5

APPROACHES TO SOCIAL WORK AND THE ETHNIC REALITY

The profession of social work in the United States traces its major beginnings to the late nineteenth century, a time of societal change and growth. The cities were growing dramatically as the country became urbanized. Immigration, mostly from Europe, was at an all-time high. Industrialization and the scientific revolution were proceeding rapidly. The country was still experiencing the aftermath of the Civil War. Many African Americans, former slaves, were making their way into the cities of the North. These developments brought in their wake many new social problems. Newly arrived immigrants from Europe, freed slaves, and other African Americans crowded into the new cities. New ways of responding to the emerging human need had to be found. The emergence of social work was one response.

Richmond refers to combining a “new way of serving humanity” (1917) with systemized knowledge. Reflecting on this history, Goldstein’s (1990) comments point to a commitment to charity, philanthropy, and caring and suggest that “the ‘social’ in social work is the expression of this heritage” (p. 32).

How best to operationalize this perspective is a matter of ongoing disagreement and debate. Some believe that most human ills can be cured by changing the economy and opening up more access to resources. Others focus on a scientific perspective. Jane Addams (1910) and her colleagues emphasized reform; Mary Richmond joined those who think it necessary to enhance the new scientific perspective and to define social work as a science (Goldstein, 1990).

Another variant of this debate focuses on the differences of opinion concerning the major sources of human problems and the paths to problem resolution. Some adherents of a social-reform perspective believe that the major sources of individual and social dysfunction are to be found in inequities in the social structure and environmental problems. Those committed to this view of the human condition explain behavior in sociological and structural terms; they advocate a major focus on interventive strategies designed to effect social and environmental change (e.g., Germain & Gitterman, 1995).
Another group believes that much human functioning can best be understood by reference to psychologically based explanations of human behavior. Each of these perspectives influences the selection of helping strategies.

Yet another group seeks to understand how the interplay of social and psychological forces impinge on and shape people. Both bodies of thought are drawn on in the effort to heighten understanding and generate appropriate helping strategies.

These different viewpoints have been translated into approaches to social work practice, or what is often termed practice theory. Turner commented on the historical evolution of practice theory. In his view, the search for theory has been informed by the effort “to understand the complex reality of ‘person in situation.’” He suggested that the test of a theory is in its ability to help and to provide quality, effective, accountable service.

Turner defined theory as “an organized body of concepts that attempt to explain some aspects of reality in a manner that has been, or is capable of being verified in an acceptable manner” (Turner, 1995). He contended that theory is used to help practitioners give meaning to and assess people’s strengths, weaknesses, and resources. Theory “facilitates and gives direction to the process of decision making” in work with clients. Theory helps us to anticipate the outcomes of intervention. All intervention planning presumes sufficient understanding that action can be taken with predictable outcomes (Turner, 1996). Key elements of theory should help us: (1) to recognize the similarities and differences in the changing elements of daily practice; (2) to enhance the concept of client self-determination by focusing on the resemblance of clients to each other, as well as their uniqueness; and (3) to test concepts as practice seems either to support or refute them.

In his earlier work, Turner held firm to the conviction that explanation and description of our clients and their world should lead logically to identification of problematic behavior and to guidelines for helping (Turner, 1974). Later he entertains the possibility that a theory of intervention could be developed that is different from the theories of personality, learning, and behavior so familiar to most social workers (Turner, 1986).

The view that causal knowledge may not provide an adequate base for practice is held by a number of analysts. Fischer (1978) and Reid (1978) are among those who have presented this perspective.

Fischer makes a distinction between causal/developmental knowledge and intervention knowledge. The former answers the question why and aids in understanding and “diagnosing”; the latter answers the question what and deals with theories, principles, and procedures for induced change (Fischer, 1978). There is increasing doubt about the assumption that understanding the causes of history of problems provides clues about what is sustaining the problem, or guidelines for intervention. This view is not shared by all. Middleman and Goldberg (1974) contend that understanding the causes of a problem goes a long way toward defining it and projecting solutions.

Turner also commented on the relationship between theory and values. Anthropologists suggest that all of us must come to terms with five value orientations. These focus on the basic nature of human nature, the importance of time, the nature of human activity, and the relationships between human beings and nature. The relevance of this perspective for our present considerations is readily appar-
ent. Cultures differ in their perspectives on time. Some focus on the present, others on the future, and some stress the past. These differences must be taken into account in intervention. For example, there are substantial distinctions between Western and non-Western conceptions of time.

Turner, who has commented on the development of practice theory in numerous publications over the past twenty years or more, suggested that the present state of practice theory is best characterized as diverse. In his view, the search for a singular unifying theory has been abandoned. Instead, we have a pluralist theoretical base. Different theories focus on different elements of the human condition and on ways of human understanding.

For example, some problems call for approaches to solving discrete problems, whereas others focus on the inner dynamics of functioning. Each of these problem-solving perspectives may be useful for work with different people.

Considerable work remains to be done in clarifying the relationship among what is known and believed about human behavior, the cause of the problems, and the way in which social work uses that knowledge.

A number of distinct, although inevitably overlapping, approaches to social work practice can be identified (see Table 5.1). For the most part, these approaches are based on the various assumptions and theories about the human condition discussed earlier.

THE PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH

The concept that people are both psychological and sociological beings is synonymous with social work's perspective. Turner (1974) suggested that the term psychosocial is fully the prerogative of our profession. However, psychosocial therapy has come to be associated with a particular view of the human condition and approaches to practice, the meanings of which are not uniformly shared. Consequently, the configuration of ideas and interventive approaches termed psychosocial practice can be viewed as separate and apart from the more general view, shared by most social workers, that many of the issues with which they deal can in large measure be understood in psychosocial terms. For these reasons, we treat the psychosocial approach as a distinct perspective on practice.

The psychosocial approach has a long and honorable history. Much attention has been and continues to be focused on efforts to refine, reformulate, and specify the basic assumptions, interventive strategies, and techniques that continue to evolve.

Assumptions

It is a basic assumption of this approach that we are in large measure governed by unique past histories and the internal dynamic generated by those histories. This view of human beings translates into a perspective on practice that emphasizes the need to maintain a dual focus on psychological and sociological man; that is, on intrapersonal man, interpersonal man, and intersystemic man (Turner, 1974).

Richmond (1917) emphasized this dual perspective in her view of social casework as involving processes that develop a personality through adjustments deliberately effected, individual by individual, between people and their social environment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial</td>
<td>Hollis, Turner, &amp; Stream</td>
<td>People are governed by past; people are psychological, sociological, interpersonal, intrapersonal, intersystems beings; people shape own destiny; problems stem from unmet infantile drives, faulty ego/superego functioning, current pressures; psychodynamic theory important; use others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>Perlman, Compton, &amp; Galaway</td>
<td>Life is a problem-solving process; capacities impaired by excess stress, crisis, insufficient resources; present important; influenced by past; eclectic theoretical stance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Task centered</td>
<td>Reed &amp; Epstein</td>
<td>People have problem-solving capacity; breakdown generates capacity for change; clients define their own problems; eclectic theoretical stance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Middleman &amp; Goldberg (Wood)</td>
<td>Environmental pressures primary cause of problems; inadequacy, usually refers to disparity between resources and need</td>
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<tr>
<td>Systems</td>
<td>Pincus &amp; Minahan</td>
<td>Social work concerned with: absence of needed resources; linkage between people and resource systems; and problematic interaction between resource systems, internal problem-solving resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological</td>
<td>Germaine &amp; Gitterman</td>
<td>Focus on relationship between living organisms and environment; all life forms seek adaptive balance, require resources; reciprocal environment—organism interaction at expense of others; stress = imbalance between demand and capability to meet demand; coping = adaptive effort; human relatedness essential for survival; environment = physical and social</td>
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<tr>
<td>Process stage approach—</td>
<td>Lum</td>
<td>Postulates that all U.S.-based people of color share experience of racism and minority values on importance of corporate collective structures, extended family, religious and spiritual values; NASW code of ethics needs modification to incorporate above</td>
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<tr>
<td>minority practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnic-sensitive practice</td>
<td>Devore &amp; Schlesinger</td>
<td>Individual and collective history affects problems; present most important; ethnicity is a source of cohesion and strife; nonconscious phenomena affect functioning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengths perspective</td>
<td>Saleeby</td>
<td>People have strength; deal with problems; resilience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>Oppression structurally based; can analyze institutional source</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interventive Procedures</td>
<td>Attention to Ethnic Reality</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustainment; direct influence; ventilation; reflective discussion of person/situation; environmental work</td>
<td>Stress pathology related to class and ethnicity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Adaptation to ethnic reality not spelled out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ascertaining facts; thinking through facts; making choices</td>
<td>Calls attention to ethclass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring problem; contracting; task planning; establishing incentives and rationale</td>
<td>Adaptation to ethnic reality descriptive, not incorporated into</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>interventive procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress: principle of accountability to the client following demands of client task; maximizing supports in the client’s environment; least content</td>
<td>Major attention to ethnicity, class, and poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help enhance coping capacity; establish people-resource linkages; facilitate interaction within resource system; influence social policy, dispense material resources</td>
<td>Adaptation to ethnic reality not incorporated into interventive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengthen fit between people and environments; coordinate with/link people to resources; contract with client; engage to protect client/ others’ vulnerability; exert professional influence at case and policy level</td>
<td>Major attention to problems related to ethnicity, class, and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>poverty</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Adaptation to ethnic reality not incorporated into interventive</td>
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<td>procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on: culturally based stress experiences; language; social and personal aspect of problem; workers must develop ethnic competence</td>
<td>Some attention to ethnicity, social class</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Adaptation to ethnic reality not incorporated into interventive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact: problem identification with focus on minority issues; recognition of difficulty in seeking help; assessment with focus on ethnic identity, minority issues; intervention usual with attention to oppression, powerlessness, themes related to the minority experience</td>
<td>Major attention to ethnicity and social class</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Adaptation to ethnic reality not incorporated into interventive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborate with client</td>
<td>Attention to ethnicity, but not social class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use political and clinical helping technologies</td>
<td>Adaptation to ethnicity incorporated into interventive procedures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Attention to ethnicity almost exclusively on people of color;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>virtually none to other ethnic groups</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Incorporates adaptation to ethnicity/minority status into</td>
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<td>interventive procedure</td>
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<td>Totally congruent</td>
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A number of themes emerge. All people are thought to have both the responsibility and capacity to participate in shaping their own destiny. People are social beings who reach their potential in the course of relationships with family, friends, small groups, and the community. Belief in the capacity to choose and to make decisions from among alternatives is related to the belief that each of us is unique and unpredictable and that we all have the capacity to transcend history (Turner, 1974). Nevertheless, genetic endowment and the environment are most important in shaping actions.

In a recent formulation of the approach (Woods & Robinson, 1996), the following assumptions are identified: many feelings and thoughts “lie outside of awareness” (p. 564); personality is a dynamic combination of forces that affect behavior; even minor changes affect the entire personality and can alter thinking and feeling, as well as behavior; defenses serve functional and dysfunctional ends; symptoms represent adaptive mechanisms that serve to uncover and aid in resolution of internal conflicts; and “neurosis” has social origins and is based in experiences with social relationships. In an earlier statement, Hollis (1972) suggested that breakdown in social adjustment can be traced to three interacting sources: (1) infantile needs and drives left over from childhood that cause the individual to make inappropriate demands on the adult world, (2) a current life situation that exerts excessive pressures, and (3) faulty ego and superego functioning.

Problems stemming from persisting infantile needs and drives generate a variety of pathologies and disturbances in capacity to assume adult responsibilities. Disturbances may also be generated by environmental pressures, such as economic deprivation, racial and ethnic discrimination, inadequate education, and inadequate housing. Family conflict or loss occasioned by illness, death, or separation are also viewed as environmental or current life pressures. Faulty ego functioning is manifested in distorted perceptions of factors operating both external and internal to the individual. Breakdown is often triggered by disturbance in more than one of these areas because they tend to interact and affect functioning.

Turner (1974) suggested that the goal of psychosocial therapy is “to help people achieve optimal psychosocial functioning given their potential and giving due recognition to their value system.” These goals can be accomplished through the development of human relationships, available material, and service resources, as well as through human resources in the environment. Involvement with a psychosocial therapist may effect change in cognitive, emotive, behavioral, or material areas so that there is a relief from suffering.

In summary, the psychosocial approach stresses the interplay of individual and environment, the effect of past on the present, the effect of nonconscious factors on the personality, and the impact of present environmental as well as psychologically induced sources of stress and coping capacity. Major attention is given to psychoanalytic conceptions of human behavior and how these explain the presenting difficulties.

**Assumptions and the Ethnic Reality**

The definition of the ethnic reality calls attention to those aspects of the ethclass experience that provide sources of pride, a comfortable sense of belonging, various
networks of family and community, and a range of approaches to coping that have withstand the test of time. At the same time, it highlights the persistent negation of valued traditions and the turmoil experienced by various ethnic groups as they encounter the majority culture. Particular attention is paid to the effects of discrimination in such spheres as jobs, housing, and schooling. A review of the major tenets of psychosocial theory indicates that the roles of ethnicity and social class are incorporated into this perspective. Hollis (1972), Turner (1974, 1978), Strean (1974), and others have emphasized the destructive effects of discrimination, poor housing, and poverty. Many have mentioned the effect of destructive stereotyping. However, two major gaps are apparent. First, there is no clear or detailed indication as to how minority status, ethnicity, and class converge to shape individuals and contribute to the problems for which they seek help. This gap is noted by many social work analysts. A second omission, or perhaps distortion, is the tendency to stress the negative and dysfunctional aspects of the ethnic reality. Attention is commonly and explicitly called to the disabling effects of discrimination or low socio-economic status. This is as it should be. However, the unique and often beneficial effects of membership in various groups are often ignored.

Good psychosocial practice should be ever mindful of those sources of identity deriving from a sense of peoplehood and those sources of difficulty that stem from systemic inequity. The consideration of past history in relation to present functioning should present positive and negative aspects of the ethnic reality. The classic statements of the approach do not help us here. There have been efforts to make these kinds of connections (Grier & Cobbs, 1969). A "test" of psychosocial theory as it applies to Chicano clients shows its usefulness in work with this group when integrated with cultural insights (Gomez, Zurcher, Buford, & Becker, 1985).

Others have carried out similar work. Lee (1997) provides many suggestions for psychotherapeutic work with Asian clients, who frequently have difficulty utilizing traditional psychotherapy. What is needed is explicit education about the purposes of questions, and how the issues dealt with may be linked to the problems people bring. Immediate psychological first aid and personal disclosure by the therapist are all strategies that are helpful and congruent with the culturally based styles and belief systems of many Asian people who are minimally assimilated to American values. Franklin (1992) suggests a series of approaches to help therapists work with African American men who may be distrustful of therapy.

The Native American perspective on time and the priority some give to kin over aspects of work is frequently cited (Attneave, 1982; Good Tracks, 1973). Behaviors related to these perspectives clash with the values of the larger society. When work schedules are not met, a job can be lost and result in much pain and turmoil.

Similarly, some Chinese fathers who, by mainstream standards, remain emotionally distant from their children may well trigger confusion and doubt in those emerging into adolescence in American society. But there is another aspect to these types of experiences: In a hostile world, kin who act in accustomed ways and who transmit powerful belief systems go a long way toward providing emotional sustenance. The loss of a job may seem negligible compared with the sense of satisfaction obtained from doing what is expected by family. Emotional distance may be
experienced as rejecting and confusing, yet it provides a sense of the past or a clear sense of being dealt with in time-honored and known ways.

Our reading of the best that has been written about the psychosocial approach suggests that insufficient attention has been paid to how to use the knowledge of the ethnic reality, despite various writers having taken great care to point out that practitioners must be attuned to these differences.

THE PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACHES

Rather than pursue the psychosocial approach, concentrating on psychoanalytic insights, many practitioners look to the problem-solving approaches as the framework to be used for the helping process. Prominent among these are Perlman (1957), Reid and Epstein (1972), and Compton and Galaway (1969). Perlman can be considered the originator of the problem-solving framework, presented in her classic work (1957). Reid and Epstein have introduced a more structured model termed task-centered casework. Compton and Galaway (1989) have elaborated on this model, as have Turner and Jaco (1996).

Common to these approaches is a reliance on a wide range of theoretical stances. Few reject Freudian conceptions; however, such conceptions are not central to the approach. Ego psychology, learning theory, role theory, and communication theory are among the theoretical foundations drawn on by the proponents of the problem-solving approaches.

The Problem-Solving Framework—Assumptions

Intrinsic to this approach is the view that all of human life is a problem-solving process and that all people have problems. Turner and Jaco (1996), quoting Meyer (1994), suggest that problem solving can be defined as a “cognitive activity aimed at changing a problem from the given to the goal state” (p. 503). Difficulties in coping with problems are based on lack of opportunity, ability, or motivation.

In the course of human growth, individuals develop problem-solving capacities that become basic features of the personality. To deal effectively with diverse problems, including recurrent life course tasks, requisite resources and opportunities must be available. Excessive stress, crisis, or inadequate resources impair coping capacity. Interpersonal conflict, insufficient resources, deficient or dissatisfying role performance, and difficulties in moving through the stages of the life course as anticipated are all viewed as problems. Compton and Galaway suggest that “troubles in living” derive from difficulties encountered in solving some of life’s situations or from deficiencies in motivation or capacity (including knowledge, social skills, and biopsychosocial factors in development) and opportunity (such as access to support systems, needed resources, and helping relationships).

There is less emphasis than in the psychosocial approach on the importance of personal pathology in the etiology of problems. Equilibrium may be restored and optimal functioning regained when people are helped to function more competently
and when needed social and welfare services are provided (Siporin, 1975). Past experiences, present perceptions and reactions to the problem, and future aspirations join together to form the person with a problem. Of primary importance is today’s reality. Knowledge of the current living situations by which persons are “being molded and battered” provide the facts necessary for activation of the problem-solving process (Perlman, 1957). Later Perlman (1986) suggested that a major contribution of the model is its “focus upon the here-and-now” and the recognition that “each help seeker comes to us at a point of what he feels to be a crisis” (p. 249).

Compton and Galaway (1989) added a number of important notions. The model contains no built-in assumptions about the cause, nature, location, or meaning of the problem. Client goals are highlighted; thus, there is congruence with the view of clients’ rights to self-determination and to define their own problems.

A person’s response to the problem-solving process is influenced by the structure and functioning of the personality, which has been molded by inherited and constitutional equipment as well as by interactions with the physical and social environment. Blocks may impede the process, including lack of material provisions available to the client, ignorance or misapprehension about the facts of the problem and the way of dealing with it, and a lack of physical and emotional energy to invest in problem solving. An important assumption focuses on the role of the worker–client relationship in the problem-solving process. The ability of the two partners to interact to communicate is critical.

Culture and its influence on individual development is also discussed. In describing the person, Perlman (1986) presents the individual operating as a physical, psychological, and social entity—a product of constitutional makeup, physical and social environment, past experience, present perceptions and reactions, and future aspirations. Also important is the person as a whole (p. 250).

The goal in problem solving is to provide the resources necessary to restore equilibrium and optimal functioning through a process that places emphasis on contemporary reality and present problem-ridden situations. These resources are of both a concrete and an interpersonal nature.

**Assumptions and the Ethnic Reality**

No contradictions exist between this model and the concept of the ethnic reality. There is considerable congruence between the notion that effective coping is contingent on the availability of adequate resources and opportunities and our view that, for the most part, the ethnic reality often simultaneously serves as a source of stress and strength. Although this approach does not neglect the dysfunctional effect of personality pathology, it places greater emphasis on restoration of competence and provision of resources in delineated problem areas than does the psychosocial approach. This is consonant with our emphasis on the systemic source of problems often faced by oppressed ethnic groups. However, few of the earlier or more recent writings specifically address the kinds of issues that must be taken into account by the ethnic-sensitive worker. For example, considerable literature suggests that the process of communication between workers and clients is affected by their respective
 ethnic group membership and by the client’s ethnic reality (e.g., Davis & Proctor, 1989; Devore & Schlesinger, all prior editions). Neither earlier nor present work on the problem-solving perspective deals with these kinds of issues explicitly.

**TASK-CENTERED SYSTEM**

The task-centered approach was first formulated by Reid and Epstein in 1972 and is closely related to the problem-solving perspective. It draws on components of structured forms of brief casework (Reid & Shyne, 1969), aspects of Perlman’s problem-solving approach (Perlman, 1957), the perspective on the client task put forth by Studt (1968), and the specification of casework methods presented by Hollis (1965; Reid, 1977).

Since the inception of this approach, extensive work has been carried out to test and refine the model (Reid, 1977, 1978). It is viewed as an evolving approach to practice, responsive to continuing research and developments in knowledge and technology; its basic principles were summarized by Reid (1986).

The task-centered approach stresses the importance of helping clients with solutions to problems in the terms defined by the clients. The worker’s role is to help bring about desired changes. The client, not the worker, is the primary agent of change. The approach emphasizes the human capacity for autonomous problem solving and people’s ability to carry out action to obtain desired ends. Problems often are indicative of a temporary breakdown in coping capacity. The breakdown generates and sets in motion forces for change. These include client motivation as well as environmental resources. The range of problems identified is similar to that usually encountered and identified in other approaches: problems in family and interpersonal relations, in carrying out social roles, in decision making, in securing resources, and involving emotional distress reactive to situational factors (Reid, 1986).

Intervention is usually brief and time limited; this is based on the view that the greatest benefit to the client is derived in a few sessions within a limited time period. Substantial research has documented the fact that (1) short, time-limited treatment is as effective as long-term intervention and (2) change occurs early in the process.

Problems take place in the context of the individual, family, and environmental systems that can hamper or facilitate resolution (Reid, 1986). In contrast to psychosocial theory, problem-oriented theory as defined by Reid and Epstein (1972) does not focus on remote or historical origins of a problem but looks primarily to contemporary causal factors. Attention is centered on those problems that the client and practitioner can act to change. Wants, beliefs, and affects are crucial determinants of action (Reid, 1978).

The possible role of the unconscious in influencing human action is not ruled out. However, given the emphasis on the present, it is assumed that problems as defined by clients can be managed without efforts to gain insight into unconscious dynamics (Reid, 1978). “In this conception the person is seen as less a prisoner of unconscious drives than in the theories of the psychoanalyst and less a prisoner of
environmental contingencies. Rather, people are viewed as having minds and wills of their own that are reactive but not subordinate to internal and external influences (Reid, 1986, p. 270).

Theories designed to explain personality dynamics and disorders, the function of social systems, and other factors are thought to aid in problem assessment. However, these provide limited clues concerning how people perceive problems, and they do not explain the relationship between personal and environmental factors. Furthermore, there are competing theories to explain similar problems. The worker is left with limited guides for action. Practitioners are free to draw on any theory or combination of theories if they seem to add to an understanding of the situation (Epstein, 1977).

Also important in this approach is the view of poverty and of the characteristics of poor clients. These contrast with other approaches. Epstein is critical of perspectives on the poor that emphasize their negative characteristics. She suggests that given the persistent and severe inequities endemic in modern society that minimize the access to resources for so many, treatment technologies are not conducive to addressing or managing or controlling such vast influences (Epstein, 1977). Fundamental resolutions to the problems experienced by poor families will require the development of social policies to mitigate the oppressive consequences of racial, ethnic, and sex discrimination; poverty; and inadequate education, day care, and other like programs.

Assumptions and the Ethnic Reality

The task-centered model was developed in part because of an interest in providing more effective service to the poor. We have noted the critique of certain prevailing views of the poor. The insistence on working with problems in the terms identified by the client is stressed. These thrusts are a major step in the direction of ethnic-sensitive practice as we define it (see Chapter 6). When clients truly have the freedom to reject problem definitions that do not concur with their own views, the risk of attributing personality pathology to systemically induced behaviors and events is minimized.

For example, many American Indians feel that responsibility to family takes precedence over responsibility to the workplace. Knowing this, the social worker is unlikely to characterize as lazy an American Indian who explains his failure to work on a given day as being due to family obligations. If the ethnic reality of an American Indian man is understood, it is unlikely that he will be characterized as lazy or unmotivated.

The extent to which adherence to such subcultural perspectives leads an American Indian man to lose several jobs may become the issue of concern between him and the social worker if he choose to make it so. He is free to define the “problem” and to deal with it on his terms. Once viewed this way, consideration of various options is possible without recourse to the pathological label. For example, can his need to work regularly be reconciled with the responsibilities to family and friends as these are defined by his own group? In some instances a new “client” or group of
clients can emerge. These may be fellow employees or a supervisor who understands the kinds of commitments he has and is able and willing to make adaptations in work routines that allow him to tend to family and work needs.

**THE SOCIAL PROVISION AND STRUCTURAL APPROACHES**

Approaches that highlight the inequity of the social structure as a major source of difficulty have long been an integral part of the literature of social work practice. The work of Addams (1910) and Wald (1951) exemplifies this perspective. They were followed by Reynolds (1938), Titmuss (1968), Younghusband (1964), and Kahn (1965).1

Recent efforts to explicate the relationship between the social context and principles of social work practice are exemplified by Germain’s (1979) and Germain and Gitterman’s (1980) ecological approach and by Meyer’s ecosystems perspective (1976). Germain proposed that practice is directed toward improving the transactions between people and environments in order to enhance adaptive capacities and improve environments for all who function within them. Out of this perspective a number of “action principles” are derived. These relate to “efforts at adaptation and organism environmental transactions…those transactions between people and environments are sought that will nourish both parts of the interdependent system” (Germain, 1979).

**THE STRUCTURAL APPROACH**

A detailed model that identifies social institutional sources of stress and specifies social work actions generated by such a perspective is presented by Middleman and Goldberg (1974), and subsequently elaborated by Wood and Middleman (1989). They identified theirs as a structural approach; we will examine it in some detail.

**Assumptions**

Several assumptions underpin this approach: (1) people are not “necessarily the cause of their problems and therefore are not always the appropriate targets for change efforts” (Wood & Middleman, 1989, p. 27), (2) “inadequate social arrangements may be responsible for many problematic situations” (Wood & Middleman, 1989, p. 27), and (3) environmental pressures should first be considered as a possible source of suffering and target of change.

The proponents of this approach feel that it is destructive and dysfunctional to define social problems in psychological terms. Many of the people served by social

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1We acknowledge the work of Siporin (1975) in helping us arrive at this formulation.
work—minority groups, the aged, the poor—are not the cause of the problems that beset them. Consequently, efforts focused on changing them are misplaced.

Much of social work efforts are expended in working with and on behalf of people who do not adequately deal with the situations in which they find themselves. Inadequacy is a relative concept that refers to the disparity between skills or resources and situational requirements. If it is expected that people ought to be skillful and resourceful in response to the requirements of varied situations, then those lacking the necessary coping skills are perceived as inadequate. On the other hand, when situational demands are inappropriate and not sufficiently responsive to individual or collective need, then the situation is perceived as inadequate. “Thus to say that a given man is inadequate is both a description of disparity between that person and a particular situation, and a value judgment attributing blame for that disparity” (Wood & Middleman, 1989, p. 27). They put major responsibility for that disparity on inadequate social provision, discrimination, and inappropriate environments and organizational arrangements.

Based on this perspective, they conceptualize social work roles in terms of two bipolar dimensions: locus of concern (Middleman & Goldberg, 1974), the intended beneficiary of the worker’s action, and persons engaged. Locus of concern identifies the reason for social work intervention. The concern may focus on (1) the problems of particular individuals, such as the members of the minority group who confront discrimination in employment and cannot find a job, or (2) the larger category of individuals who suffer from the same problem.

“Persons engaged” calls attention to those people with whom the social worker interacts in response to the problem. Those engaged may be the “sufferer” (client) and/or others. This may involve a process by which the social worker facilitates action by clients and family and community networks to help themselves and each other; or it may involve focusing attention on more explicit social change activity. This can range from efforts to effect legislative change, to organizing for specific community services, to marshaling informal community supports in time of crisis.

The major targets of intervention are always the conditions that inhibit functioning and increase suffering. Social workers intervene in an effort to enhance the nature of the relationship between people and their social environment. They try to use change or create needed social structures and resources. There are four categories of activity: (1) work with clients in their own behalf (such as in casework), (2) work with clients on behalf of themselves and others like them, (3) work with nonsufferers on behalf of clients, and (4) work with nonsufferers on behalf of a category of sufferers (such as in research, policy development, and social change activities).

Assumptions and the Ethnic Reality

The congruence between many of the assumptions of the structural approach and our perspective on the ethnic reality is in many respects self-evident. We have established that a sense of class and ethnicity is strongly experienced in everyday life and that many ethnic groups and all minority groups are held in low esteem by
various segments of the society. Not infrequently we find that certain culturally derived behaviors are viewed as deviant or inadequate by those tied to core societal values.

The basic assumptions of the structural approach are consonant with our view concerning the part played by the ethnic reality in generating many of the problems at issue.

However, like the proponents of other approaches, these authors leave the implicit impression that matters of race and ethnicity are primarily problematic. They do not call explicit attention to the particular sources of strength or to the coping capacity that such group identification often generates, nor do they tend to the fact that ethnic and class factors contribute to how people view problems.

THE SYSTEMS APPROACH

In the introduction to this chapter, we called attention to the fact that some social work theoreticians have developed approaches to social work practice that are independent of various substantive theories derived from other domains of interest; they want to identify a “social work frame of reference” related to the basic values, functions, and purposes of the profession.

Pincus and Minahan (1973) present such a model. They define social work practice as a goal-oriented planned change process. The model uses a general systems approach as an organizing framework. It is intended for application in a wide range of settings. An effort is made to avoid the often-noted dichotomies between person and environment, clinical practice and social action, and microsystem and macrosystem change. In their view, the profession’s strength and major contribution is its recognition of and attention to the connections between these elements.

Assumptions

Two basic concepts form this approach: resources and interaction between people and the social environment (Pincus & Minahan, 1973). A resource is considered to be anything that helps to achieve goals, to solve problems, to alleviate distress, to aid in accomplishing life tasks, or to realize aspirations and values. Resources are usually used in interaction with one another. There is interdependence among resources, people, and varying informal and formal systems. The former include family, friends, and neighbors; the latter, the societal, governmental, and voluntary health, educational, and social welfare services.

This perspective helps to identify five areas of concern to social work: (1) the absence of needed resources, (2) the absence of linkages between people and resource systems or between resource systems, (3) problematic interaction between people within the same resource system, (4) problematic interaction between resource systems, and (5) problematic individual internal problem-solving or coping resources.
Assumptions and the Ethnic Reality

The systems approach derives its basic thrust from the values and purposes of social work. By definition, this focuses attention on the many gaps in institutional life that prevent people from reaching their full potential. There is no question that the gaps related to discrimination and cultural differences have always been recognized by our profession. The emphasis on resources and environment implicitly calls attention to those problems and strengths related to the ethnic reality. However, Pincus and Minahan (1973) did not devote explicit attention to these issues, although their examples do point to problems experienced by minority people as they confront mainstream institutions.

The assumptions on which this systems or generalist approach are based are, like all the others we have reviewed, congruent with a view that takes account of the ethnic reality. However, no explicit attention is paid to these matters.

ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

We began this chapter by pointing to the two major schools of thought regarding the relationship between person and environment that have long been an integral part of social work theory and practice.

The ecological or life model approach developed by Germain (1979) and Germain and Gitterman (1980) is a response to this historical didactic and an attempt to develop a conceptual framework that provides a simultaneous focus on people and environments (Germain & Gitterman, 1986). Some analysts view ecology as a useful “practice metaphor” that seeks to further understand the reciprocal relationships between people and the environment and to see how each acts on and influences the other. The ecological perspective is an “evolutionary, adaptive view of people and their environments” (Germain & Gitterman, 1986, p. 619). An important concept is that of “person-environment fit.”

This discussion will review the basic assumptions of the ecological or life model approach as developed by Germain and Gitterman in 1980 and summarized in 1986.

Assumptions

The ecological framework is an important and useful way of thinking about social work’s societal function. Key concepts are ecology; adaptation, stress, and coping; human relatedness, identity, self-esteem, and competence; and the environment, including its layers and textures (Germain & Gitterman, 1986).

Ecology

Ecology is a useful concept because of its focus on the relationships among living organisms and all elements of their environments. Integral to this concept is an effort to examine the adaptive balance or goodness of fit achieved between organisms and
their environments. All forms of life are involved in the process of achieving this adaptive balance. In order to develop and survive, all living forms require stimulation and resources from the environment. In turn, these living forms act on the environment, which becomes more differentiated, more complex, and able to support more diverse forms of life.

The reciprocal interactions between an organism and its environment may occasionally be at the expense of other organisms. Damage may render an environment no longer capable of supporting human or physical life forms; or conversely, failure by the environment to support individual life forms may threaten their survival. For example, social environments may become damaged or “polluted” by such cultural processes as poverty, discrimination, and stigma. Under positive environmental circumstances, individuals grow and develop in a positive manner.

**Adaptation, Stress, and Coping**

Stress, defined as “an imbalance between a perceived demand and a perceived capability to meet the demand through the use of available internal and external resources” (Germain & Gitterman, 1986, p. 620), develops when there are upsets in the usual or desired person–environment fit. Stress may be positive, in the sense associated with positive self-feeling and anticipation of mastering a challenge, or it may be experienced negatively.

Coping refers to the adaptive effort evoked by stress and usually requires both internal and external resources. Internal resources refer to levels of motivation, self-esteem, and problem-solving skills. Problem-solving skills are in part acquired by training in the environment—from family, schools, and other institutions.

**Human Relatedness, Identity, Self-Esteem, and Competence**

Human relatedness is essential for biological and social survival. Infants and children require extended periods of care and the opportunity for learning and socialization. The family, peers, and the institutions of the larger society are the context in which such learning takes place. Deprivation in key primary relationships is painful and may lead to fear of relationships because of their association with loss and pain. Human relationships are crucial, giving rise to a sense of identity and self-esteem. This process begins in infancy and expands to include the increasing range of social experiences that usually accompany growth. Included among the factors that shape identity and self-esteem are gender, race, and social class.

Competence has been defined as “the sum of the person’s successful experiences in the environment” (Germain & Gitterman, 1986, p. 622). Individuals achieve a sense of competence when they have the experience of making an impact on the social and physical environment. Important in the development of competence are curiosity and explorative behavior. If competence is to be developed and sustained, appropriate conditions must be provided by family, school, and community.

**The Environment**

Germain and Gitterman (1986) suggested that the environment consists of layers and textures. The former refers to the social and physical environment; the latter to
time and space. The physical world includes the natural and the built world. The social environment is the human environment of people “at many levels of relationships.” These environments interact and shape one another. Technological and scientific developments shape norms in social behavior. Illustrative are the changing sexual norms influenced by the development of contraceptive technology. Importantly, the way in which society appraises certain groups is evidenced in elements of the built environment. Germain and Gitterman (1986) made an important point when they suggested, for example, that design differences between a welfare office and a private family agency often reflect societal values. These in turn affect daily life and self-perception.

Key elements of the social environment are bureaucratic organizations and social networks. The structure and function of bureaucratic organizations give them the potential for positive or negative impact on person–environment fit. Social networks often occur naturally—though they need not—in the life space of the individual. Whether they occur naturally or are formed (as in the case of organized self-help groups), social networks often serve as mutual aid systems. Included are help with providing resources, information, and emotional support.

The physical environment is the context within which human interaction takes place. The sense of personal identity is closely related to “a sense of place.” The importance attached to the degree of personal space and what is defined as crowding is influenced by culture and gender, as well as by physical, emotional, and cognitive states.

The life model views human beings as active, purposeful, and having the potential for growth. In the course of ongoing interchange with the environment, there is a potential for problems. These are termed, in the model, problems in living.

Problems in Living
Problems in living are encountered in the course of managing life transitions, in dealing with environmental pressures, and, in some, by maladaptive interpersonal processes. Life transitions can become problematic under a number of circumstances, including when conflicting role demands are related to status changes and when life transitions and developmental changes do not coincide. Marriage may present a woman with demands to be a wife in the traditional sense at the same time as the occupational role needs to be played in more contemporary terms. The unmarried teenage mother is often not developmentally prepared for the parenting role.

Environmental pressures may result from (1) the unavailability of needed resources, (2) people’s inability to use available resources, and (3) environments and resources that are unresponsive to particular styles and needs. The last point is well illustrated by the highly structured elements of many of our health and welfare systems, which do not take account of the ethnic reality of particular groups. For example, the sterile, private atmosphere of a contemporary delivery room may not be congruent with the need for communication with and presence of female relatives to which some Chicano and American Indian women are accustomed. Maladaptive interpersonal processes can arise in efforts to cope with significant environments, illness, and other stresses.
Social Work Purpose
The distinctive professional social work purpose is focused on helping people with the problems of living; that is, it seeks to improve transactions between people and their environments or to improve the goodness of fit between needs and resources. This effort provides social work with a “core” function. The ecological framework provides one new approach to how best to carry out this function. The three major types of problems noted earlier are particularly suited to social work interventions.

Assumptions and the Ethnic Reality
The important contribution to the practice literature made by Germain and Gitterman (1980, 1986) does much to help social workers to recognize and understand the complex person–environment interactions that have long been of central concern to the profession. It recognizes that problems are outcomes of the interactions of many factors and abandons the search for a single cause or cure (Hartman & Laird, 1983). There clearly are no contradictions between the ecological perspective and the view of the ethnic reality developed in this book.

The focus on person–environment fit and on the reciprocal relationships between people and their environment is congruent with the view that ethnicity, minority status, social class, resource availability, and societal evaluations give shape to problems in living and affect the capacity to cope with these problems. Germaine and Gitterman have repeatedly stressed the point that matters of culture and class are critical elements in the person–environment interaction. The congruence between this model and ethnic-sensitive practice has been noted by Devore (1983), who suggested that the proponents of the model “have encouraged practitioners to move beyond practice models that look within the individual for the cause of problems to one that encompasses the many facets of life” (p. 525). Clearly, the model and its assumptions can only facilitate the work of the ethnic-sensitive practitioner.

THE GENERALIST PERSPECTIVE
During the past decade or more, increased attention has been directed to the development of the generalist perspective. The most recent version of the Curriculum Policy Statement of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 1992) requires that all baccalaureate and master’s level programs of social work educate students in the generalist perspective.

In Chapter 7 we review the generalist perspective in some detail. We review the work of a number of analysts who suggest that this perspective can be traced to the Milford Conference, held in 1923. At that time, a generic model of casework theory was presented (Morales & Sheafor, 1991) as a way of bringing greater unity to the several types of social casework then extant. At present, the generalist perspective is said to reflect the profession’s theoretical focus on assessment, the person in situation, relationship, process, and intervention (Johnson, 1994). Others (e.g., Anderson, 1982) point to the emphasis on targeting problems at all levels: intrapersonal, organizational, community, institutional, and societal. We suggest that an ethnic-
sensitive approach to generalist practice is best operationalized by the structural model discussed earlier in this chapter.

**THE EMPOWERMENT AND STRENGTHS PERSPECTIVES**

The empowerment approach and the strengths perspective are recent additions to the social work practice literature. The empowerment approach (see Lee, 1996) is guided by simultaneous concern for people and their environments. This formulation is based on the work of C. Wright Mills and Schwartz's view of the integral connection between personal and public issues. Also important is the ecological perspective as developed by Germain and Gitterman (1980) and others, with its emphasis on the interdependence of all systems. Ecological perspectives are linked with a view that conflict is important "as a means of releasing the potentialities of people and their environments" (p. 230).

The authors of the strengths perspective (e.g., Saleeby, 1997) view the emphasis on client strengths and resources as a significant departure from past approaches, which were more focused on pathology. A "lexicon of strength" informs the perspective in which the key aspects of the empowerment approach are clearly embedded.

**The Empowerment Approach**

**Assumptions**

Oppression is a structurally based phenomenon with far-reaching consequences for both individuals and their communities. The effects of oppression range from health effects and death, for example, excessive rates of infant mortality among groups such as African Americans; to hopelessness and its behavioral sequella such as suicide for some; to despair and internalized rage.

These effects of oppression point to the importance of such social factors as good support networks and other means of developing connections and relatedness. However, most of the problems caused by oppression require a dual focus on changing the environment as well as strengthening individuals.

It is a key assumption of this approach that people are fully capable of solving their immediate problems. They can go beyond this level to analyze the institutional and structural sources that sustain their oppression. Basically, people empower themselves, and it is they, not the professional helper, who is key in the helping process. Both clinical and political helping technologies must be utilized.

**Strengths Perspectives**

**Assumptions**

The lexicon of strengths is a way of directing us to words that highlight strength, including *empowerment, membership* (as in important supportive units such as families), *resilience, healing and wholeness*, and *dialogue and collaboration*. An important

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2 Much of the following discussion is based on the empowerment approach as discussed by Lee (1996).
concept is to “suspend disbelief in client perspectives.” This relates to a long-standing criticism of traditional social work approaches in which the clients’ views of their problems were often discounted in favor of the assessment made by the professional.

Other important principles are focused on the view that all people have the strength to deal with their problems and that we don’t know the upper limits of people’s capacity to grow. Service is best rendered in collaboration with the client and not for the client.

Assumptions and the Ethnic Reality

There is little question that both of these perspectives are consonant with the conceptions of the ethnic reality and ethnic-sensitive social work practice.

Elsewhere in this volume we have critiqued those approaches to the needs, lifestyles, and orientations of several ethnic groups and oppressed ethnic groups that focus almost exclusively on the difficulties and pathologies facing these groups, with limited attention to their strengths and culturally based coping capacities. We welcome the focus on strength and empowerment inherent in these two relative newcomers to the social work practice literature.

Specifically, it is important to note that in her discussion of the empowerment perspective, Lee (1996) presents what she terms “bifocal vision” that must inform practice. This vision must include understanding of the history of a group’s oppression and a history of policies governing the group; an ecological, stress, and coping paradigm; and ethclass and feminist perspectives. Importantly, Lee asserts (1996) that the work on ethnic-sensitive practice carried on by the present authors (Devore & Schlesinger, 1981, 1987, 1991, 1995), others (e.g., Lum 1995; Davis, 1984), and Chau (1990) “made knowledge of culture and race critical to empowerment practice.”

It is a testament to the major developments that have taken place in social work’s efforts to truly confront self-determination, the impact of ethnicity and class on social functioning, and the structural bases of the oppression still experienced by many groups that others join us in efforts to infuse the very core of social work practice with these assumptions and principles.

APPROACHES FOCUSED ON CULTURAL AWARENESS AND MINORITY ISSUES

Assumptions

Green (1995) developed an approach focused on cultural awareness because in his view social work had paid limited attention to the concerns and interests of minority clients. Green reviews a number of concepts focused on culture, race, ethnicity, and minority groups. He rejected the use of the concept of race because of its presumed pejorative connotations and suggested that it is difficult to apply social class concepts in pluralistic societies. His review of the concepts just noted led him to conclude that efforts to define them entail terminological and conceptual problems.
He asked whether there is a “concept of cultural variation that could be...useful in understanding cross-cultural social service encounters, regardless of the social characteristics or the relative power of the groups or individual involved” (p. 8). He answered his own question by suggesting that the concept of ethnicity, as developed by anthropologists, is useful.

Green (1982) contrasted two views of ethnicity. One, termed *categorical*, attempts to explain differences between and within groups and people by the degree to which distinctive cultural traits such as characteristic ways of dressing, talking, eating, or acting are manifested. These distinctive traits “are not significant except to the extent that they influence intergroup and interpersonal cross-cultural relationships” (p. 11). These elements of “cultural content” may become important as political and cultural symbols used when a group makes claims for resources or demands respect.

The second view, termed *transactional*, focuses on the ways in which people of different groups who are communicating maintain their sense of cultural distinctiveness. It is the manipulation of boundaries between distinctive cultural groups that is crucial to understanding ethnicity and its impact on life.

Ethnicity, stated Green, can be defined in terms of boundary and boundary-maintenance issues. The importance of ethnicity surfaces when people of different ethnic groups interact.

Green adopted a transactional approach to ethnicity. He suggested that in interactions between groups it is not “the descriptive cultural traits” that are important, but “the lines of separation and in particular how they are managed, protected, ritualized through stereotyping, and sometimes violated” (p. 12). Those persons who mediate intergroup boundaries are critical actors in cross-cultural encounters. Social workers assume an important role as boundary mediators, given the part they play in the communication of information and in the regulation of resources pertinent to various groups.

Four modes of social work intervention with minority groups serve to identify the implications that ethnicity has for key social service activities. The first, *advocacy*, points to the inherent conflicts in relationships between a minority and the dominant group. Dominant institutions dominate minority people, and advocacy identifies with clients who are subject to domination.

In *counseling*, the individual is the target of change. Culturally sensitive counseling is not well developed. A *regulator* role is also identified. This role focuses on work with the group, usually termed the involuntary client, and is often viewed as unfair and unjust by ethnic community leaders. Examples given include the removal of American Indian children from their homes after allegations of social deprivation. As “regulators,” social workers are in a position to define deviance in ways that may do violence to important group values.

In the *broker* role, social workers intervene both with the individual and with society. This role represents a “necessary response to the failure of established social service organizations to meet the legitimate needs of minority clients” (Green, 1982, p. 21). Each of these roles has different consequences for destructive or liberating interactions with minority clients.
A MODEL OF HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

Green suggested that there is a lack of "cross-cultural" conceptualization in social work and therefore turned to a medical sociological/anthropological model of help-seeking behavior. This model focuses on (1) culturally based differences in perceiving and experiencing stress, (2) language and how it crystallizes experience, and (3) the social as well as personal experience of a problem.

Client and professional cultures are distinct. Components of the model, as they pertain to cultural differences, are (1) the recognition of an experience as a problem by the client, (2) the way language is used to label a problem, (3) the availability of indigenous helping resources, and (4) client-oriented criteria for deciding whether a satisfactory resolution has been achieved. There is a basic contrast between the values and assumptions of the client and those of the service culture. Culturally aware practice requires an ability to suspend agency and professional priorities in order to be able to view services from the perspective of the client. This requires much learning and effort on the part of the worker.

Ethnic Competence

Green (1995) proposed a number of ways of acquiring ethnic competence. Ethnic competence refers to a performance level of cultural awareness representing a degree of comprehension of others that involves more than the usual patience, genuineness, and honesty in client–worker relationships. It is the ability to conduct professional work in a way that is consonant with the behavior of members of distinct groups and the expectations that they have of one another. Use of cultural guides and participant observation in diverse communities are means of acquiring ethnic competence.

Congruence of the Model with Prevailing Approaches to Social Work Practice

The model of cultural awareness reviewed here presents a useful way of thinking about social work’s past tendency to minimize and neglect ethnic and cultural differences. It draws on key social work roles as a way of illustrating and highlighting some of the real dissatisfaction with which social work is viewed by some minority groups.

This disenchantment with the profession’s neglect and distortions of ethnic group life led Green (1982) to identify a model of help-seeking behavior drawn from a discipline outside of social work. The key elements of that model are potentially congruent with prevailing approaches to practice. However, Green does not make the linkages. Each of the elements of the model could readily be integrated into the approaches reviewed here, assuming the kind of commitment and ethnic competence described.

The Model as a Guide for Practice

The cultural awareness model contributes conceptual insights into ethnicity, highlights the profession’s historical neglect of this area, and presents some important
guidelines for acquiring sensitivity to various ethnic groups. Ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and study of ethnographic documents are all useful mechanisms for coming to an understanding of the lives of clients.

Limited if any attention is directed to how the constraints of time and agency function affect the workers' ability to take the steps that in Green's view are needed to acquire ethnic competence. A related question bears on how workers acquire ethnic competence in the ways proposed when they work in a multiethnic community.

THE PROCESS-STAGE APPROACH

Assumptions

Lum (1992) aimed to break new ground by focusing on key differences between the emphases in current social work practice and minority characteristics, beliefs, and behaviors. He believes that social workers' professional orientation must be reexamined from the viewpoint of ethnic minorities, and he presented a framework for ethnic minority practice by proceeding from the assumption that minorities share a similar predicament as well as values and beliefs and that practice protocols applicable to these minorities can be developed. He pointed to the relative lack of attention in social work to minority practice, which he defines as "the art and science of developing a helping relationship with an individual, family, group, and/or community whose distinctive physical/cultural characteristics and discriminatory experience require approaches that are sensitive to ethnic and cultural environments" (p. 3).

The terms people of color and ethnic minority are used interchangeably throughout this book, and they basically refer to African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and American Indians. The common experience of racism, discrimination, and segregation "binds minority people of color together and contrasts with the experience of White Americans" (Lum, 1986, p. 1).

Lum postulated a number of commonly held minority values. He proposed that social work values and the code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers need to be modified to incorporate collective minority values that emphasize family unification, recognition of the leadership of elders and parents, and mutual responsibility of family members for one another. Certain Western values and interventive theories and strategies center on individual growth in contrast to kinship and group-centered minority culture. Minority family values revolve around corporate collective structures, including maintenance of ethnic identification and solidarity. Extended family and religious and spiritual values have extensive influence in the minority community. There are a number of generic principles of feeling and thought that cut across groups, despite the known differences in values and culture between varied groups.

Minority knowledge theory has its own intrinsic concepts. Drawing implications for practice with minorities from existing social work knowledge theories is not sufficient. Nevertheless, most theories of social work practice can be adapted for use with people of color.
Congruence of the Model with Prevailing Approaches to Social Work Practice

Efforts to answer the question, "Is the process–stage approach congruent with prevailing approaches to social work practice?" must be divided into at least two segments: (1) review and analysis of the basic assumptions and (2) consideration of how the process and stages of practice are in keeping with procedures of social work practice.

The Basic Assumptions

Lum (1986) proceeded from the assumption that all people of color presently living in the United States—Latinos, Asian Americans, American Indians, and African Americans—are bound together by the experience of racism, which contrasts with the experience of white Americans. He further proposed that these groups share collective minority values that emphasize family unification, recognition of the leadership of elders and parents, and mutual responsibility of family members for one another. Also important are values revolving around corporate collective structures, maintenance of ethnic identification, and solidarity. Extended family, kinship networks, spiritual values, and the importance of a vertical hierarchy of authority are said to have extensive influence. The prevailing ethics of the profession, as embodied in the code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers, are currently oriented toward individual client rights. This code should also address and incorporate the collective minority values just summarized.

In his discussion of "ethnic minority values and knowledge base" (p. 55), Lum directed limited attention to the concept of or influence of social class. He suggested that

For ethnic minorities, social class is influenced by racial discrimination and socioeconomic constraints. Although people of a particular minority group may occupy different social class levels, coping with survival and the reality of racism are forces that bind people of color together.

In our view, there are some key conceptual, empirical, and ideological flaws in the assumptions as presented.

We agree that racism is a factor that is shared by the groups identified by Lum. However, the degree to which they hold in common the "minority values" identified is subject to considerable question. The degree of adherence to these types of values, for any group or for any individual member of a group, remains a matter of empirical question and exploration with the individual member. Thus, to suggest that all people of color, in contrast with all whites, value a hierarchy of authority, corporate structures, and the same spiritual values runs counter to much of the life experience of these groups. The view neglects substantial empirical evidence that shows that the degree of adherence to these values is a function of recency of migration (e.g., Bean & Tienda, 1988) and of social class. Indeed, the accelerating current debate about the nature and source of the African American underclass (see our discussion in Chapter 2 and Wilson, 1987) casts serious doubt on the contention that issues of survival and racism bind to the degree that the conceptualization pre-
sented here would suggest. Our concept of the ethnic reality takes account of factors of social class and suggests a framework for understanding the ethnic- and class-related differences that bind as well as those that pull people away from identification with core ethnic values.

The major difficulty in identifying a minority value base that is shared by all people of color is that the effort to unify can have the effect of minimizing and distorting the important unique and rich cultures and values that are characteristic of each of the groups identified as people of color. To attribute a common set of values to diverse people already beset by racism risks a negation of uniqueness, special needs, and stereotyping.

Surely, even a brief review of the values adhered to by such groups as Navajo Indians, urban African Americans who live in the ghetto, Asian Indians, people from the Caribbean, and third- or fourth-generation Japanese women cast serious doubt on the view that they share spiritual values, the value on vertical hierarchy of authority, or the importance of corporate collective structures.

Importantly, many of these and related values are or have been held by many white ethnic groups. For example, the emphasis on family and group solidarity is often discussed as an attribute of Jewish people and of many Italians.

**Interventive Procedures**

Each of the models of practice discussed here has developed a somewhat distinctive set of procedures. As social work practice theory and interventional modalities have evolved and grown, the distinctions between the procedures presented with different models have been muted. For the most part, the focus on the process of assessment or problem identification and on work with the client or client group in efforts to help with the problem of concern. In Chapters 7, 8, and 9, the basic procedures currently most commonly used in social work practice are delineated and adaptations in keeping with the ethnic reality are proposed.

Our analysis of these procedures intended to assess the extent to which they have taken account of ethnic-related dispositions suggests that few of the models have incorporated ethnic-sensitive procedures.

**SUMMARY**

This review of some of the major approaches to social work practice indicates that, with few exceptions, the assumptions on which practice is based do not contradict prevailing understandings of cultural, class, and ethnic diversity.

The models reviewed in this chapter share adherence to basic social work values. The dignity of the individual, the right to self-determination, and the need for an adequate standard of living and satisfying, growth-enhancing relationships are uniformly noted. Differences emerge about what social workers need to know and do in order to achieve these lofty objectives.

It is quite apparent that those social workers who believe that past personal experience and nonconscious factors have a major bearing on how people feel in the present structure their practice differently from those who emphasize the
importance of institutional barriers, both past and present. Both groups draw on a wide range of psychological and sociological knowledge. However, their theoretical differences influence the manner in which these are incorporated in practice. These differences are reflected in how problems are defined, what kinds of needs are stressed, the structure of the worker-client relationship, and the type of activity undertaken.

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