

# Unit I: Theories, Perspectives and Background Information

SVWK 3810  
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Social Work is helping individuals, groups, or communities enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating societal conditions favorable to that goal.

- enhancing problem-solving & coping
- expand capacity (at all levels)
- broker services, resources and opportunities
- promote effectiveness in operation of organizations and communities

## Multidimensional Approach

- Personal (biological, psychological, social, spiritual)
- Environmental (physical, culture, social structures, dyads, families, groups, organizations, communities, social movements)
- Time (clock, event, linear)

## Basic client systems

- Micro (individual)
- Meso (family and small groups)
- Exo (organizations)
- Macro (community)

## What skills are necessary to work with any of the client systems?

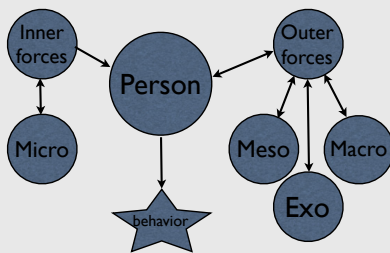
assessment  
documentation  
research  
interviewing  
cultural competency

# Critical Thinking

1. Importance of questioning beliefs, statements, and assumptions
2. Formulating an informed opinion based on evidence

The “Systems” perspective is a Meta theory for Social Work practice. The perspective emphasizes:

inter-relatedness, inter-dependency  
assessment of all systems  
influence of transactions

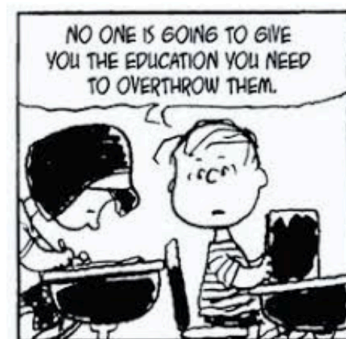


# Structural Functional theory:

structure  
function  
stability of system

# Conflict Theory:

power  
who benefits  
homeostasis (role of conflict)



## Feminist perspective:

- identifying: attitudes, expectations, language, behaviors and social arrangements that contribute to oppression and disenfranchisement
- awareness of inequality

## Social Constructionist perspective

- focus on learning through interactions and classification
- existence of multiple social and cultural realities
- Symbolic Interaction (use of symbols)
- Labeling theory

## Rational Choice

- behavior is based in self-interest and goal accomplishment (goal directed and rational)
- Social Exchange (minimize cost, maximize reward)

## Social Behavioral Perspective

- behavior is learned and can be unlearned
  - Classical conditioning
  - Operant conditioning
  - Cognitive social learning

## Humanistic Perspective

freedom of action and the search for meaning

## Empowerment

- subjective perception of resources and power
- exercising psychological control over personal affairs and exerting influence over events
- DuBois & Miley (2011)

## Strengths perspective

- identifying coping skills and using strengths to address needed changes
- empowering ownership of decisions and outcomes

For the remainder of the course, we will draw from these theories to assess aspects of interaction “systems” that influence human functioning, specifically behavior in the social environment. We will begin with addressing the environment in which a person lives.

## The Environment and Transactionalism

People shape their environment, just as the environment shapes them (connection of systems)

Key Concepts for understanding the relationship between behavior and the physical environment:

- accessibility
- adaptability
- control
- crowding
- meaning
- privacy

## Stimulation theories propose:

the physical environment is a source of sensory information that is necessary for human well-being

## Control theories focus on:

how much control we have over our physical environment and the attempts we make to gain control

## Behavior settings theories propose:

behavior is situational (tied to a specific place)

What is biophilia - and why is it important to consider for human behavior?

What are the most influential features of the natural environment?

- water
- trees
- sunlight

## Sociofugal spaces

physical designs that discourage social interaction

## Sociopetal spaces

physical designs that encourage social interaction

How can place attachment impact human behavior?

How can the physical environment influence a person's development across the life span?

- Childhood
- Adolescence
- Adulthood
- Late life

An individual's culture has huge ramifications for their behavior.

What is culture?

There are two types of cultural paradigms (world view, general perspective)

I. Traditional (dominant)

views that have the most influence on environments

Positivistic  
importance of truth  
and knowledge

Scientific  
importance of observation  
and measurement

Objective  
importance of being  
unbiased and detached

Quantitative  
importance of precisely  
measured quantities

Masculine/Patriarchal  
importance of  
masculine ideals

Whiteness  
importance of lens of color  
(especially in leadership)

Separateness/Impersonality  
importance of independence  
and autonomy

Oppositional/  
Competitive  
importance of hierarchy

Privileged  
importance of  
exclusion

2. Alternative Paradigms  
(subordinate)  
views that have less influence

Interpretive  
importance of meaning

Intuitive  
importance of  
awareness

Subjective  
importance of personal  
experiences



**Qualitative**  
importance of narrative

**Feminism**  
importance of categories

**Diversity**  
importance of differences

**Interconnection**  
importance of connections

**Integrative**  
importance of balance

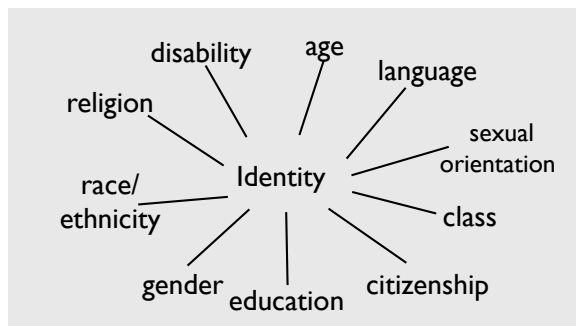
**Oppressions**  
importance of systems

## Cultural relativism

behavior in one culture should not be judged by the standards of another culture

Individuals tend to be  
“ethnocentric”  
(especially in the U.S.A.)

\*why is this relevant?



## Cultural Identity

## How is a culture maintained?

- common sense
- traditions
- customs
- (influenced by education, economics, politics and values)

## How is a culture adapted?

- assimilation
- accommodation
- acculturation
- bicultural socialization

## What are the different aspects of culture that can impact a person's behavior?

- race
- ethnicity
- socioeconomic status
- gender
- family (composition)

## Why is it important to recognize that social life has patterns?

understanding problem solving in a society  
expected behaviors (status, roles)  
constraints imposed by social structure

Systems in place socially  
have expected functions.  
Examples include?

Changes in social institutions  
and social structure impact  
how individuals behave. In  
the U.S. we track many social  
institutions and structures  
focusing on current trends.

## Relevant areas:

- Economics
- Education
- Government and politics
- Social welfare
- Healthcare
- Families and kinship systems
- Religion
- Mass media

## Implications for practice:

- understand history and decisions
- understand perceived problems/needs
- identify strengths and resources
- look for meanings / paradigms
- use and accessibility issues
- cultural change and current trends
- advocacy