personal documents and photographs out of Cambodia, and she uses these to invite fond memories of past joyful events, including her traditional Cambodian wedding. These memories give her pleasure, but Sina lives mostly in the present while anticipating the future with confidence. To her husband, however, the past holds more positive meaning than either the present or future does.

Person, environment, and time interact dynamically. Relationships are reconfigured as the multiple influences on human behavior ebb and flow. The actions of one person can only be understood in relation to the actions of other people and in relation to ever-changing situations. A focus on changing relationships among inseparable aspects of a unity is often referred to as a transactional approach (Altman & Rogoff, 1987; Dewey & Bentley, 1949). A basic tenet is that person and environment depend on each other for their definition; the same person in a different environment, or the same environment with a different person, most likely will yield different behaviors. In reality, of course, any configuration or situation involves multiple persons and multiple environments.

Sina's story is a good illustration of the inseparability of person, environment, and time. What made her decide to attempt to escape from the prison camp? Was it something within her, something about her physical and social environment, or something about that time of her life? Or a combination of all three? Why has she chosen to acculturate more quickly than her husband? What has led her, from time to time, to reach out for help for her husband? It is impossible to focus on person, environment, and time independently; they are inseparable.

## A Multidimensional Approach

Thinking about human behavior as changing configurations of person and environment over time is a **multidimensional approach**. Such an approach is not new. Social work has historically recognized human behavior as an interaction of person with environment. The earliest social work practice book, *Social Diagnosis*, written by Mary Richmond in 1917, identified the social situation and the personality of the client as the dual foci of social work assessment. The settlement house movement put heavy emphasis on the environmental aspects of person-environment configurations, but environment was deemphasized, and

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intrapsychic factors were emphasized, when social work began to rely on psychodynamic theory in the 1920s. In 1958, Herman Stein and Richard Cloward published an edited reader, *Social Perspectives on Behavior: A Reader in Social Science for Social Work and Related Professions*. In the preface, they commented that social work had failed, in the midst of its fascination with dynamic psychology, to keep abreast of developments in sociology, cultural anthropology, and social psychology. In addition, in the late 1960s, general systems theory and other related formulations were incorporated into the way social work scholars think about human behavior (Anderson & Carter, 1974; Bloom, 1984; Germain, 1973; Hartman, 1970; Hearn, 1958, 1969; Meyer, 1976; Pincus & Minahan, 1973; Siporin, 1975). In recent times, ecological theory, which addresses the relationships between organisms and their environments, has become the dominant theoretical approach across a number of behavioral science disciplines (Fraser, 2004b). These approaches have renewed social workers' interest in the social sciences and helped social workers to understand the processes and activities involved in the relationships between person and environment. The multidimensional approach of this book is rooted in the systems perspective.

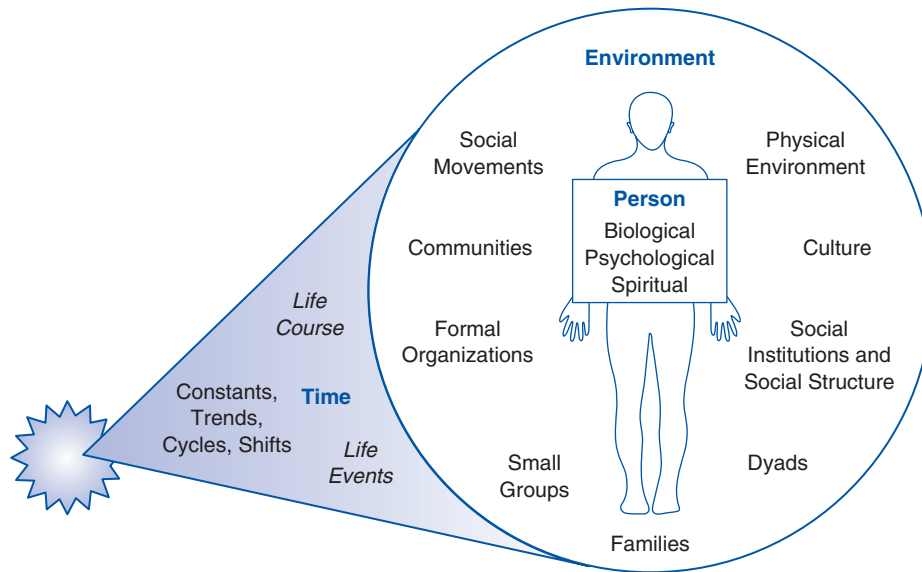
We need, of course, to move beyond general statements about the inseparability of person and environment and about changing configurations to bring these ideas alive in our day-to-day experiences as social workers and to understand how to talk with clients like Sina about their concerns. A vast multidisciplinary literature, of both theory and research, is available to help us. The good news is that the multifaceted nature of this literature provides a broad knowledge base for the varied settings and roles involved in social work practice. The bad news is that this literature is highly fragmented, "scattered across more than thirty fields" (Kirk & Reid, 2002, p. 207). What we need is a structure for organizing our thinking about this multifaceted, multidisciplinary, fragmented literature.

The multidimensional approach provided in this book should help. This approach is built on the three major aspects of human behavior: person, environment, and time. Although in this book and in the companion volume, *Dimensions of Human Behavior: The Changing Life Course*, we focus on each of these aspects separately, keep in mind that no single aspect can be entirely understood without attention to the other aspects.

We can get a clearer picture of these three aspects if we think about the important dimensions of each—about what it is that we should study about person, about environment, and about time. Exhibit 1.1 is a graphic overview of the dimensions of person, environment, and time discussed in this book. Exhibit 1.2 defines and gives examples for each dimension.

Keep in mind that **dimension** refers to a feature that can be focused on separately but that cannot be understood without also considering other features. The dimensions identified in this book are usually studied as detached or semidetached realities, with one dimension characterized as causing or leading to another. However, I do not see dimensions as detached realities, and I am not presenting a causal model. I want instead to show how these dimensions work together, how they are embedded with each other, and how many possibilities are opened for social work practice when we think about human behavior this way. I am suggesting that human behavior is **multidetermined**, or developed as a result of many causes. I do think, however, that focusing on specific dimensions one at a time can help to clarify general, abstract statements about changing configurations of person and environment.



**Exhibit 1.1** Person, Environment, and Time Dimensions**Personal Dimensions**

Any story could be told from the perspective of any person in the story. The story at the beginning of this chapter is told from Sina's perspective, but it could have been told from the perspectives of a variety of other persons: a Khmer Rouge soldier, Sina's husband, her mother, one of her children, a member of the sponsoring family, the social worker. You will want to recognize the multiple perspectives held by different persons involved in the stories of which you become a part in your social work activities.

You also will want tools for thinking about the various dimensions of the persons involved in these stories. For many years, social work scholars described the approach of social work as *psychosocial*, giving primacy to psychological dimensions of the person. Personality, ego states, emotion, and cognition are the important features of the person in this approach. Currently, however, social workers, like contemporary scholars in other disciplines (e.g., Bandura, 2001; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; McInnis-Dittrich, 2002; Sadock & Sadock, 2003; Saleebey, 2001; White, 2005), take a **biopsychosocial approach**. In this approach, human behavior is considered to be the result of interactions of integrated biological, psychological, and social systems. Psychology is seen as inseparable from biology; emotions and cognitions affect the health of the body and are affected by it (Adelman, 2006). Increasingly, neurobiologists write about the "social brain," recognizing that the human brain is wired for social life but also recognizing that the social environment has an impact on brain structure and processes (Insel & Fernald, 2004; Skuse, Morris, & Lawrence, 2003).

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**Exhibit 1.2** Definitions and Examples of Dimensions of Person, Environment, and Time

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<i>Personal Dimensions</i>		
The Biological Person	The body's biochemical, cell, organ, and physiological systems	Nervous system, endocrine system, immune system, cardiovascular system, musculoskeletal system, reproductive system
The Psychological Person	The mind and the mental processes	Cognitions (conscious thinking processes), emotion (feelings), self (identity)
The Spiritual Person	The aspect of the person that searches for meaning and purpose in life	Themes of morality; ethics; justice; interconnectedness; creativity; mystical states; prayer, meditation, and contemplation; relationships with a higher power
<i>Environmental Dimensions</i>		
The Physical Environment	The natural and human-built material aspects of the environment	Water, sun, trees, buildings, landscapes
Culture	A set of common understandings, evident in both behavior and material artifacts	Beliefs, customs, traditions, values
Social Institutions and Social Structure	Social Institutions: Patterned ways of organizing social relations in a particular sector of social life  Social Structure: A set of interrelated social institutions developed by humans to impose constraints on human interaction for the purpose of the survival and well-being of the collectivity	Social Institutions: family, religion, government, economy, education, social welfare, health care, mass media  Social Structure: social class
Dyads	Two persons bound together in some way	Parent and child, romantic couple, social worker and client
Families	Groupings of two or more people who define themselves as family and assume obligations to one another	Nuclear family, extended family, fictive kin
Small Groups	Collections of people who interact with each other, perceive themselves as belonging to a group, are interdependent, join together to accomplish a goal, fulfill a need through joint association, or are influenced by a set of rules and norms	Friendship group, self-help group, therapy group, committee, task group, interdisciplinary team

**Exhibit 1.2**

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Formal Organizations	Collectivities of people, with a high degree of formality of structure, working together to meet a goal or goals	Civic and social service organizations, business organizations, professional associations
Communities	People bound either by geography or by network links (webs of communication), sharing common ties, and interacting with one another	Territorial communities such as neighborhoods; relational communities such as the social work community, the disability community, a faith community, a soccer league
Social Movements	Large-scale collective actions to make change, or resist change, in specific social institutions	Civil rights movement, poor people's movements, disability movement, gay rights movement
<i>Time Dimensions</i>		
Trends	Long-term patterns of change that move in a general direction	Trend toward greater ethnic diversity in the United States Trend toward delayed childbearing in advanced industrial countries Trend toward greater income inequality between sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world
Cycles	Short-term patterns of change that reverse direction repetitively	A weekly cycle of work interspersed with rest and relaxation Economic downturns and upturns
Shifts	Sudden abrupt changes of direction	Changes in patterns of living following a major loss Changes in the physical and social environment following a natural disaster (e.g., hurricane, flood, earthquake), or a human-made disaster such as September 11, 2001
Linear Time	Time in terms of a straight line	Past, present, future

In recent years, social work scholars as well as scholars in the social and behavioral sciences and medicine have argued for greater attention to the spiritual dimension of persons as well (Carley, 2005; Faull & Hills, 2006; Richards, 2005; Watts, Dutton, & Gulliford, 2006). Recent developments in neuroscience have generated new explorations of the unity of the biological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of the person. For example, recent research has focused on the ways that emotions and thoughts, as well as spiritual states,

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influence the immune system (Kimura et al., 2005; Woods, Antoni, Ironson, & Kling, 1999). One research team has explored the impact of spirituality and religiosity on mental health and found that thankfulness protects against major depression (Kendler et al., 2003). In this book, we give substantial coverage to all three of these personal dimensions: biological, psychological, and spiritual.

### Environmental Dimensions

Social workers have always thought about the environment as multidimensional. As early as 1901, Mary Richmond presented a model of case coordination that took into account not only personal dimensions but also family, neighborhood, civic organizations, private charitable organizations, and public relief organizations (see Exhibit 1.3). Like contemporary social workers, Richmond saw the environment as multidimensional, including in her model many of the same dimensions of environment covered in this book and presented in Exhibit 1.1.

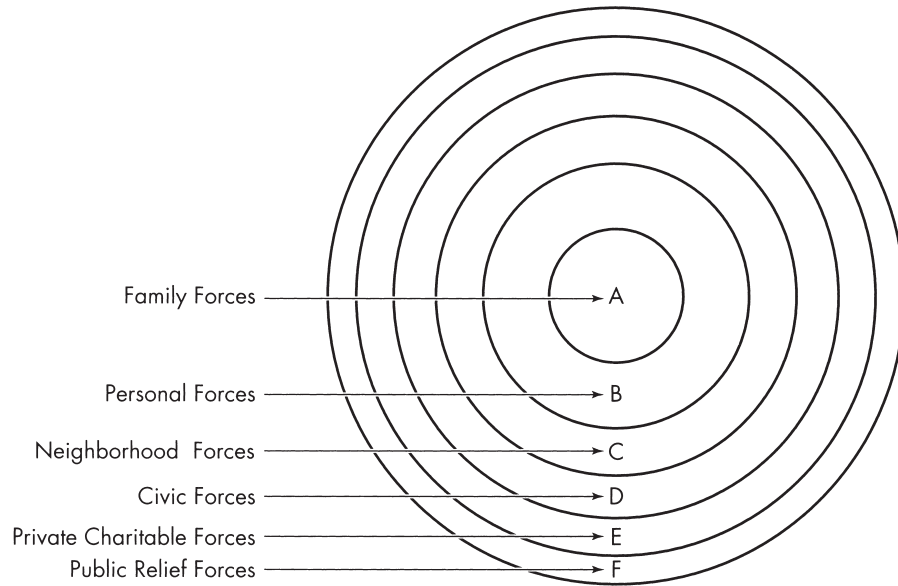
Several models for classifying dimensions of the environment have been proposed more recently. Among social work scholars, Ralph Anderson and Irl Carter (1974) made a historic contribution to systemic thinking about human behavior with the first edition of their *Human Behavior in the Social Environment: A Social Systems Approach*, one of the earliest textbooks on human behavior authored by social workers. Their classification of environmental dimensions has had a significant impact on the way social workers think about the environment. Anderson and Carter divided the environment into five dimensions: culture and society, communities, organizations, groups, and families. Social workers (see, e.g., Ashford, LeCroy, & Lortie, 2006) have also been influenced by Uri Bronfenbrenner's (1989, 1999) ecological perspective, which identifies four interdependent, nested categories or levels of systems:

1. *Microsystems* are systems that involve direct face-to-face contact between members.
2. *Mesosystems* are networks of microsystems of a given person.
3. *Exosystems* are the linkages between microsystems and larger institutions that affect the system, such as the family system and the parent's workplace or the family system and the child's school.
4. *Macrosystems* are the broader influences of culture, subculture, and social structure.

Some recent models have added the physical environment (natural and designed environments) as a separate dimension. Failure to include the physical environment has most notably hampered social work's ability to respond to persons with physical disabilities.

To have an up-to-date understanding of the multidimensional environment, social workers need knowledge about the eight dimensions of environment described in Exhibit 1.2 and presented as chapters in this book: the physical environment, culture, social institutions and social structure, families, small groups, formal organizations, communities, and social movements. We also need knowledge about dyadic relationships—relationships between two people, the most basic social relationships. Dyadic relationships receive attention throughout the book and are emphasized in Chapter 5. Simultaneous consideration of multiple environmental dimensions provides new possibilities for action, perhaps even new or revised approaches to social work practice.

**Exhibit 1.3** Mary Richmond's 1901 Model of Case Coordination



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>A. <i>Family Forces</i><br/>Capacity of each member for<br/>Affection<br/>Training<br/>Endeavor<br/>Social development</p> <p>B. <i>Personal Forces</i><br/>Kindred<br/>Friends</p> <p>C. <i>Neighborhood Forces</i><br/>Neighbors, landlords, tradesmen<br/>Former and present employers<br/>Clergymen, Sunday-school teachers,<br/>fellow church members<br/>Doctors<br/>Trade-unions, fraternal and benefit<br/>societies, social clubs,<br/>fellow-workmen<br/>Libraries, educational clubs, classes,<br/>settlements, etc.<br/>Thrift agencies, savings banks,<br/>stamp-savings, building and loan<br/>associations</p> <p>D. <i>Civic Forces</i><br/>School teachers, truant officers<br/>Police, police magistrates, probation<br/>officers, reformatories</p> | <p>Health department, sanitary<br/>inspectors, factory inspectors<br/>Postmen<br/>Parks, baths, etc.</p> <p>E. <i>Private Charitable Forces</i><br/>Charity organization society<br/>Church of denomination to which<br/>family belongs<br/>Benevolent individuals<br/>National, special, and general relief<br/>societies<br/>Charitable employment agencies and<br/>workrooms<br/>Fresh-air society, children's aid<br/>society, society for protection of<br/>children, children's homes, etc.<br/>District nurses, sick-diet kitchens,<br/>dispensaries, hospitals, etc.<br/>Society for suppression of vice,<br/>prisoner's aid society, etc.</p> <p>F. <i>Public Relief Forces</i><br/>Almshouses<br/>Outdoor poor department<br/>Public hospitals and dispensaries</p> |
|---|---|

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▲ **Photo 1.1** Three dimensions of human behavior are captured in this photo—person, environment, and time.

These dimensions are neither mutually exclusive nor hierarchically ordered. For example, a family is sometimes referred to as a social institution, families can also be considered small groups or dyads, and family theorists write about family culture. Remember, dimensions are useful ways of thinking about person-environment configurations, but you should not think of them as detached realities.

### Time Dimensions

When I was a doctoral student in a social work practice course, Professor Max Siporin began his discussion about social work assessment with the comment, “The date is the most important information on a written social work assessment.” This was Siporin’s way of acknowledging the importance of time in human behavior, of recognizing that person-environment transactions are ever-changing, dynamic, and flowing.

We are aware of the time dimension in the ongoing process of acculturation in Sina’s story. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, **acculturation** is a process of changing one’s culture by incorporating elements of another culture. Acculturation happens over time, in a nonlinear process, with new situations and opportunities to learn, negotiate, and accommodate. Sina has aggressively pursued learning about her new culture’s roles while still keeping her culture of origin, becoming bicultural over time. Her husband, however, barely speaks the new language and is involved in a much slower acculturation process. Twenty years ago, research indicated that men adapted to cultural change faster than women, but more recent research indicates that women often have a faster pace of acculturation than their spouses. There is also considerable evidence that children usually have a faster pace of acculturation than their parents (Falicov, 2003).



▲ **Photo 1.2** Time is one of the three dimensions outlined in this text for studying human behavior. It recognizes that people and environments are ever changing, dynamic, and flowing.

When I think of time, I tend to think of clocks, calendars, and appointments. And, I often seem to be racing against time, allowing the clock to tell me when an event should begin and end. This is the way most people in affluent countries with market economies think of time. This approach to time has been called *clock time* (Lauer, 1981; Levine, 2006). However, this approach to time is a relatively new invention, and many people in the contemporary world have a very different approach to time (Rosen, 2004). In nonindustrialized countries, and in subcultures within industrialized countries, people operate on *event time*, allowing scheduling to be determined by events. Robert Levine (2006) provides numerous examples of event time. Signals from the body, rather than the hour on the clock, dictate when to eat. Activities are guided by seasonal changes; when the rainy season comes, it is time for planting. Appointments are flexible; “I will see you tomorrow morning when the cows go out to graze.” The length of an event may be explained by saying, for example, “The storm lasted as long as a rice-cooking.” Monks in Burma have developed their own alarm clocks, knowing it is time to get up when there is enough light to see the veins in their hands (Thompson, 1967, cited in Levine, 2006).

Some event time cultures, such as that of the Hopi of the U.S. Southwest, and some Arab cultures have no language to distinguish past, present, and future time. However, clock time

cultures often use the concept **time orientation** to describe the extent to which individuals and collectivities are invested in three temporal zones—past, present, and future time—known as **linear time**. Research indicates that cultures differ in their time orientation. More traditional cultures are more invested in the past, and advanced industrial cultures are more invested in the future (Hofstede, 1998). Recently, Western behavioral scientists have begun to incorporate Eastern mindfulness practices of being more fully present in the current moment (present orientation) to help people buffer the persistent stresses of clock time and goal monitoring (future orientation) (see, e.g., Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

Research also indicates that there are age-related differences in time orientation, with older adults more past oriented than younger age groups (Shmotkin, 1991). There are also individual variations in time orientation. We noted earlier, for example, that Sina is invested in the future, but her husband is oriented to the past. This difference is consistent with research that found that trauma survivors who had experienced the most severe loss were more likely than other trauma survivors to be highly oriented to the past (Holman & Silver, 1998;

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Martz, 2004). It is important for social workers to be aware of the meaning of time for the individuals and communities they serve.

Nancy Yattaw (1999) suggests four ways of thinking about time in changing configurations of persons and environments: constants, trends, cycles, and shifts. Both event time and clock time are represented in these ways of thinking about time. Constants and trends are long-term changes, and cycles and shifts are short-term changes. This is how they differ:

- ◆ **Constants** move invariably in one direction. It is hard to think of examples of constants in our contemporary global societies, but the aging process approximates the idea of a constant.
- ◆ **Trends** move in a general direction but are not as invariable as constants. Sina and her family are part of a trend toward greater cultural diversity in the United States. Chapter 9 examines trends in major social institutions and in patterns of social inequality.
- ◆ **Cycles** reverse direction repetitively. Cycles of behavior can recur in different patterns: daily, weekly, monthly, seasonally, annually, or in some other regular or partially regular pattern. Miriam Glucksmann (1998) suggests that cyclical time serves as the glue for social life: “Everybody does the same thing on the same day so they share a common daily or weekly cycle” (p. 256). Socially constructed cyclical time has a large impact on our lives. As I work on this book in mid-July, I am cognizant that summer “vacation” is more than half over, and soon my time will be spent preparing lectures, grading papers, and making visits to field agencies, all activities that I do not engage in during the summer. I am also remembering the rhythm of the school semester: the intense activity to get the semester up and rolling; the settling-in time when I think to myself, *I can handle this*; the accelerated pace beginning around midsemester when I am determinedly focused on time management; and the hectic last weeks when, in spite of my best intentions, my health maintenance program is seriously compromised and I find myself wondering, *How did I let this happen again?* This cycle has been repeating for 25 years, but it is never exactly the same. Change, as well as stability, comes with cyclical time. Another example of cycles comes from social movements. During “cycles of contention,” protest movements build on each other. Such cycles are broken by periods of relative quiet, when little is happening in the way of social protest. In the United States, the last cycle of contention was the rights movements of the 1960s. In Eastern Europe, the late 1980s was the beginning of a cycle of contention.
- ◆ **Shifts** are sudden abrupt changes in direction. Several shifts are evident in the story of Sina and her family: evacuation, escape, and resettlement. After September 11, 2001, we heard much talk about whether the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon would produce shifts in our patterns of social interactions. Early reports suggested that family life became more precious to us (“ACOG Assesses Impact of September 11,” 2002) and faith in each other increased (“Historical Perspective,” 2002). At this point, there is considerable evidence that these changes in social life were temporary in nature and did not signal a more permanent shift in direction.

Sometimes the pace of change is more rapid than at other times—for example, the pace of change accelerated in April 1975 for Sina and her family. There is also a temporal scope,



or duration, to changing configurations. In linear time, the scope of some events is brief, such as a birthday party, an automobile accident, termination from a job, winning the lottery, or a natural disaster. Werner, Altman, and Oxley (1985) refer to these brief events as *incidents*; in this book and the companion volume, they are called **life events**. Although life events are brief in scope, they may produce shifts and have serious and long-lasting effects. It is important to note the role of perception when discussing both the pace of change and the duration of an event (Rappaport, Enrich, & Wilson, 1985). It is easy to imagine that the three years spent in the prison camp seemed much longer to Sina and her family than the preceding three years in their suburban home.

Other events are long and complex transactions of people and environments. Werner et al. (1985) refer to these longer events as *stages*; it is this dimension of time that has been incorporated into life stage theories of human behavior. As explained in Chapter 2, however, life stage theories have been criticized for their overstatement of the universality of the sequence of stages and of the timing of human behavior. In contrast, a **life course perspective** assumes that each person's life has a unique long-term pattern of stability and change but that shared social and historical contexts produce some commonalities (George, 1993). The life course perspective is the topic of Chapter 1 in the companion volume.

## Diversity, Inequality, and the Pursuit of Social Justice

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Diversity has always been a part of the social reality in the United States. Even before the Europeans came, the indigenous people were divided into about 200 distinct societies with about 200 different languages (Parrillo, 2005). Since the inception of the nation of the United States of America, we have been a nation of immigrants. We value our nation's immigrant heritage and take pride in the ideals of equality of opportunity for all who come. However, there have always been tensions about how we as a nation will handle diversity. Will we be a *melting pot* where all are melted into one indistinguishable model of citizenship, or will we be a *pluralist society* in which groups have separate identities, cultures, and ways of organizing but work together in mutual respect? Pioneer social worker Jane Addams was a prominent voice for pluralism during the early twentieth century.

However, it is accurate to say that some of the diversity in our national social life is new. Clearly, there is increasing racial, ethnic, and religious diversity in the United States, and the mix in the population stream has become much more complex in recent years (Alvarez, 2001). The United States was 87% white in 1925, 80% white in 1950, and 72% white in 2000; by 2050, it is projected that we will be about 50% white (Prewitt, 2000). Why is this happening at this time? A major driving force is the demographic reality that natives are no longer reproducing at replacement level in the wealthy industrialized nations, which, if it continues, ultimately will lead to a declining population skewed toward advanced age. One solution used by some countries, including the United States, is to change immigration policy to allow new streams of immigration. The current pattern of immigration is for workers to move from low-wage and low-demand economies to high-wage and high-demand economies, like those found in the United States and Europe (Sernau, 2006). With the recent influx of immigrants from around the globe, the United States has become one of many ethnically and racially diverse nations in the world today. In many wealthy industrialized

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countries, including the United States, there is much anti-immigrant sentiment, even though the economies of these countries are dependent on such migration. Like other diverse societies, we must find ways to embrace the diversity and seize the opportunity to demonstrate the human capacity for intergroup harmony.

On the other hand, some of the diversity in our social life is not new but simply newly recognized. In the contemporary era, we have been developing a heightened consciousness of human differences—gender differences, racial and ethnic differences, cultural differences, religious differences, differences in sexual orientation, differences in abilities and disabilities, differences in family forms, and so on. We are experiencing a new tension to navigate the line between cultural sensitivity and stereotypical thinking about individuals. It is the intent of this book to capture the diversity of human experience in a manner that is respectful of all groups, conveys the positive value of human diversity, and recognizes differences *within* groups as well as differences *among* groups. It is important to note that the naming of identity groups and the labels used to distinguish groups are ultimately political. It is our belief that groups should have the control over the naming of themselves. However, we also recognize that there are often internal struggles within identity groups about preferred labels. Therefore, the names we use may not be equally appealing to all within a particular identity group. In addition, you will find that we are not always consistent in the naming of groups. This happens because when we are reporting on empirical research, we use labels as they are used by the researchers, to avoid misrepresenting their findings.

As you seek to honor differences, keep in mind the distinction between heterogeneity and diversity (Calasanti, 1996). **Heterogeneity** refers to individual-level variations—differences among individuals. For example, as the social worker whom Sina consults, you will want to recognize the ways in which Sina is different from you and from other clients you serve, including other clients of Cambodian heritage. An understanding of heterogeneity allows us to recognize the uniqueness of person-environment configurations. **Diversity**, on the other hand, refers to patterns of group differences. Diversity recognizes social groups, groups of people who share a range of physical, cultural, or social characteristics within a category of social identity. As a social worker, besides recognizing individual differences, you will also want to be aware of the diversity in your community, such as the distribution of various ethnic groups, including those of Cambodian heritage. Knowledge of diversity helps us to provide culturally sensitive practice.

We want to interject a word here about terminology and human diversity. As we attempted to uncover what is known about human diversity in person and environment, we struggled with terminology to define identity groups. We searched for consistent language to describe different groups, and we were dedicated to using language that identity groups would use to describe themselves. However, we ran into challenges endemic to our time related to the language of diversity. First, it is not the case that all members of a given identity group at any given time embrace the same terminology for their group. Second, as we reviewed literature from different historical moments, we recognized the shifting nature of terminology. In addition, even within a given historical era, we found that different researchers used different terms and had different decision rules about who composes the membership of identity groups. So, in the end, you will find that we have not settled on fixed terminology that is used consistently to describe identity groups. Rather, we use the language of individual researchers when reporting their work, because we want to avoid distorting their work. We hope you will not find this too distracting. We also hope that you will

recognize that the ever-changing language of diversity has both constructive potential to find creative ways to affirm diversity and destructive potential to dichotomize diversity into *the norm* and *the other*.

Attending to diversity involves recognition of the power relations between social groups and the patterns in opportunities and constraints for social groups (Calasanti, 1996). If we are interested in the Cambodian community in our city, for example, we will want to note, among other things, the neighborhoods where they live, the quality of the housing stock in those neighborhoods, the comparative educational attainment in the community, the occupational profile of the community, and the comparative income levels. When we attend to diversity, we not only note the differences between groups, but we also note how socially constructed hierarchies of power are superimposed on these differences.

Recent scholarship in the social sciences has emphasized the ways in which three types of categorizations—gender, race, and class—are used to develop hierarchical social structures that influence social identities and life chances (Stoller & Gibson, 2000, p. 4). This literature suggests that these social categorizations create **privilege**, or unearned advantage, for some groups and disadvantage for other groups. In a much-cited article, Peggy McIntosh (1988/2001) has pointed out the mundane daily advantages of white privilege that are not available to members of groups of color, such as, “can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race” and “Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.” We could also generate lists of advantages of male privilege, adult privilege, upper middle-class privilege, heterosexual privilege, ability privilege, Christian privilege, and so on. McIntosh argues that we benefit from our privilege but have not been taught to think of ourselves as privileged. Members of privileged groups take for granted that their advantages are “normal and universal” (Bell, 1997, p. 12). For survival, members of nonprivileged groups must learn a lot about the lives of groups with privilege, but groups with privileged status are not similarly compelled to learn about the lives of members of nonprivileged groups.

Michael Schwalbe (2006) argues that those of us who live in the United States also carry “American privilege,” which comes from our dominant position in the world. According to Schwalbe, among other things, American privilege means that we don’t have to bother to learn about other countries or about the impact of our foreign policy on people living in other countries. It also means that we have access to cheap goods that are produced by poorly paid workers in impoverished countries. In recent years, however, we who live in the United States have begun to learn about some of the costs of exercising the American privilege to remain ignorant about the rest of the world and the impact our actions have on other nations. The events of September 11, 2001, were a harsh reminder of the growing global interdependence. Because emerging technologies allow extensive and growing global interconnections, what happens in one part of the world “can affect the lives of vast populations elsewhere” (Bandura, 2002, p. 283). Therefore, throughout the book, we will make attempts to provide a global context for the multiple dimensions of human behavior.

As we strive to provide a global context, we encounter current controversies about appropriate language to describe different sectors of the world. For a long time, many scholars have used the language of First World, Second World, and Third World to define global sectors. *First World* has been used to describe the nations that were the first to industrialize, urbanize, and modernize. *Second World* was used to describe nations that have industrialized but have not yet become central to the world economy. *Third World* has been used to refer

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to nonindustrialized nations that have few resources and are considered expendable in the global economy. This approach has lost favor in recent years (Leeder, 2004). Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1979) uses different language but makes a similar distinction; he refers to wealthy *core* countries, newly industrialized *semiperiphery* countries, and the poorest *periphery* countries. Other writers divide the world into *developed* and *developing* countries (McMichael, 2004), referring to the level of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. Still others divide the world into the *Global North* and the *Global South*, calling attention to a history in which the Global North colonized and exploited the resources of the Global South. And, finally some writers talk about the *West* versus the *East*, where the distinctions are largely cultural. We recognize that such categories carry great symbolic meaning and can mask systems of power and exploitation. As with diversity, we attempted to find a respectful language that could be used consistently throughout the book. Again, we found that different researchers have used different language and different characteristics to describe categories of nations, and when reporting on their findings, we have used their own language to avoid misrepresenting their findings.

It is important to note that privilege and disadvantage are multidimensional, not one-dimensional. One can be privileged in one dimension and disadvantaged in another; for example, I have white privilege but not gender privilege. As social workers, we need to be attuned to our own *social locations*, where we fit in a system of social identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, religion, ability/disability, and age. We must recognize how our own particular social locations shape how we see the world, what we notice, and how we interpret what we “see.”

This is not easy for us, because in the United States, as a rule, we avoid the topic of class and don't like to admit that it shapes our lives (Sernau, 2006). It is important for social workers to acknowledge social inequalities, however, because our interactions are constantly affected by inequalities. And there is clear evidence that social inequalities are on the rise in the United States. In the last couple of decades, the United States gained the distinction as the most unequal society in the advanced industrial world, and the gap continues to widen (Sernau, 2006).

There is another important reason that social workers must acknowledge social inequalities. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics identifies social justice as one of six core values of social work and mandates that “Social Workers challenge social injustice” (NASW, 1996/1999). To challenge injustice, we must first recognize it and understand the ways that it is embedded in a number of societal institutions. That will be the subject of Chapter 9 in this book.

Suzanne Pharr (1988) has provided some useful conceptual tools that can help us recognize injustice when we see it. She identifies a set of mechanisms of oppression, whereby the everyday arrangements of social life systematically block opportunities for some groups and inhibit their power to exercise self-determination. Exhibit 1.4 provides an overview of these mechanisms of oppression. As you review the list, you may recognize some that are familiar to you, such as stereotyping and perhaps blaming the victim. There may be others that you have not previously given much thought to. You may also recognize, as I do each time I look at the list, that while some of these mechanisms of oppression are sometimes used quite intentionally, others are not so intentional but occur as we do business as usual. For example, when you walk into your classroom, do you give much thought to the person who cleans that room, what wage this person is paid, whether this is the only job this person holds, and what opportunities and barriers this person has experienced in life? Most likely, the classroom is cleaned in the evening after it has been vacated by teachers and students,

and the person who cleans it, like many people who provide services that make our lives more pleasant, is invisible to you. Giving serious thought to common mechanisms of oppression can help us to recognize social injustice and think about ways to challenge it.

#### Exhibit 1.4 Common Mechanisms of Oppression

Economic Power and Control	Limiting of resources, mobility, education, and employment options to all but a few
Myth of Scarcity	Myth used to pit people against one another, suggests that resources are limited and blames people (e.g., poor people, immigrants) for using too many of them
Defined Norm	A standard of what is good and right, against which all are judged
The Other	Those who fall outside “the norm” but are defined in relation to it, seen as abnormal, inferior, marginalized
Invisibility	Keeping “the other’s” existence, everyday life, and achievements unknown
Distortion	Selective presentation or rewriting of history so that only negative aspects of “the other” are included
Stereotyping	Generalizing the actions of a few to an entire group, denying individual characteristics and behaviors
Violence and the Threat of Violence	Laying claim to resources, then using might to ensure superior position
Lack of Prior Claim	Excluding anyone who was not originally included and labeling as disruptive those who fight for inclusion
Blaming the Victim	Condemning “the others” for their situation, diverting attention from the roles that dominants play in the situation
Internalized Oppression	Internalizing negative judgments of being “the other,” leading to self-hatred, depression, despair, and self-abuse
Horizontal Hostility	Extending internalized oppression to one’s entire group as well as to other subordinate groups, expressing hostility to other oppressed persons and groups rather than to members of dominant groups
Isolation	Physically isolating people as individuals or as a “minority” group
Assimilation	Pressuring members of “minority” groups to drop their culture and differences and become a mirror of the dominant culture
Tokenism	Rewarding some of the most assimilated “others” with position and resources
Emphasis on Individual Solutions	Emphasizing individual responsibility for problems and individual solutions rather than collective responsibility and collective solutions

SOURCE: Adapted from Pharr (1988).

## The General and the Unique

The tension between commonalities and individual differences is central to the multidimensional approach. Let's assume that your field instructor has asked you to meet with Sina regarding her concerns about her husband. How will you know how to talk with her and what to talk with her about? What questions will you have before you get started? What do you want to know more about? Most likely, you want to know something about Sina's unique life story, and you must decide how much of that to learn from agency records and your field instructor and how much to wait and hear from Sina herself. But you will probably want to know some other, more general types of information that will not be in the agency record and that you know your field instructor expects you to take some personal responsibility for learning. This general information might include aspects of Cambodian culture, the acculturation process, family functioning, Buddhism and Catholicism, grief reactions, posttraumatic stress reactions, clinical depression, and cross-cultural communication.

Carol Meyer (1993) suggests that effective social work practice involves balancing an individualized (unique) assessment of the specific person in a specific situation with general knowledge about human behavior. Professional social workers weave idiosyncratic details of a client's story with general knowledge about patterns of relationships between persons and situations. Although Meyer writes about work with one particular client, her suggestions about general knowledge and unique situations could apply equally well to work with families, small groups, neighborhoods, and so on. You might want, for example, to form a mutual aid group of Cambodian men or to develop an outreach program in a Cambodian neighborhood, drawing on both general knowledge about small group dynamics and community building and more specialized knowledge of Cambodian culture and the interpersonal dynamics in the group or neighborhood.

I want to emphasize two ideas about the relationship between general and unique knowledge: First, it is a person's or group's unique story that suggests which general knowledge is needed. Second, the general knowledge suggests **hypotheses**, or tentative statements, to be explored and tested, not facts to be applied, in transactions with the person. For example, your examination of general knowledge may lead you to hypothesize that Sina's husband understands the tenets of Buddhism to direct him to hold himself personally responsible for his own suffering. You may hypothesize that, like many Southeast Asians, he would find it disgraceful to engage in direct conversation about his emotions. You may have learned that although seeking help for physical problems was acceptable in Cambodia, there were no special professions for addressing emotional problems. This understanding may lead you to hypothesize that Sina's husband would be more comfortable talking about his situation in terms of its biological aspects instead of its emotional aspects. Ultimately, of course, you want to understand how Cambodian culture, family functioning, Buddhism and Catholicism, grief reactions, posttraumatic stress reactions, clinical depression, cross-cultural communication, and all the rest come together to form a whole in Sina's unfolding life story. That is a lot to think about, but such complexity is what makes social work such a demanding and exciting profession.

Professional social workers must struggle continuously with the tension between the general and the unique. The multidimensional approach presented in this book is well suited to this struggle. A multidimensional approach allows examination of an idiosyncratic event from several perspectives and opens the possibilities for considering the variety of factors that

contribute to a particular transaction. A multidimensional approach also facilitates social work's emphasis on human diversity.

To assist you in moving between general knowledge and unique stories, each chapter in this book begins, as this one does, with one or more case studies. Each of these unique stories suggests which general knowledge is needed. Then, throughout the chapter, the stories are woven together with the relevant general knowledge. Keep in mind as you read that general knowledge is necessary, but you will not be an effective practitioner unless you take the time to learn about the unique life course of each person or collectivity you serve.

## General Knowledge: Theory and Research

Some suggest that there can be no “general” knowledge because all situations are unique. I think you can see, however, that the details of Sina's unique story are inadequate for guiding you in thinking about how to talk with her and what to talk about. You also need some general knowledge about human behavior as you try to understand the world and situations such as those facing Sina and her family.

We go about trying to understand human behavior in a number of ways. Christine Marlow (2005) has identified the following types of understanding: values, intuition, experience, authority, and science. Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong (2005) have suggested a slightly different classification: tradition, experience, common sense, and science. All these ways of understanding, or put another way, all these types of knowledge, have pitfalls as well as strengths. Exhibit 1.5 summarizes the ways of understanding presented by Marlow and by Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong and analyzes their strengths as well as their pitfalls.

Although all ways of understanding have both strengths and pitfalls, a profession such as social work should draw on general knowledge that is built in the most rigorous and systematic way (Kirk & Reid, 2002). As you can see from Exhibit 1.5, that way of understanding is what we call science. Two interrelated approaches to knowledge building, theory and empirical research, fit the scientific criteria of being rigorous and systematic. Together, they create the base of knowledge that social workers need to understand commonalities among their clients and practice situations.

### Theory

Social workers use theory to help organize and make sense of the situations they encounter. A **theory** is a logically interrelated set of concepts and propositions, organized into a deductive system, which explains relationships between aspects of our world. As Elaine Leeder (2004) so aptly put it, “To have a theory is to have a way of explaining the world—an understanding that the world is not just a random series of events and experiences” (p. 9). Theory is a somewhat imposing word, seemingly abstract and associated with serious scholars, but it has everyday utility to social workers:

Scratch any social worker and you will find a theoretician. Her own theoretical perspectives about people and practice may be informed by theories in print (or formal theories) but are put together in her own way with many modifications and additions growing out of her own professional and personal experience. (Reid & Smith, 1989, p. 45)

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**Exhibit 1.5** Ways of Understanding

<i>Way of Understanding</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Pitfalls</i>
Authority (Marlow)	An outside source of knowledge that is recognized as indisputable for the matter at hand.	Authorities of various types can provide readily accessible knowledge on a variety of topics.	The knowledge gained is only as strong as the authoritative source.
Common Sense (Monette et al.)	Practical judgments based on the shared experiences and prejudices of a collectivity.	Common sense is readily available and can be valuable and accurate.	What is common sense in one culture may make no sense in another culture. What is considered common sense does not usually involve rigorous and systematic investigation.
Experience (Marlow; Monette et al.)	Firsthand, personal participation in similar events or activities.	Firsthand experience may help us understand aspects of a situation not grasped by other ways of understanding. Experience also helps us remember, because it involves all the senses.	Experience is vulnerable to perceptual biases, faulty inferences, vested interests, and faulty generalizations.
Intuition (Marlow)	An insight that is not based on special training or reasoning. May be based on past experiences.	Intuition can give us leads to follow for further investigation. It may involve perceptions that are not yet captured at the conscious level. It is highly valued in some cultures.	Intuition does not usually involve rigorous and systematic investigation, and it is subject to a variety of biases.
Science (Marlow; Monette et al.)	A rigorous and systematic way of producing knowledge about the world.	Science attempts to put a check on biases. It reminds us to remain tentative and open to questions and possibilities. It allows us to accumulate accurate information over time.	Science is never fully free of bias. It is created by persons and institutions with power. Bias can occur at every stage of the scientific process.
Tradition (Monette et al.)	Customs, habit, and repetition.	Tradition can provide valuable information for moral judgments and value decisions.	Tradition is extremely resistant to change. It easily confuses "what is" with "what should be."
Values (Marlow)	Beliefs about what is right and wrong.	Social work is based on values about what constitutes socially just relationships and social structures.	Values are very culture bound. They are accepted on face value and are not expected to be put to the test of skeptical inquiry.

SOURCES: Based on Marlow (2005); Monette et al. (2005).



Thus, theory gives us a framework for interpreting person-environment transactions and planning interventions. Theories focus our attention on particular aspects of the person-environment-time configuration.

Other terms that you will often encounter in discussions of theories are *model*, *paradigm*, or *perspective*. *Model* usually is used to refer to a visual representation of the relationships between concepts. *Paradigm* is usually used to mean a way of seeing the world, and *perspective* is an emphasis or a view. Paradigms and perspectives are broader and more general than theory.

If you are to make good use of theory, you should know something about how it is constructed. **Concepts** are the building blocks of theory. They are symbols, or mental images, that summarize observations, feelings, or ideas. Concepts allow us to communicate about the phenomena of interest. Some relevant concepts in Sina's story are culture, family functioning, Buddhism, grief reaction, posttraumatic stress disorder, clinical depression, and cross-cultural communication.

Theoretical concepts are put together to form **propositions** or assertions. For example, attachment theory asserts that loss of an attachment figure leads to a grief reaction. This proposition, which asserts a particular relationship between the concepts of loss, attachment figure, and grief, may help us understand the behavior of Sina's husband.

Theories are a form of **deductive reasoning**, meaning that they lay out general, abstract propositions that we can use to generate specific hypotheses to test in unique situations. In this example, attachment theory can lead us to hypothesize that Sina's husband is still grieving the many losses he has suffered: loss of loved ones, loss of a homeland, loss of status, and so on.

Social and behavioral science theories are based on **assumptions**, or beliefs held to be true without testing or proof, about the nature of human social life. These theoretical assumptions have raised a number of controversies, three of which are worth introducing at this point (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Martin & O'Connor, 1989; Monte & Sollod, 2003):

1. Do the dimensions of human behavior have an **objective reality** that exists outside a person's consciousness, or is all reality based on personal perception (**subjective reality**)?
2. Is human behavior determined by forces beyond the control of the person (**determinism**), or are persons free and proactive agents in the creation of their behavior (**voluntarism**)?
3. Are the patterned interactions among people characterized by harmony, unity, and social cohesion or by conflict, domination, coercion, and exploitation?

The nature of these controversies will become more apparent to you in Chapter 2. The contributing authors and I take a middle ground on all of them: We assume that reality has both objective and subjective aspects, that human behavior is partially constrained and partially free, and that social life is marked by both cohesion and conflict.

## Empirical Research

Traditionally, science is equated with empirical research, which is widely held as the most rigorous and systematic way to understand human behavior. Research is typically viewed, in simple terms, as a problem-solving process, or a method of seeking answers to questions. Something that is empirical is something that we experience through our senses, as opposed

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to something that we experience purely in our minds. The process of **empirical research** includes a careful, purposeful, and systematic observation of events with the intent to note and record them in terms of their attributes, to look for patterns in those events, and to make our methods and observations public. Like theory, empirical research is a key tool for social workers: “The practitioner who just conforms to ongoing practices without keeping abreast of the latest research in his or her field is not doing all possible to see that his or her clients get the best possible service” (Rubin & Babbie, 1993, p. xxv).

Just as there are controversies about theoretical assumptions, there are also controversies about what constitutes appropriate research methods for understanding human behavior. Modern science is based on several assumptions, generally recognized as a **positivist perspective**: The world has an order that can be discovered; findings of one study should be applicable to other groups; complex phenomena can be studied by reducing them to some component part; findings are tentative and subject to question; scientific methods are value-free.

**Quantitative methods of research** are the preferred methods from the positivist perspective. These methods use quantifiable measures of concepts, standardize the collection of data, attend only to preselected variables, and use statistical methods to look for patterns and associations (Schutt, 2006).

Over the years, the positivist perspective and its claim that positivism = science have been challenged. Critics of these methods argue that quantitative methods cannot possibly capture the subjective experience of individuals or the complex nature of social life. Although most of these critics do not reject positivism as *a way* of doing science, they recommend other ways of understanding the world and suggest that these alternative methods should also be considered part of science. Various names have been given to these alternative methods. We will be referring to them as the **interpretist perspective**, because they share the assumption that reality is based on people’s definitions of it and research should focus on learning the meanings that people give to their situations. This perspective is also referred to as a **constructivist perspective**.

Interpretists see a need to replace existing methods with **qualitative methods of research**, which are more flexible and experiential than quantitative methods and are designed to capture how participants view social life rather than to ask participants to respond to categories preset by the researcher (Schutt, 2006). Participant observation, intensive interviewing, and focus groups are examples of qualitative methods of research. Interpretists assume that people’s behavior cannot be observed objectively, that reality is created as researcher and research participants interact. Researchers using qualitative methods are more likely to present their findings in words than in numbers and to attempt to capture the settings of behavior. They are likely to report the transactions of researcher and participant as well as the values of the researcher, because they assume that value-free research is impossible.

In this controversy, it is our position that no single research method can adequately capture the whole, the complexity, of human behavior. In fact, “we must often settle for likely, approximate, or partial truths” (Kirk & Reid, 2002, p. 16). Both quantitative and qualitative research methods have a place in a multidimensional approach, and used together they may help us to see more dimensions of situations. Alvin Saperstein (1996) has stated our view well: “Science is a fabric: its ability to cover the world depends upon the existence of many different fibers acting together to give it structure and strength” (p. 163). This view has much in common with postpositivism, which developed in response to criticism of positivism. **Postpositivism** is a philosophical position that recognizes the complexity of reality and the limitations of human observers. It proposes that scientists can never develop more than a

partial understanding of human behavior (Schutt, 2006). Nevertheless, science remains the most rigorous and systematic way to understand human behavior.



▲ **Photo 1.3** Theories and research about human behavior are boundless and constantly growing. Active readers must question what they read.

### Critical Use of Theory and Research

Theories of and research about human behavior are nearly boundless and constantly growing. This book presents an up-to-date account of the current state of knowledge about human behavior, but it is highly likely that some of this knowledge will eventually be found mistaken. Thus, you are encouraged to be an active reader—reading with a sense of inquiry and curiosity, but also with a healthy skepticism. Exhibit 1.6 lists some questions that the active reader should think about; I hope that you will incorporate these questions into your reading of this book.

As you read this book and other sources of general knowledge, you will also want to begin to think critically about the theory and research that they present. In other words, you will want to give careful thought to the credibility of the claims made. Let's look first at theory. It is important to remember that although theorists may try to put checks on their biases, they write from their own cultural frame of reference and from a particular location in the social structure of their society. So, when taking a critical look at a theory, it is important to remember that theories are generally created by people of privileged backgrounds who operate in seats of power. The bulk of theories still used today were authored by white, middle- to upper-class Western European men and men in the United States with academic appointments. Therefore, as we work in a highly diversified world, we need to be attentive to the possibilities of biases related to race, gender, culture, religion, sexual orientation, abilities/disabilities, and social class—as well as professional or occupational orientation.

**Exhibit 1.6** Questions Asked by the Active Reader

1. What is the evidence for this statement?
2. Is this true for all people (for me, for my client, for other people I know)?
3. How can I use this information in my practice?
4. Is there anything left out of this argument?
5. What is the main point of this section?
6. Can I summarize the argument?
7. How does this relate to other evidence about this topic?

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SOURCE: Based on Gambrill (1990), p. 75.

One particular concern is that such biases can lead us to think of disadvantaged members of society or of members of minority groups as pathological or deficient.

Social and behavioral science scholars disagree about the criteria for evaluating theory and research. However, I recommend the criteria presented in Exhibit 1.7 because they are consistent with the multidimensional approach of this book and with the value base of the social work profession. (The five criteria for evaluating theory presented in Exhibit 1.7 are also used in Chapter 2 to evaluate eight theoretical perspectives relevant to social work.) There is agreement in the social and behavioral sciences that theory should be evaluated for coherence and conceptual clarity as well as for testability and evidence of empirical support. The criterion of comprehensiveness is specifically related to the multidimensional approach of this book. We do not expect all theories to be multidimensional in nature, but critical analysis of a theory should help us identify determinism and unidimensional thinking where they exist. The criterion of consistency with emphasis on diversity and power arrangements examines the utility of the theory for a profession that places high value on social justice. And the criterion of usefulness for practice is essential for a profession.

Just as theory may be biased toward the experiences of members of dominant groups, so too may research be biased. The result may be “misleading and, in some cases, [may lead to] outright false conclusions regarding a minority” (Monette et al., 2005, p. 8). Bias can occur at all stages of the research process.

- ◆ Funding sources and other vested interests have a strong influence on which problems are selected for research attention. For example, several critics have suggested that governmental agencies were slow to fund research on acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) because it was associated in the early years with gay males (Shilts, 1987).
- ◆ Bias can occur in the definition of variables for study. For example, using “offenses cleared by arrests” as the definition of crime, rather than using a definition such as “self-reported crime involvement,” leads to an overestimation of crime among minority groups of color, because those are the people who are most often arrested for their crimes (Hagan, 1994).

**Exhibit 1.7** Criteria for Evaluating Theory and Research*Criteria for Evaluating Theory*

*Coherence and conceptual clarity.* Are the concepts clearly defined and consistently used? Is the theory free of logical inconsistencies? Is it stated in the simplest possible way, without oversimplifying?

*Testability and evidence of empirical support.* Can the concepts and propositions be expressed in language that makes them observable and accessible to corroboration or refutation by persons other than the theoretician? Is there evidence of empirical support for the theory?

*Comprehensiveness.* Does the theory include multiple dimensions of persons, environments, and time? What is included and what is excluded? What dimension(s) is (are) emphasized? Does the theory account for things that other theories have overlooked or been unable to account for?

*Consistency with social work's emphasis on diversity and power arrangements.* Can the theory help us understand uniqueness and diversity? How inclusive is it? Does it avoid pathologizing members of minority groups? Does it assist in understanding power arrangements and systems of oppression? Can it be used to promote social justice?

*Usefulness for social work practice.* Does the theory assist in the understanding of person and environment transactions over time? Can principles of action be derived from the theory? At what levels of practice can the theory be used? Can the theory be used in practice in a way that is consistent with the NASW code of ethics?

*Criteria for Evaluating Research*

*Corroboration.* Are the research findings corroborated by other researchers? Are a variety of research methods used in corroborating research? Do the findings fit logically with accepted theory and other research findings?

*Multidimensionality.* Does the research include multiple dimensions of persons, environments, and time? If not, do the researchers acknowledge the omissions, connect the research to larger programs of research that include omitted dimensions, or recommend further research to include omitted dimensions?

*Definition of terms.* Are major variables defined and measured in such a way as to avoid bias against members of minority groups?

*Limitation of sample.* Does the researcher make sufficient effort to include diversity in the sample? Are minority groups represented in sufficient number to show the variability within them? When demographic groups are compared, are they equivalent on important variables? Does the researcher specify the limitations of the sample for generalizing to specific groups?

*Influence of setting.* Does the researcher specify attributes of the setting of the research, acknowledge the possible contribution of the setting to research outcomes, and present the findings of similar research across a range of settings?

*Influence of the researcher.* Does the researcher specify the attributes of the researcher and the role of the researcher in the observed person/environment configurations? Does the researcher specify the possible contributions of the researcher to research outcomes?

*Social distance.* Does the researcher attempt to minimize errors that could occur because of literacy, language, and cultural differences between the researcher and respondents?

*Specification of inferences.* Does the researcher specify how inferences are made, based on the data?

*Suitability of measures.* Does the researcher use measures that seem suited to, and sensitive to, the situation being researched?

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◆ Bias can occur in choosing the sample to be studied. Because of their smaller numbers, members of minority groups may not be included in sufficient numbers to demonstrate the variability within a particular minority group. Or a biased sample of minorities may be used (e.g., it is not uncommon to make black/white comparisons on a sample that includes middle-class whites and low-income blacks).

◆ Bias can occur in data collection. The validity and reliability of most standardized measuring instruments have been evaluated by using them with white, non-Hispanic respondents, and their cultural relevance with ethnic minorities is questionable. Language and literacy difficulties may arise with both written survey instruments and interviews. Several potential sources of errors when majority researchers gather data from members of minority groups are mistrust and fear, the motivation to provide what is perceived to be wanted, shame and embarrassment, joking or making sport of the researcher, answering based on ideal rather than real, and inadequacy of questions (e.g., asking about a monthly income with families that will have to do a complex computation of incomes of different family members, “income from selling fruit and Popsicles on weekends, income from helping another family make cheese once every two to three weeks, extra money brought in by giving haircuts and permanents to neighborhood women, or occasional childcare and sewing”; Goodson-Lawes, 1994, p. 24).

As with theory evaluation, there is no universally agreed-upon set of criteria for evaluating research. We recommend the nine criteria presented in Exhibit 1.7 for considering the credibility of a research report. These criteria can be applied to either quantitative or qualitative research. Many research reports would be strengthened if their authors were to attend to these criteria.

### Theory and Research in a Multidimensional Approach

As you travel the journey on which this book takes you, you should have a clear understanding of the assumptions the contributing authors and I make about the role of theory and research in understanding human behavior. That understanding will assist you to be a critical reader of the book. I have written about some of these assumptions earlier in the chapter, but I summarize them for you here for emphasis.

Our assumptions about theory are as follows:

◆ Changing configurations of persons and environments may involve unique, unrepeatable events, but they also may involve consistencies and patterns of similar events. Therefore, general statements and theories are possible, but should not be expected to fit all situations or all aspects of a given situation.

◆ Each situation allows examination from several perspectives, and using a variety of theoretical perspectives brings more dimensions of the situation into view. Different situations call for different combinations of theoretical concepts and propositions.

◆ Theories, like situations, are unfolding and should be viewed as tentative statements. Theoretical propositions serve as hypotheses to be tested, not as factual statements about the situation under examination.

- ◆ Given the complexity of human behavior, a given transaction is probably not predictable, but we do not rule out the possibility of prediction.
- ◆ Our goal as social workers should be to develop maximum understanding of situations in terms of whatever theoretical concepts and propositions apply. Multiple theoretical perspectives are necessary when taking a multidimensional approach to human behavior. This point is the focus of Chapter 2.
- ◆ Social life is fraught with contradictions as well as consistencies, so it is acceptable to use multiple theoretical approaches that introduce contradictions. You will discover some contradictions in the theories discussed in Chapter 2.

Our assumptions about research include the following:

- ◆ Any setting is an acceptable research setting, but studying a variety of settings enhances the knowledge-building process.
- ◆ The researcher should always consider the contribution of the setting to the research findings.
- ◆ The characteristics, biases, and role of the researcher constitute aspects of the phenomenon under study and should be considered in interpretation of data. The meanings of the research activities to the participants are also important dimensions of the research situation and should also be considered in interpreting the data.
- ◆ Standardized measures should be used only when they are suited to the situation under study.
- ◆ Understanding of human behavior may be advanced by both traditional and non-traditional methods of research.
- ◆ Research projects that exclude person, environment, or time dimensions may advance an understanding of human behavior, but the researcher should recognize the omissions in interpretation of the data.

## Organization of the Book

This book covers two of the three aspects of human behavior: person and environment. The third aspect, time, is covered in a companion volume titled *Dimensions of Human Behavior: The Changing Life Course*.

In this book, Part I includes two stage-setting chapters that introduce the framework for the book and provide a foundation for thinking critically about the discussions of theory and research presented in Parts II and III. Part II comprises four chapters that analyze the multiple dimensions of persons—one chapter each on the biological person, the psychological person (or the self), the psychosocial person (or the self in relationship), and the spiritual person. The eight chapters of Part III discuss the environmental dimensions: the physical environment, culture, social institutions and social structure, families, small groups, formal organizations, communities, and social movements.

Presenting personal and environmental dimensions separately is a risky approach. I do not wish to reinforce any tendency to think about human behavior in a way that camouflages the inseparability of person and environment. We have taken this approach, however, for two reasons. First, the personal and environmental dimensions, for the most part, have been studied separately, often by different disciplines, and usually as detached or semidetached

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entities. Second, I want to introduce some dimensions of persons and environments not typically covered in social work textbooks and provide updated knowledge about all the dimensions. However, it is important to remember that no single dimension of human behavior can be understood without attention to other dimensions. Thus, frequent references to other dimensions throughout Parts II and III should help develop an understanding of the unity of persons, environments, and time.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The multidimensional approach outlined in this chapter suggests several principles for social work assessment and intervention, for both prevention and remediation services:

- ◆ In the assessment process, collect information about all the critical dimensions of the changing configuration of person and environment.
- ◆ In the assessment process, attempt to see the situation from a variety of perspectives. Use multiple data sources, including the person(s), significant others, and direct observations.
- ◆ Allow people to tell their own stories, and pay attention to how they describe the pattern and flow of their person-environment configurations.
- ◆ Use the multidimensional database to develop a dynamic picture of the person-environment configuration.
- ◆ Link intervention strategies to the dimensions of the assessment.
- ◆ In general, expect more effective outcomes from interventions that are multidimensional, because the situation itself is multidimensional.
- ◆ Pay particular attention to the impact of diversity and inequality on the unique stories and situations that you encounter.
- ◆ Allow the unique stories of people and situations to direct the choice of theory and research to be used.
- ◆ Use general knowledge to suggest tentative hypotheses to be explored in the unique situation.
- ◆ Think of social work practice as a continuous, dialectical movement between unique knowledge and general knowledge.

### KEY TERMS

acculturation	heterogeneity	propositions
assumptions	hypotheses	qualitative methods of research
biopsychosocial approach	interpretist perspective	quantitative methods of research
concepts	life course perspective	shifts
constants	life events	subjective reality
constructivist perspective	linear time	theory
cycles	multidetermined	time orientation
deductive reasoning	multidimensional approach	trends
determinism	objective reality	voluntarism
dimension	positivist perspective	
diversity	postpositivism	
empirical research	privilege	



### Active Learning

1. We have used multiple dimensions of person, environment, and time to think about Sina's story. If you were to be the social worker who met with her to discuss her concerns about her husband, you would bring your own unfolding person-environment-time story to that encounter. With the graphic in Exhibit 1.1 as your guide, write your own multidimensional story. What personal dimensions are important? What environmental dimensions? What time dimensions? What might happen when these two stories encounter each other?
2. Select a social issue that interests you, such as child abuse or youth gangs. List five things that you "know" about this issue. Think about how you know what you know. Where does your knowledge fit in Exhibit 1.5? How would you go about confirming or disproving your current state of knowledge on this topic?

### WEB RESOURCES

Each chapter of this textbook contains a list of Internet resources and Web sites that may be useful to readers in their search for further information. Each site listing includes the address and a brief description of the contents of the site. Readers should be aware that the information contained in Web sites may not be truthful or reliable and should be confirmed before the site is used as a reference. Readers should also be aware that Internet addresses, or URLs, are constantly changing; therefore, the addresses listed may no longer be active or accurate. Many of the Internet sites listed in each chapter contain links to other Internet sites containing more information on the topic. Readers may use these links for further investigation.

Information not included in the Web Resources sections of each chapter can be found by using one of the many Internet search engines provided free of charge on the Internet. These search engines enable you to search using keywords or phrases, or you can use the search engines' topical listings. You should use several search engines when researching a topic, as each will retrieve different Internet sites.

#### GOOGLE

[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

#### ASK

[www.ask.com](http://www.ask.com)

#### YAHOO

[www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)

#### EXCITE

[www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com)

#### LYCOS

[www.lycos.com](http://www.lycos.com)

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There are several Internet sites that are maintained by and for social workers, some at university schools of social work and some by professional associations:

### **Information for Practice**

**[www.nyu.edu/socialwork/ip/](http://www.nyu.edu/socialwork/ip/)**

Site developed and maintained by Professor Gary Holden of New York University's School of Social Work contains links to many federal and state Internet sites as well as journals, assessment and measurement tools, and sites maintained by professional associations.

### **Social Work Access Network (SWAN)**

**[www.cosw.sc.edu/swan/](http://www.cosw.sc.edu/swan/)**

Site presented by the University of South Carolina College of Social Work contains social work topics, list of schools of social work, upcoming conferences, and online chats.

### **Social Work and Social Services Web Sites**

**[gwbweb/wustl.edu/library/websites.html](http://gwbweb/wustl.edu/library/websites.html)**

Site presented by the George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, contains links to resources for a wide variety of social issues and social service organizations.

### **Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)**

**[www.cswe.org](http://www.cswe.org)**

Site presented by the Council on Social Work Education, the accrediting body for academic social work programs, contains information about accreditation, projects, publications, and links to a number of social work-related Web sites.

### **National Association of Social Workers (NASW)**

**[www.naswdc.org](http://www.naswdc.org)**

Site presented by the National Association of Social Workers contains professional development material, press room, advocacy information, and resources.

### **International Federation of Social Workers**

**[www.ifsw.org](http://www.ifsw.org)**

Site presented by the International Federation of Social Workers contains information about international conferences, policy papers on selected issues, and links to human rights organizations and other social work organizations.