

The Future of Social Welfare & the Social Work Profession: A Global Perspective

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Overview of Presentation

- **Examining Long-Standing Assumptions**
- **Macro Changes and Their Implications**
- **New Realities and Their Implications**
- **Issues to be Resolved**
- **The Future Social Work Workforce**
- **Social Justice, Social Welfare, & Social Work**
- **Challenging the Master Narrative in Social Work to Develop a Social Work of Resistance**
- **Questions and Discussion**

Assumptions about Social Welfare & Social Work

- **Social welfare will gradually expand to meet human needs and redistribute resources.**
- **Government policies can correct the excesses of the market economy by collectivizing the “social costs of private enterprise.”**
- **Examples: Unemployment, Pollution**

Assumptions about Social Welfare

- **Social policies promote stability and the appearance of democracy & legitimacy.**
- **Both social policies & social work practice operate within national boundaries in which international developments are not central to their formulation or implementation.**

Assumptions

- **Expansion of social welfare will create a more egalitarian & non-discriminatory society**
- **The creation of a multicultural society will lead to greater support for ALL equality-based social policies**

Assumptions

- **Social work's goals require cooperation with state policy-making and state intervention.**
- **Social work can serve as an instrument of the state -- to further the redistributive and social control ends of social policies -- without compromising its basic values.**

Assumptions

- **The function of non-profit organizations in U.S. society complements that of the state.**
- **Non-profits require a different type of organizational structure and culture because they create different “commodities” from those produced by for-profit market system**

Assumptions

- **The goals of social service agencies are compatible with those of workers and clients.**
- **A climate of relatively benign cooperation exists among public, non-profit, & for-profit organizations in the social welfare field.**

Assumptions

- **Client and community self-determination and empowerment are compatible with effective social services.**
- **The ethical guidelines of social work practice are compatible with enhanced state intervention in social welfare and the goals & purposes of non-profit organizations.**

Assumptions

- Divisions in U.S. society occur primarily along a “majority-minority” axis that juxtaposes white, male, middle/upper class heterosexuals with all other groups.
- These “minority” groups will remain in minority status for the indefinite future and the principle tensions in society will be between the dominant or “majority” culture and these various “minority” groups.

Assumptions about Social Work Practice

- **To adapt to the realities of a multicultural society, social workers require only to add “cultural competence” to their practice.**
- **The skills social workers need to practice effectively in this emerging environment remain fundamentally unchanged.**

Assumptions

- **Concerns over multiculturalism and the eradication of white privilege are fully compatible with the other social justice-related goals of social work practice.**
- **The resolution of racial and cultural issues is compatible with the maintenance of the major features of the U.S. social welfare system and social work practice.**

HOWEVER --

**THESE ASSUMPTIONS ARE NO
LONGER VALID!**

Macro Changes & Their Implications

- **Economic Globalization & the Welfare State**
- **Effects of Economic & Fiscal Crises on SW**
- **Changing Roles of Government & Nonprofits**
- **Demographic & Cultural Changes**
- **Internationalization of Social Problems**
- **Ideological Justifications for Social Welfare**
- **Changing Nature of Social Work Practice**

New or More Complex Issues

- **Climate Change**
- **Global Epidemics**
- **Immigration & Trans-National Migration**
- **New Forms of Substance Abuse**
- **Impact of War on Individuals & Families**
- **Instability of Work, Housing, Retirement**
- **Permanent Social/Economic Stratification**
- **Financing Crisis of Social Security & Medicare**

New Social & Cultural Realities

- Demographic changes:
 - Aging of population - Immigration
 - Population shift: Urban/rural, coast/heartland
 - Racial/ethnic composition of cities, workforce

- Cultural changes:
 - Different attitudes about sexual orientation
 - Different gender roles and family structures
 - Different conceptions of work and retirement

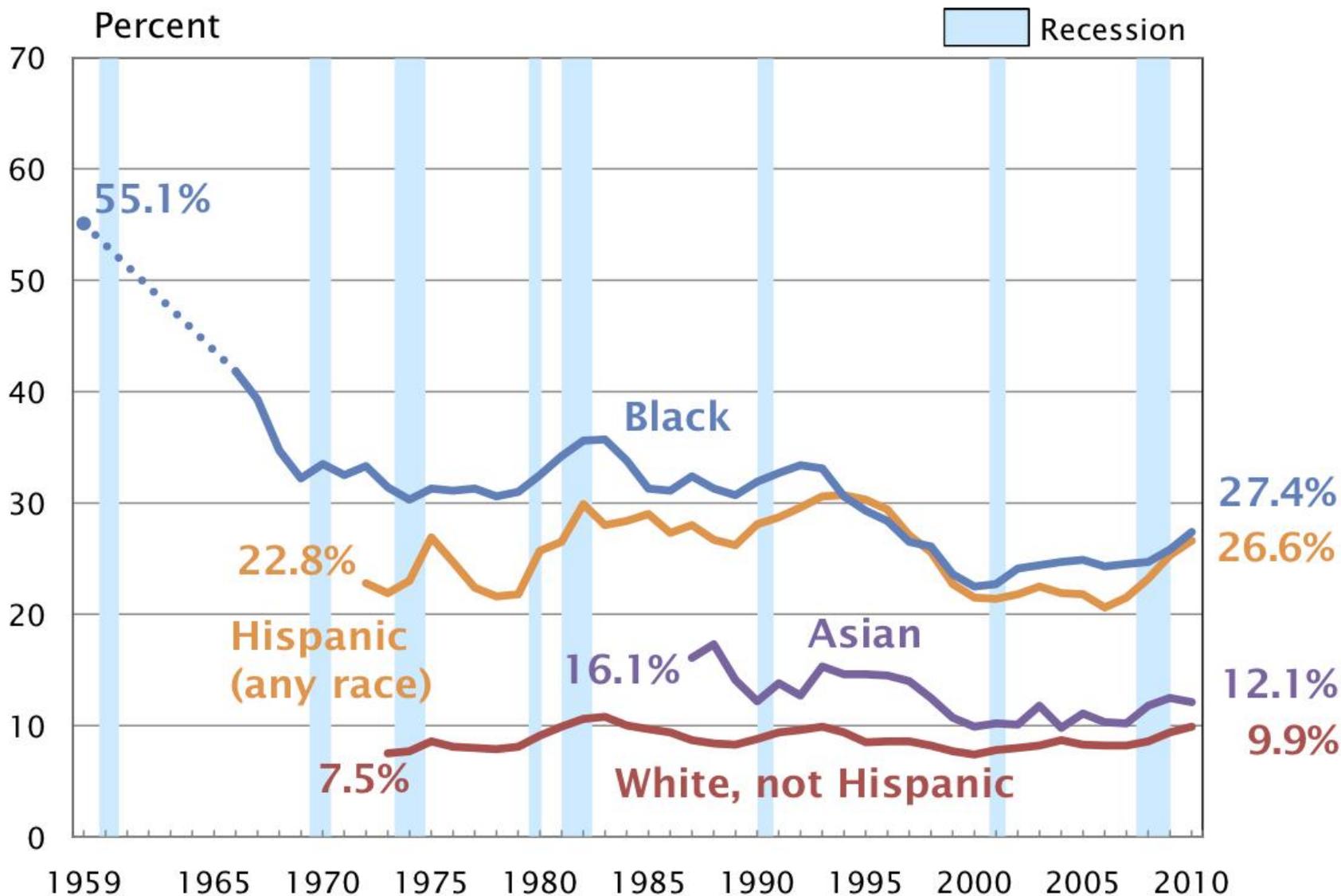
New Realities

- **Economic globalization has invalidated these long-standing assumptions.**
- **Fiscal, monetary, and spending policies now primarily emphasize the creation of a suitable environment for investment.**
- **This has produced a focus on budget deficits and tax cuts, and increased reliance on private sector alternatives to state provision.**

New Social Welfare Realities

- **The U.S. is now the most unequal of all industrialized nations. Recent tax cuts and the focus on budget deficits will further exacerbate this situation.**
- **Problems such as environmental pollution, AIDS, immigration, and unemployment can no longer be understood or responded to solely within national or local boundaries.**

Poverty Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1959 to 2010



New Political Realities

- **Persistent ideological attacks and decades of cutbacks have eroded the credibility and capacity of government as a problem-solving institution to the lowest point in 50 years.**
- **Changes in the distribution of political power and the nature of U.S. politics have effectively disenfranchised millions.**
- **These changes threaten the core social work principles of social justice & empowerment.**

The Challenge of Creating A Socially Just Society



Recent Examples Include

- **Attacks on the Concept of Entitlement**
- **Welfare Reform**
- **Managed Care in health/mental health**
- **Efforts to privatize Social Security and cut benefits in Medicare & Medicaid**
- **The rollback of Affirmative Action and other anti-discrimination legislation**

New Practice Realities

- **For over 30 years, the lines between public, non-profit, and for-profit agencies have been deliberately blurred through policy changes.**
- **Non-profits are increasingly expected to fill in the gaps created by the fraying of the government-funded social safety net.**
- **The culture of the market has permeated the environment of non-profit agencies.**

New Practice Realities

- **Recent research reveals that many non-profits are experiencing greater competition for shrinking resources even as clients' demands increase & become more complex.**
- **Welfare reform and managed care have undermined existing cooperative networks between public/non-profit, non-profit/for-profit, & secular/religious organizations.**

New Practice Realities

- **Increases in involuntary clients undercut the basic assumptions of social work practice regarding the worker-client relationship.**
- **Workers and clients now compete for agency resources because of fiscal scarcity.**
- **Policy shifts and greater accountability demands jeopardize clients' & communities' ability to exercise self-determination and undermine the principle of confidentiality.**

New Demographic & Social Realities

- **In most major cities and a few states, so-called “minorities” are now the majority.**
- **The majority of the new workforce is comprised of women and people of color.**
- **In urban areas, social tensions have increasingly occurred along multi-racial lines and between minorities of color and other disenfranchised communities.**

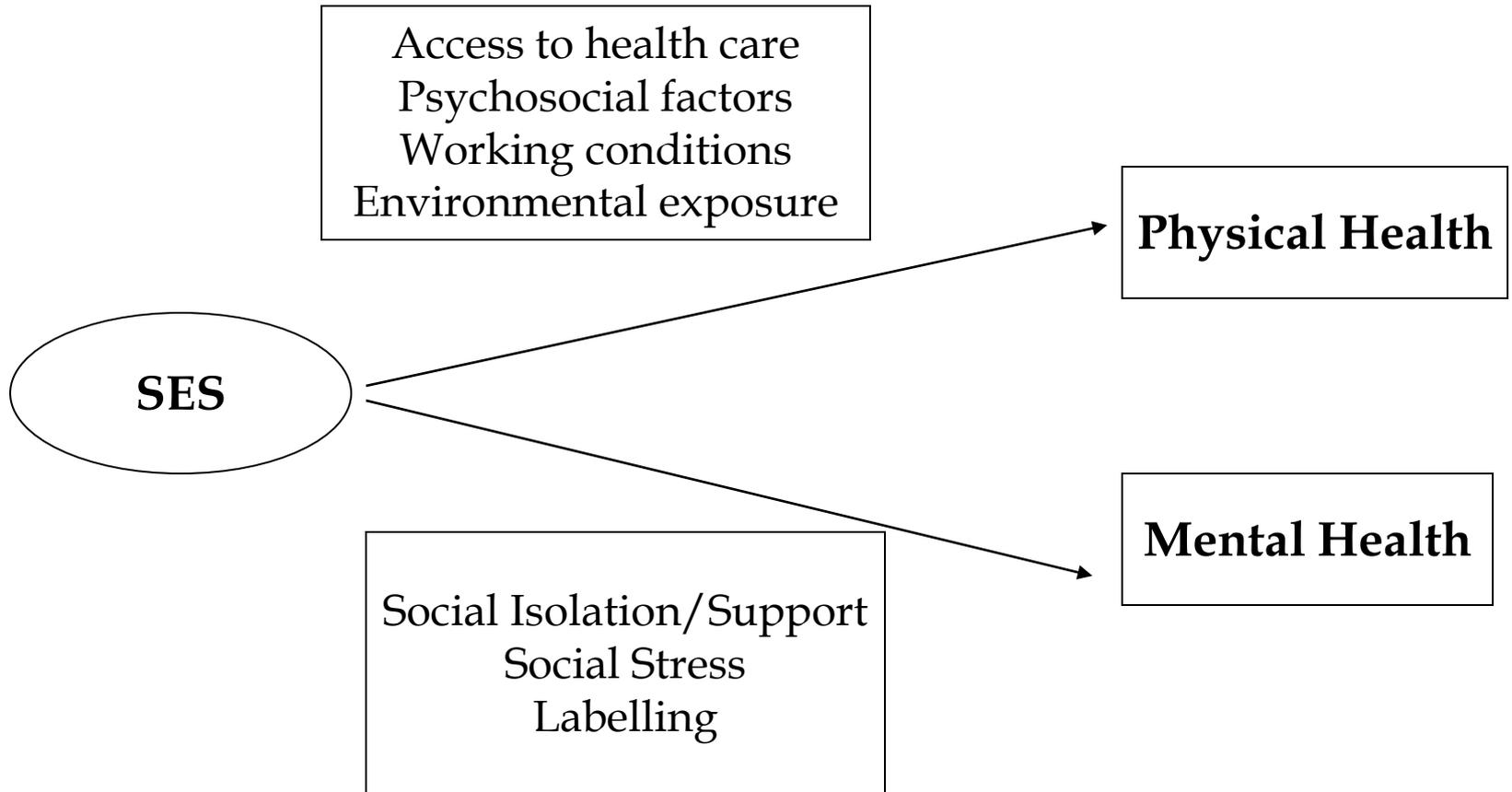
New Social Realities

- **Nearly all minorities of color still lag significantly behind whites in most major economic and social indicators of well-being.**
- **Attacks on Affirmative Action & social welfare programs and policies threaten to undermine decades of social progress.**
- **Divisions among minority groups have arisen over issues such as abortion, faith-based services, same sex marriage and immigration.**

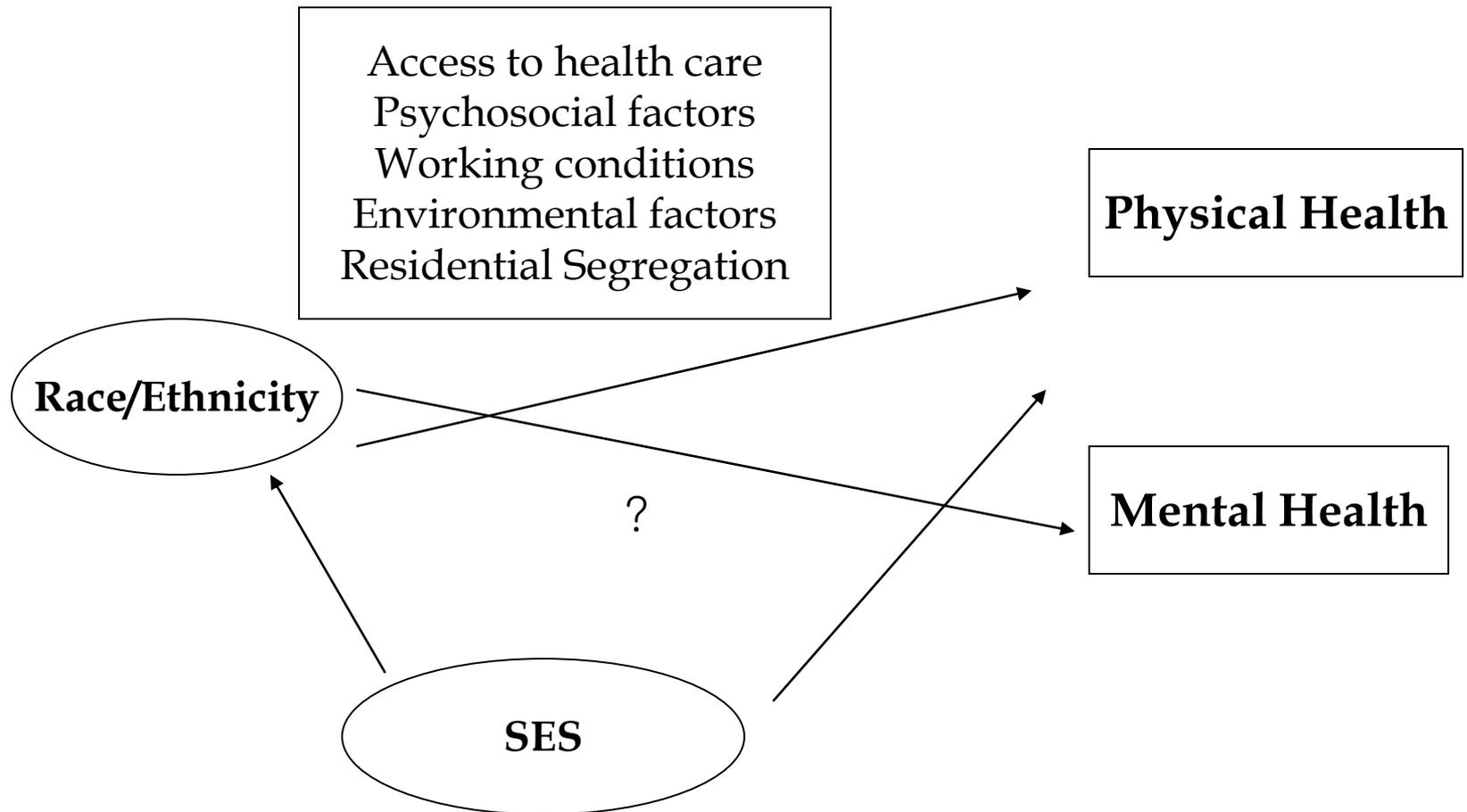
Broader Inequalities in Health and Mental Health in the U.S.

- ▣ Different groups are differentially affected by certain health & mental health problems due to:
 - Race/ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, geographic location, occupation, & sexual orientation
- ▣ Health & mental health disparities have a reciprocal relationship with inequalities in other domains, e.g.
 - Social, political, and economic conditions
 - Education
 - Housing
 - Environmental pollution

Inequalities in Health & Mental Health



Inequalities in Health & Mental Health



New Social Realities

- **Debates over the nature of welfare reform, school vouchers, and the role of faith-based institutions reveal significant differences across racial/cultural lines over the structure and functions of social provision in the U.S.**
- **Tensions over women's rights & laws regarding same sex marriage underscore fundamental social, and cultural differences.**

New Practice Realities

- **Cutbacks in government support for SW**
- **Declining financial viability of nonprofits**
- **Increasing numbers of involuntary clients**
- **Increasing demographic diversity**
- **Internationalization of social problems**
- **Treatment of mental health issues: Methods used, payment mechanisms, loss of stigma.**
- **Implications for social work theories, practice frameworks, knowledge, and skill sets**



Implications of the New Realities

- **Social workers can not play a meaningful role in the 21st Century using outdated practice frameworks and existing skills.**
- **We will have to acquire new skills and adapt existing skills to the rapid and enormous changes that are occurring in the U.S. and around the world.**
- **We will have to resolve the following issues:**

Issue 1:

**What Do We Mean
by Social Justice?**

**Why Does It Matter
In the 21st Century?**

Issue 2:

What is a multicultural society?

Are social justice and
multiculturalism compatible
in the 21st century?

ISSUE 3:

How can the social work profession survive when its social justice mission is deliberately thwarted by public policies?

What other forms of social service might emerge in its place?

Issue 4:

How can we reconcile diverse views of social justice?

What are the implications of this
challenge for social welfare
and social work practice?

ISSUE 5:

What do concepts like self-determination, confidentiality, & empowerment mean in today's environment?

How are these concepts being used today? What alternatives exist?

ISSUE 6:

What will hold together our increasingly multicultural society in the 21st Century?

How will we answer the questions:

Who is an American?

Who deserves help? Who must provide?

Issue 7: Where will social workers be needed in the future?

- **Total: 18-26% increase in next five years**
- **Work with older adults: 54% increase by 2020**
- **BLS Data: 727,000 by 2016 (22% total increase); --
19% for family & children and school SW;
-- 30% in mental health and substance abuse;
-- 24% health and public health**
- **In general, very strong growth in rural, social action, and aging areas with not enough to fill openings**

Workforce Issues to Resolve

- **Retention**: job stress, less job security, low salaries, declining supervision and training
- **Replacement**: Impending retirements
- **Recruitment issues**: People of color & men
- **Credentials**: MSW increasingly needed, but BSW grad #s are almost equal to MSWs, with fewer seeking MSW's – Economic impact on profession

A Revised Vision of Social Justice

- **Need knowledge of different definitions of social justice (contexts, contestations, fluidity)**
- **Components:**
 - “Capabilities” approaches (e.g., Sen, Nussbaum)
 - Incorporation of different cultural & historical contexts
 - Consideration of multiple forms of power
 - Tailored to different types of oppression and manifestations of privilege.
- **Common principles reformulated for particular contexts and updated regularly**

Assumptions about Social Justice

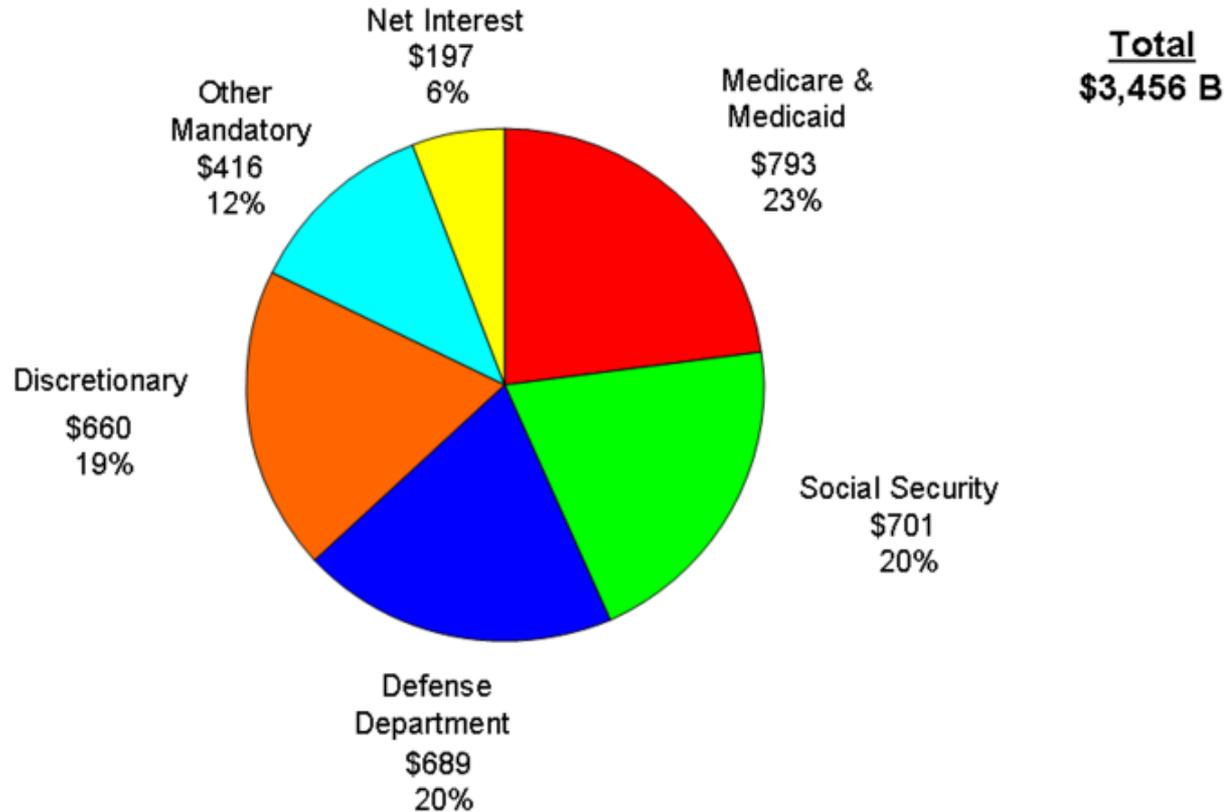
- Social justice issues always present
- Social justice is complex, fluid, evolving, conflict-laden, and subjective. It is dynamic, not static.
- Definitions of social justice must be multifaceted with a positive vision.
- Social injustice exists in all societies, but takes different forms in different contexts.

Social Justice & Social Welfare: Basic Principles

- **Hold vulnerable groups harmless**
- **Express collective responsibility**
- **Emphasis on prevention**
- **Stress multiple forms of helping**
- **Emphasize rights and needs**
- **Promote democratic participation**

The Budget & Social Justice

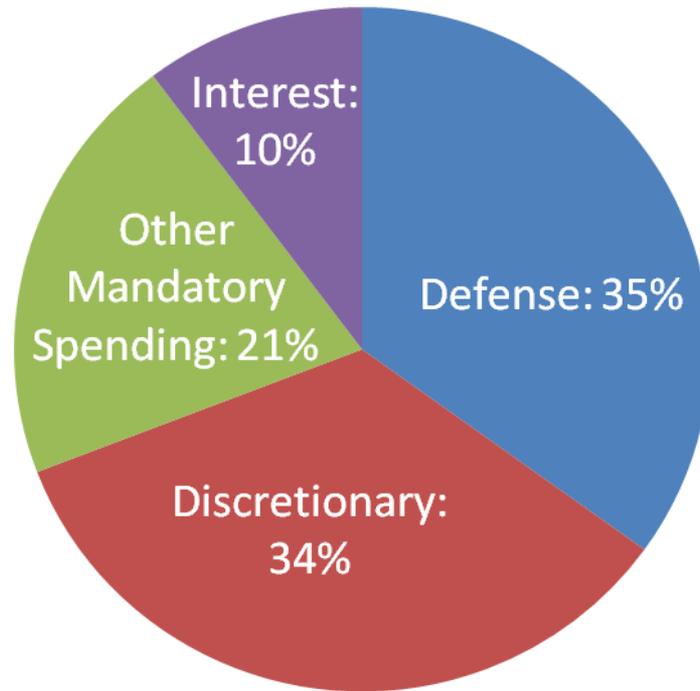
U.S. Federal Spending – Fiscal Year 2010 (\$ Billion)



Source Data: CBO Historical Tables

A Revised View of the Federal Budget

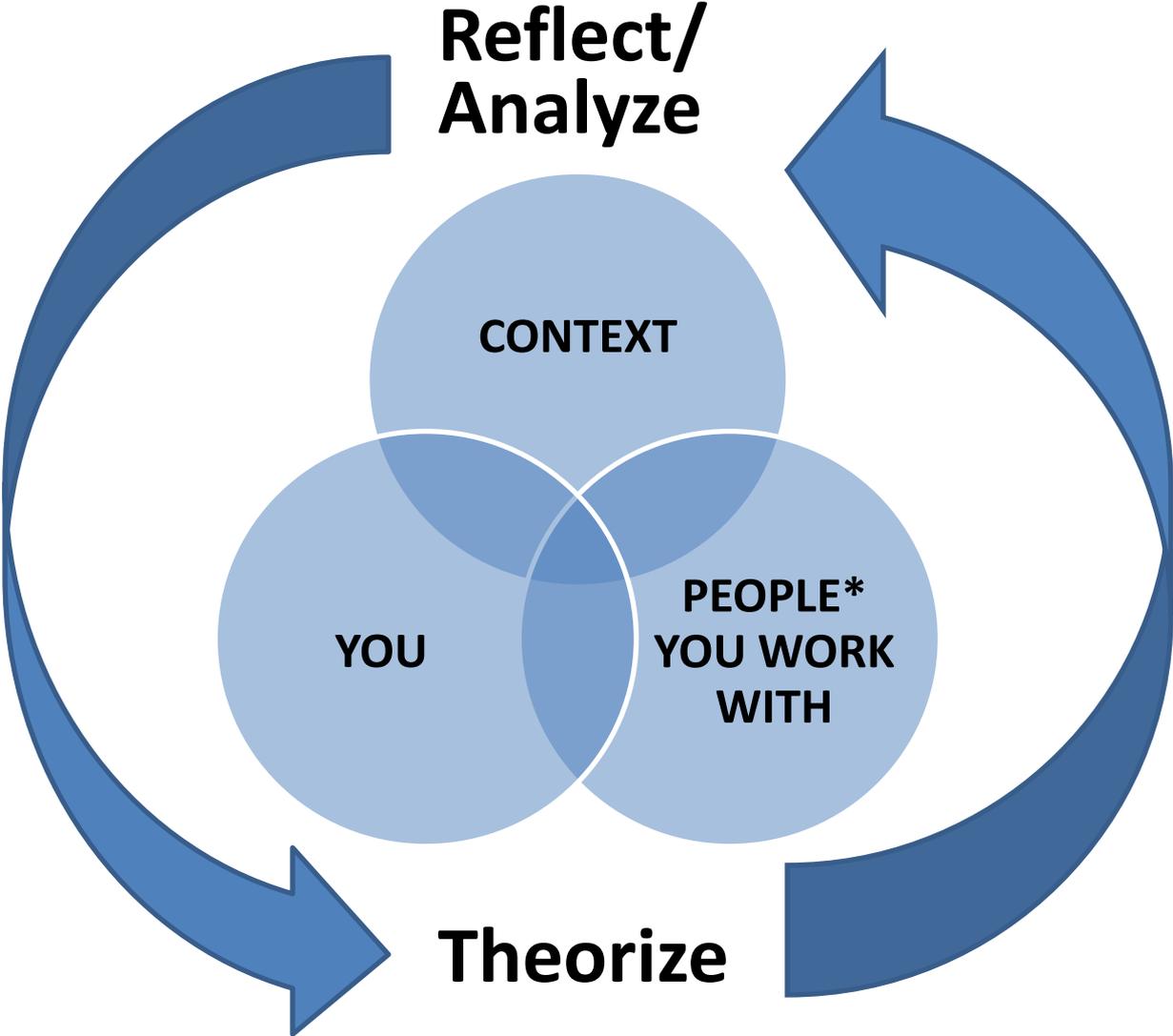
Source: Congressional Budget Office



Social Justice & Social Work Practice

- **Analyze root causes of inequality & injustice**
- **Emphasize power dynamics**
- **Juxtapose goals of market economy and SW**
- **Critique role of ideology and culture**
- **Focus on basic institutions and human needs**
- **Promote structural & institutional change not mere participation within existing systems**
- **Create alternative institutions**

Figure one: Critical Analyses

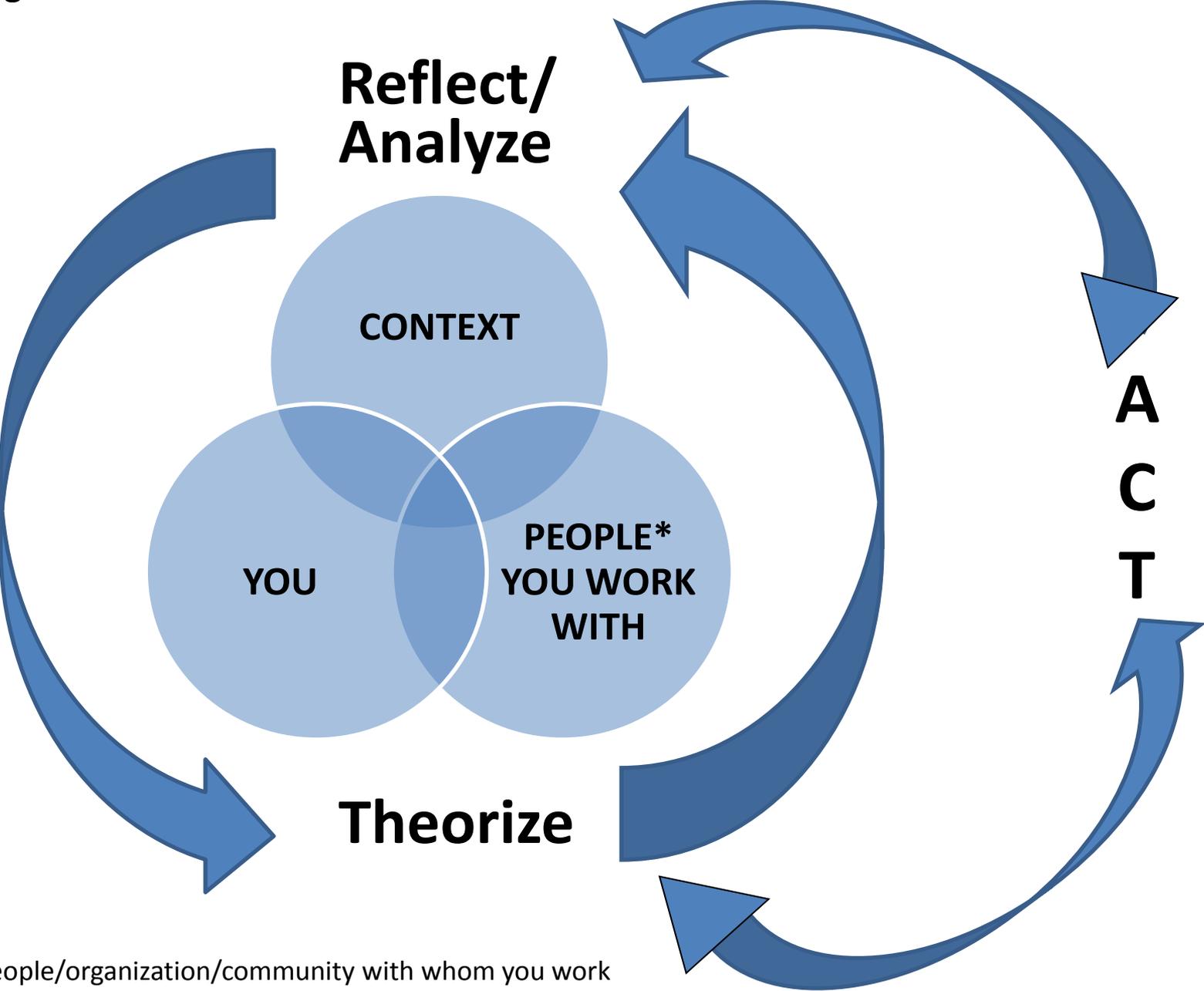


* People/organization/community with whom you work

Practice Emphases

- **Educational function of community work**
- **Focus on praxis & critical consciousness**
- **Integrate marginalized & excluded groups**
- **Create multicultural coalitions**
- **Use community-based action research**
- **Develop ongoing mechanisms of support**

Figure Two: Praxis and Critical Consciousness



* People/organization/community with whom you work

Practice Emphases

- **Organize Within and Across Boundaries**
- **Blend Issue and Identity-Based Approaches**
- **Focus on Expanding Participation: Create Diverse Means for People to Participate**
- **Surface and Deal with Power & Conflict**
- **Forge Diverse Coalitions and Allyships**
- **Infuse Global Perspectives and International Influences into all Aspects of Practice**

Practice Emphases

- **Create and Strengthen Social Capital**
- **Accept Different Styles of Leadership**
- **Use Socially Just Decision-making Processes**
- **Create Socially Just Organizational Cultures**
- **Deal w/Intra & Inter-organizational conflict**
- **Find New Ways to Use Technology**

Figure Three: Dimensions of Practice

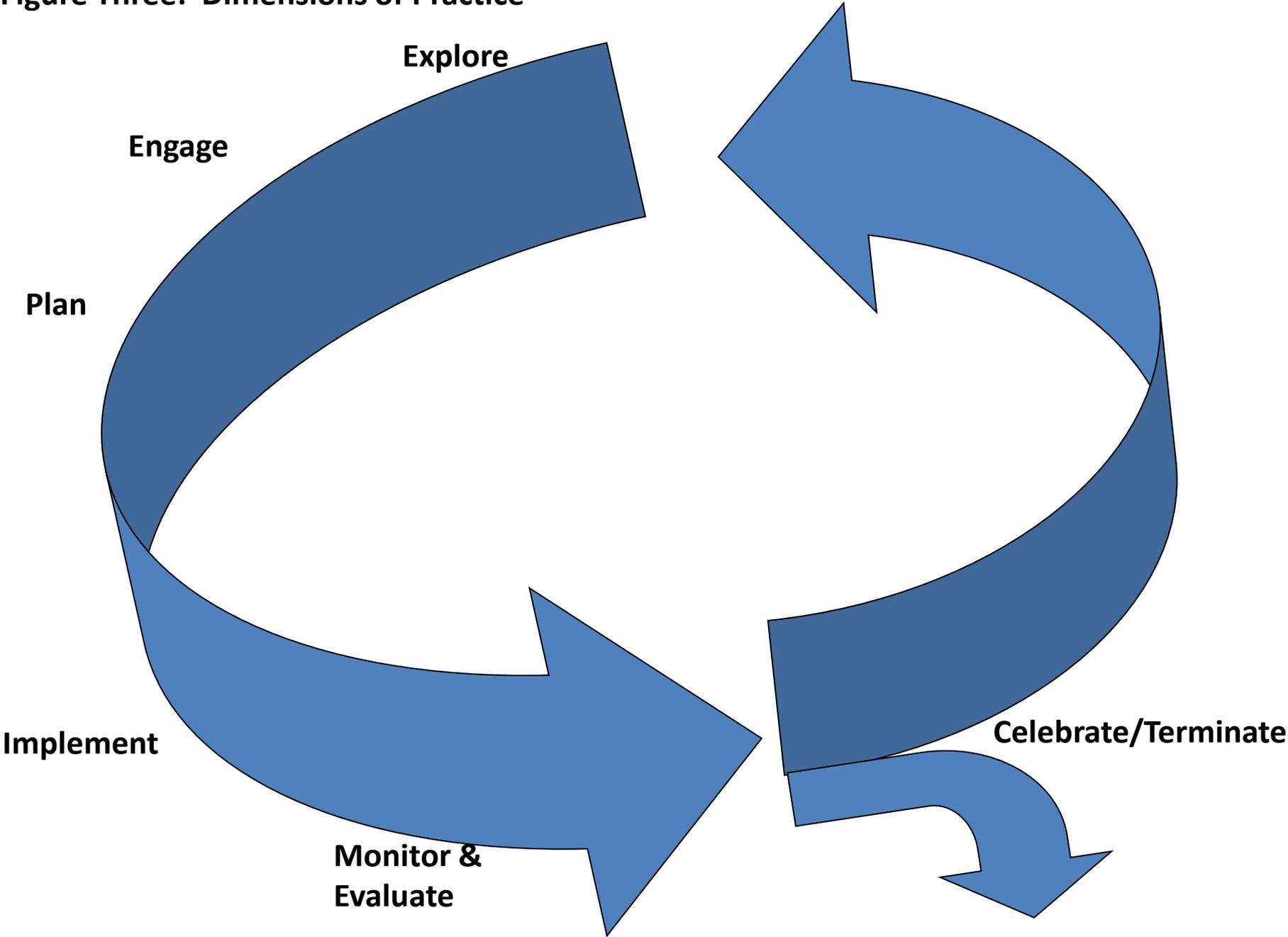


Figure 4. Dimensions of Social Justice Practice

* People/organization/community you work with



Master Narratives

- **Reflect ideology of the dominant culture**
- **Adapt individuals to their social function**
- **Construct assumed “normative experience”**
- **Engage people at realm of lived experience**
- **Derive their power from internalization of views**
- **Influence “local narratives”**
- **Acquire power of universal unquestioned truth**
- **Mutually reinforce institutions they produce**

Impact of Master Narratives

- **Exclude incompatible ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions**
- **Define “normal” behavior and produce individual and group conformity.**
- **Link their ideological components to prevailing dominant/subordinate relationships in society**
- **Reflect irrefutable internal logic**
- **Compel those who do not conform to create counter-narratives**

Critique of Master Narratives

- They are not neutral. Purpose is to make us “see the world as embodied in the story.”
- Fail to acknowledge the sources, purposes, and assumptions of narrators.

Pose Key Qs: Who does the telling?

Why is told the way it is?

What required this form of narrative?

What does the narrative invite us to ‘see’?

Master Narratives & Social Work

- Express how society works & contain views of role of government and social welfare system.
- Ensure that rights & duties conform with dominant values and behavioral norms.
- Image: “Value-based” profession & “conscience of society” yet ambiguity of professional vocabulary
 - Fails to acknowledge rhetoric’s implications & contradictions between rhetoric and reality.
- Result: Rhetoric is change-oriented while practice focuses largely on adaptation.

Social Work's Master Narrative

- **Linked to societal/political master narratives.**
- **Purpose is self-maintenance, not change.**
- **Institutionalized by professional organizations**
- **Accepts institutional status quo as a given & channels client needs within it.**
- **Masks social control function through the rhetoric of “social justice”**

Impact of Social Work's Master Narrative

- **Major bulwark of professional status quo**
- **Shapes profession's interpretation of its past**
- **Infuses all aspects of SW theory & practice**
- **Shapes perceptions of self and others.**
- **Shapes views of science, values, knowledge.**
- **Silences or marginalizes counter-narratives**
- **Makes social work increasingly apolitical**

Implications for Theory

- **Linear view of people's bio-psycho-social & spiritual needs**
- **Universal, static hierarchy of needs. Defines "other" as "deviant".**
- **Focuses on satisfaction of individual needs;**
- **Assumes a benign individual-environment relationship with fixed systems boundaries**
- **Assumes well-being is natural state of people**
- **Neglects influence of history, race, class, etc.**

Implications for Research

- Rationalizes current emphasis on “evidence-based practice” (EBP).
- Self-preservation in neo-liberal context
- Reflects a deterministic version of rationality
- Affirms structural status quo
- Definitions reflect unacknowledged biases (e.g., “evidence,” “knowledge,” “knowing”)

Implications for Practice

- **Uses expertise to control worker/client relationship.**
- **Devalues knowledge based on experience & labels knowledge based on observation as “science”**
- **Restricts problems to the private domain.**
- **Increases likelihood of blaming people for their problems.**

Counter-Narratives & Resistance

- Forms of resistance to the dominant culture
- Reflect & validate alternative view of reality
- Exist in relation to master narratives but are not necessarily in opposition to it
- Deliberately disruptive of accepted “stories”

Pose fundamental question:

- Who benefits from the establishment and preservation of the master narrative & how?

Critique of Master Narrative

- Impedes the development of people's critical consciousness
- Covers up lack of critical consciousness with “buzz words” like “freedom”
- In social work, “empowerment” is equated with ability to demand or obtain access to existing services, not to challenge them.

A Counter-Narrative of Resistance in Social Work

- **Reorient SW's goals towards elimination of oppression & creation of egalitarian society**
- **Challenge prevailing assumptions**
- **Develop alternative frameworks & theories**
- **Pose different research questions**
- **Clarify ambiguous concepts and vocabulary**
- **Forge new alliances & creating new SW roles**
- **Partner with clients to pursue social justice.**

Adapting a Counter-Narrative to the 21st C

Short-term:

- Influence policy & practice in pursuit of clients' interests
- Encourage resistance at intellectual & practice levels
 - Help people survive, find meaning, become aware of injustice and work for justice.
 - Help those who are oppressed exercise dignity & agency in dehumanizing circumstances.

Long-term:

- Forge “a new social discourse”
- Go beyond replacing one rhetoric with another
- Reframe our analysis, alternatives, & actions.

Conclusion

- **Rapid changes in the environment of social welfare & social work practice require us to:**
 - Reexamine our basic assumptions**
 - Reformulate our practice concepts**
 - Clarify the meaning of our core values**

IF we are to play a viable role in the future.

Questions for Discussion

- **What do such values as social justice and empowerment mean in the 21st C.?**
- **How can we reconcile our basic assumptions with the changing realities of policy & practice in a multicultural society?**
- **What will be the relative roles of the public, private, & non-profit sectors in the provision of social welfare in the future?**

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