

how they have successfully coped with stress and trauma in the past, and how their cultural background, religion, ages, and other social characteristics might shape their understanding of and relationship to death and dying. Because she takes the time to understand the family's unique strengths and diverse characteristics, Ashley can provide effective services tailored to meet the family's needs.

Historical Influence of Theories of Human Behavior in Social Work Practice

Generalist social workers often absorb a wide range of theories of human behavior, then draw on them eclectically when practical situations seem to call for, or respond to, different approaches. Social work operates from the belief that a mixture of theories works to ease suffering or achieve justice and is preferable to a dogmatic approach with less desirable consequences. Therefore, a generalist social worker in the field might call on any or all of the following theoretical traditions. The decision about which theory or theories to utilize will be made by the social worker based on the situation or context, the social worker's strengths and traits, the client's strengths and traits, and the resources available. We present several theories of human behavior in a largely historical context, in order to demonstrate social work's approach to theory over time.

Psychodynamic Theory **LO 3** By the early twentieth century, the ideas of Sigmund Freud had emerged as a dominant theory of human behavior and were influential among social workers. Freud's theories of human behavior were adopted by others and eventually evolved into psychodynamic theory.

The components of psychodynamic theory that influenced early social work practice established that people's behaviors were purposeful and determined and that some of those determinants were unconscious. These two fundamental beliefs changed the direction of social work practice. Social workers were no longer limited to working with people living in poverty, as in the early 1900s; their domain grew to include all people.

The modern practice of **psychosocial treatment** was influenced by Anna Freud (1946), Sigmund's daughter, and by Erik Erikson (1950). Both made significant contributions to the understanding of ego psychology. Building on the works of Mary Richmond, Anna Freud, and Erik Erikson, Florence Hollis's *Casework: A Psychosocial Therapy* (1964) became the social work profession's guide to psychosocial treatment. (A second edition was prepared by Woods and Hollis, 1990.)

The core tenet is that interacting genetic, biological, and sociocultural factors explain the cognitive and emotional processes, both conscious and unconscious, that motivate human behavior. This theory is the basis of many casework interventions, including psychosocial treatment, the **problem-solving method**, and **task-centered casework**. All three are used in social work practice with individuals and families.

Because theory informs practice, what are the practice implications of psychodynamic theory? One implication of the belief that we have unconscious

processes is that social workers can help clients by encouraging them to process early life experiences and childhood memories. Psychological symptoms, such as depression and anxiety are viewed as adaptive attempts to uncover and resolve internal conflicts. The goal of the social worker is to help clients overcome conflicts that are barriers to self-fulfillment. Within the safety of the client-worker relationship, clients can discover the underlying conscious and unconscious motivations for their behavior. Exploring their feelings and patterns of responses allows them to resolve internal conflicts so as to achieve improved mental health and improved relationships with others.

One of the criticisms of psychosocial treatment is that it does not pay enough attention to external conflicts or the influences of social systems. For example, a psychosocial approach would probably not be effective in assisting Michael to navigate the medical system, because his situation requires more focus on external conflicts or problems with social systems than on internal conflicts.

Problem-Solving Method During the 1950s, Helen Harris Perlman (1957) developed the problem-solving method of intervention. Her goal was to move away from the psychosocial focus on early childhood experiences and memories and to make social work practice more pragmatic and more focused on the present moment (Turner & Jaco, 1996). Two fundamental assumptions underlie the problem-solving method. The first is that client problems do not represent weakness and failure on the part of the client, but are instead a natural part of life and the process of human growth and change (Compton & Galaway, 1994). The second assumption is that if clients cannot solve their problems, it is because they lack the knowledge or resources to effectively do so (Turner & Jaco, 1996). As is the case with psychosocial treatment, the client-worker relationship is critical to the problem-solving method. The relationship is collaborative and provides the client with a source of encouragement and the safety needed to initiate creative problem solving.

Task-Centered Social Work In the late 1960s, task-centered social work evolved out of the discovery that shortened treatment periods were more effective in problem solving than the long-term treatments associated with psychosocial interventions. Thus, Reid and Epstein (1972), who were influenced by Perlman's problem-solving model, developed task-centered social work with time limits in mind. The basic characteristics of task-centered casework are that it is short term; the focus is on client-acknowledged problems; and sessions are highly structured into specific activities. Because task-centered casework is brief and focuses on the presenting problem, the emphasis is on identifying a problem rather than identifying the underlying cause. Once the problem is identified, the desired outcome or change is then identified. Determining tasks to overcome obstacles and achieve the desired outcome is the goal of this approach.

Cognitive Behavioral Theory In addition to Freud's explanations of human behavior in the early twentieth century, another important theory was