

Social Justice & Social Work Practice

Michael Reisch, Ph.D.

Lecture to SW 241

Introduction to Multi-Level Practice

University of California, Berkeley

School of Social Welfare

December 8 & 9, 2014

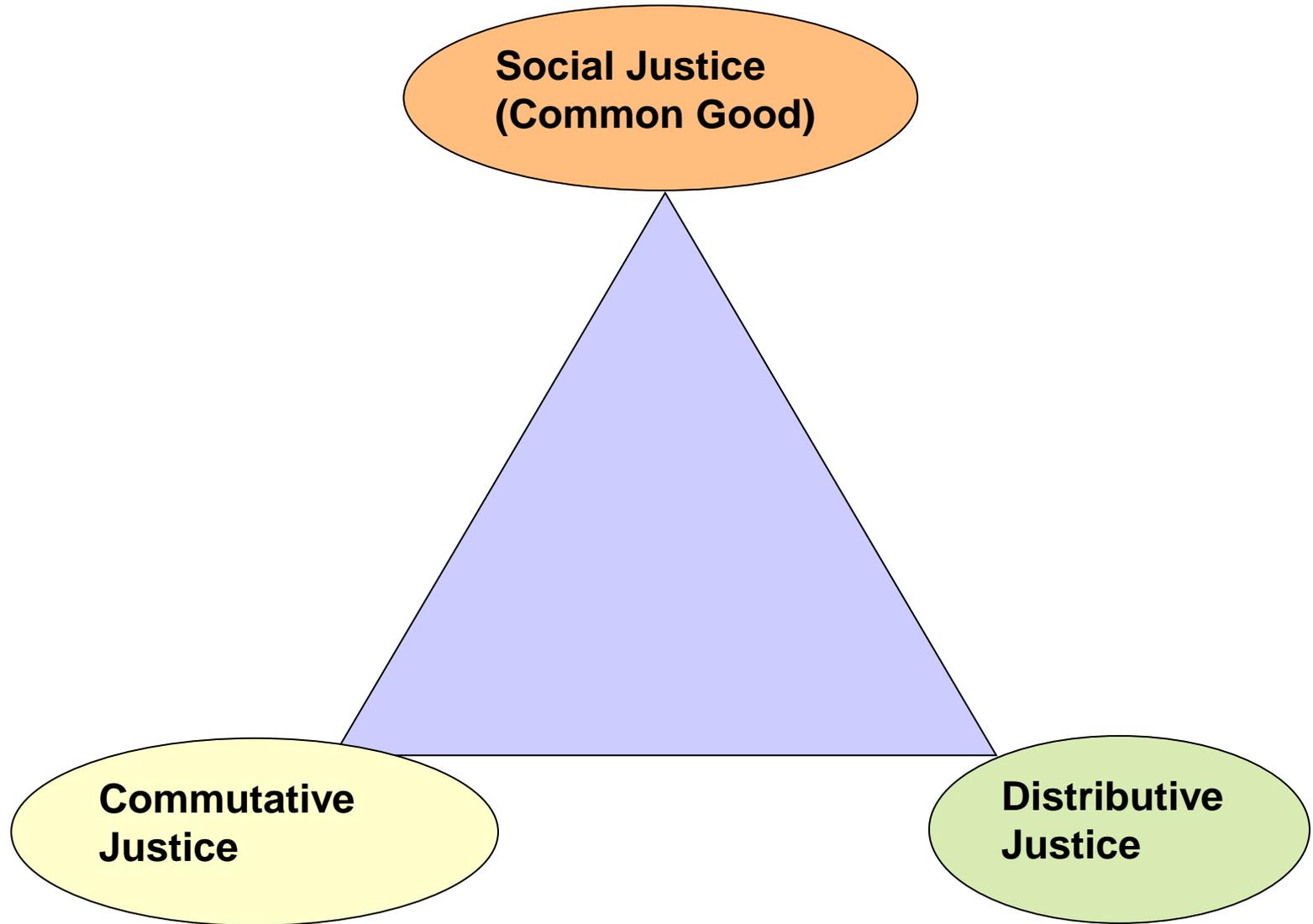
Goals/Overview

- **Illustrate principles & applications of social justice practice frameworks, goals & methods in/across practice levels.**
- **Understand social justice processes & goals & their connection to practice competencies**

Key Points re: Social Justice Today

- 1. Lack of clarity in SW about the meaning of social justice & how to translate it into practice.**
- 2. Most discussions of social justice focus on eradication of injustice not on what would constitute a socially just society or community.**
- 3. Most discussions of social justice assume a universal definition when this has not & does not exist.**
- 4. Most discussions focus exclusively on socially just goals & pay insufficient attention to means.**

The 3 Sides of Justice (Maguire)



Assumptions about Social Justice

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

Assumptions (cont.)

- **Social justice is never achieved for all time.**
- **Same systems needed to create social justice can also produce injustice.**
- **Our social locations & experiences limit our ability to recognize many forms of injustice or envision what a just society or socially just practice would look like.**

A Vision of Social Justice Involves

- **A critique of dominant assumptions**
- **A more equitable distribution of power, access, resources, status & opportunities**
- **An emphasis on both human rights & human capabilities**

Assumptions about SJ Practice

- **Social justice is central, not an add-on**
- **It is an ongoing journey because injustice reappears in new forms**
- **It must attend to goals and processes**
- **Standpoints & contexts are critical**
- **Power affects all practice.**
- **It is important to define “success” or we will never move beyond rhetoric**

Social Justice Practice Competencies

- 1. Formulate dynamic vision of social justice**
- 2. Implement actions towards that vision**
- 3. Engage with others through socially just processes clearly linked to outcomes.**
- 4. Apply critical contextual analysis through reflective and reflexive practices**
- 5. Use praxis to integrate these components.**

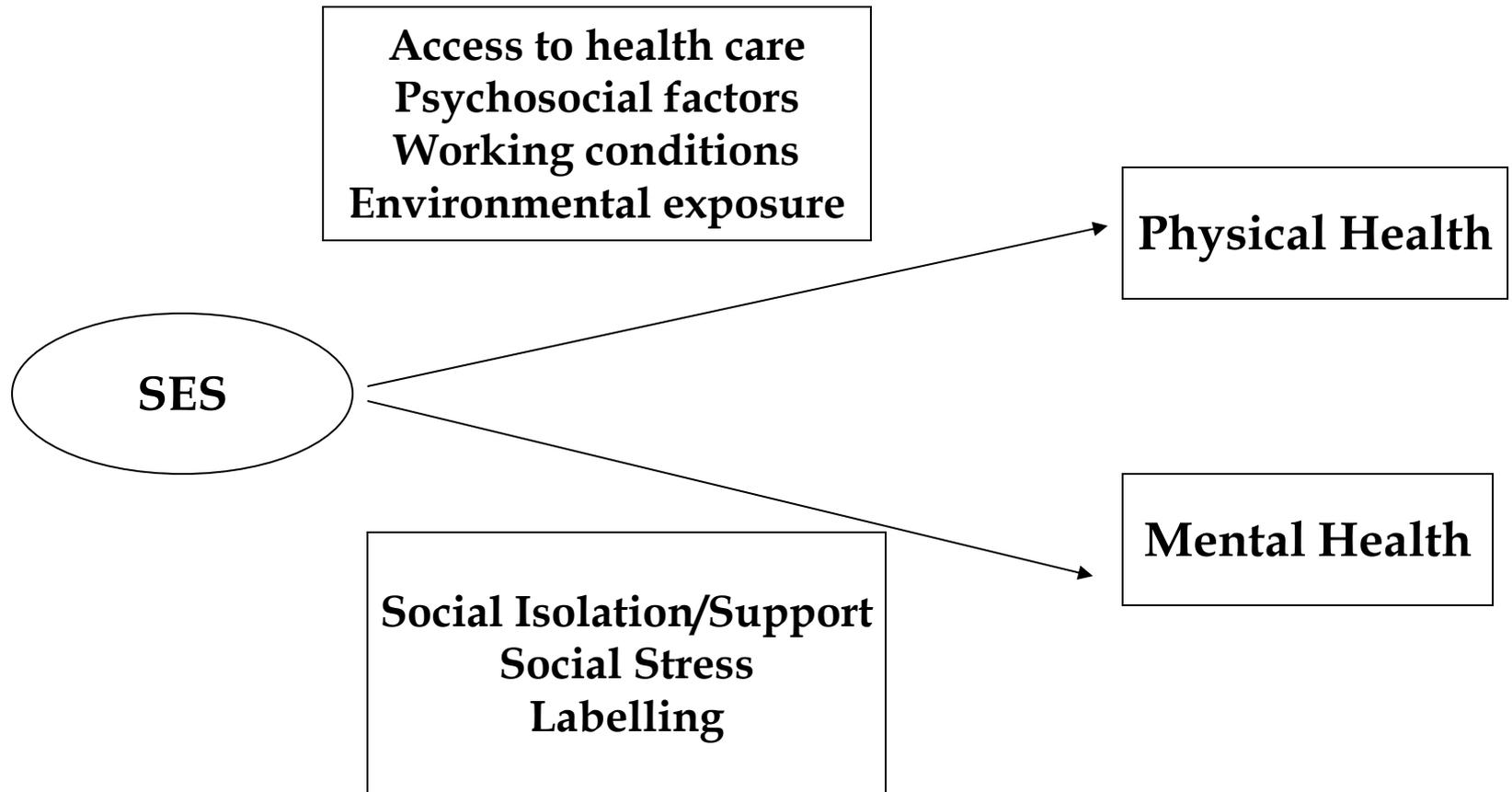
**Q: IS SOCIAL JUSTICE PRACTICE
JUST GOOD SOCIAL WORK
PRACTICE?**

A: No – Social justice practice refers more broadly to social action in the context of unequal power relations.

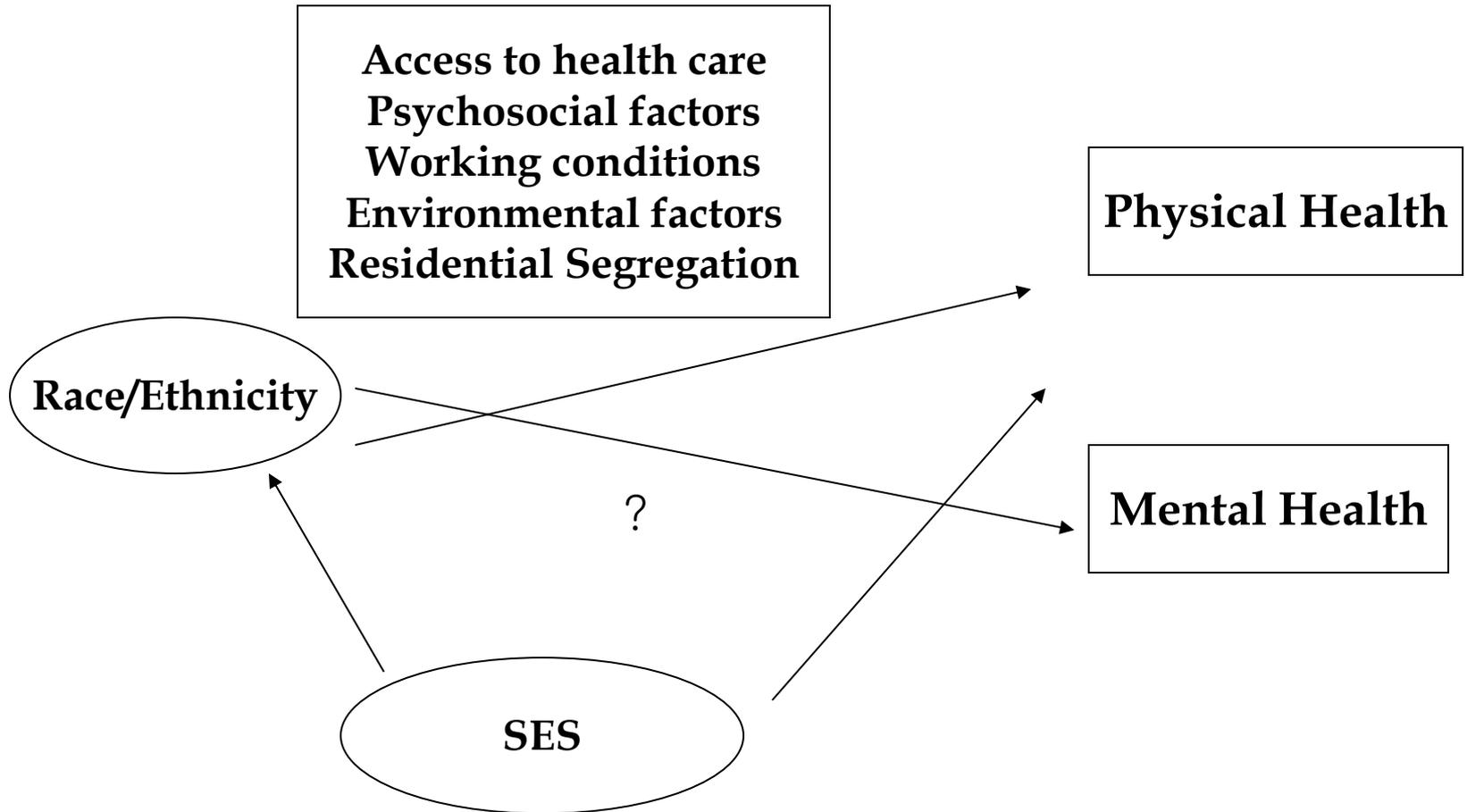
Goals of Social Justice Practice

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

Example: Inequalities in Health & Mental Health



Example: Inequalities in Health & Mental Health



Social Justice Practice Emphases

- **Educational aspects of all our work**
- **Praxis to develop critical consciousness**
- **Integration of marginalized groups**
- **Creation of multicultural coalitions**
- **Use community-based participatory action research**
- **Develop ongoing support mechanisms**

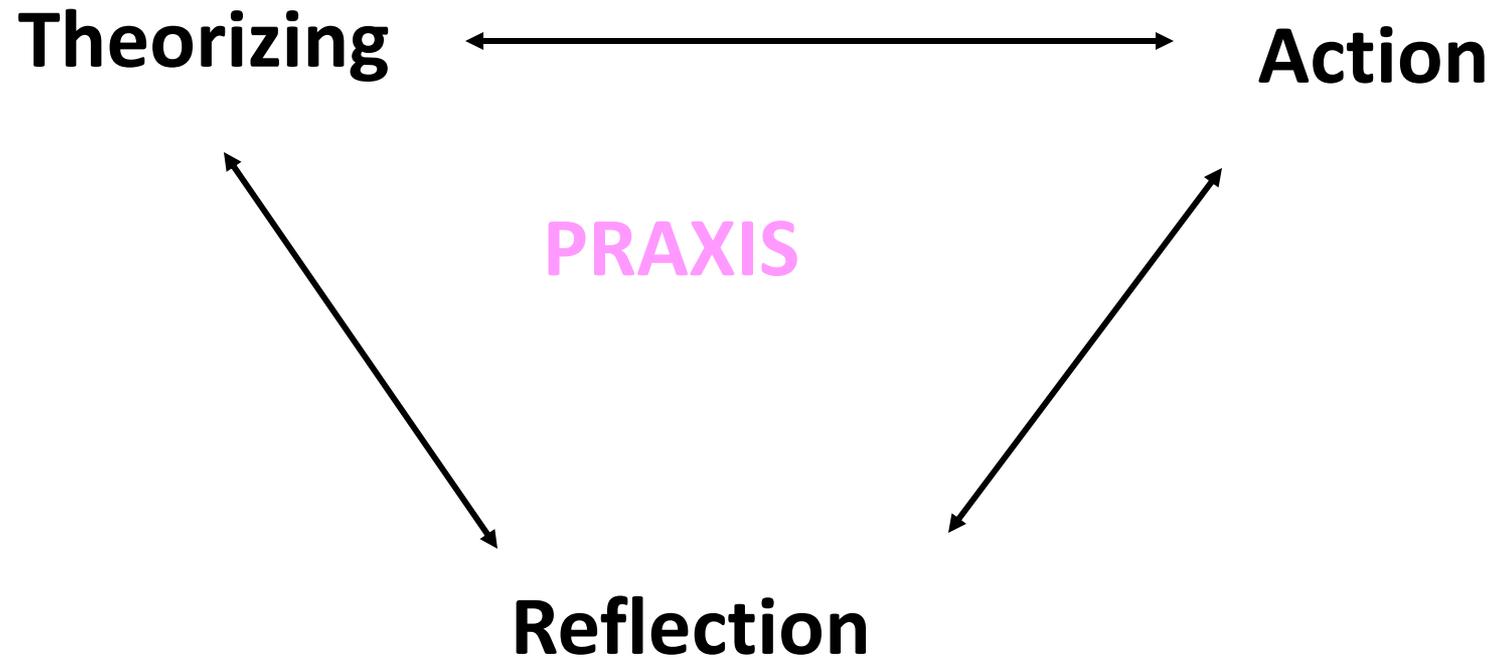
Basic SJ Practice Principles

- **Help people achieve their aspirations, solve problems, and obtain vital resources.**
- **Vulnerable groups should be held harmless.**
- **Mutuality, reciprocity, common humanity**
- **Use multiple forms of helping & multiple points of access. Focus on prevention.**
- **True democratic participation at all levels.**
- **Address the mutually reinforcing structures of privilege and domination in all of their forms.**

Basic SJ Practice Principles

- Use multiple analytic frames.**
- Attend to multiple social locations of actors.**
- Focus on different forms of power & how they are or can be used to promote or resist change.**
- Anticipate conflict and resistance in our work**
- Learn how to negotiate conflict & boundaries.**
- Be aware of how theory & knowledge formulation create or sustain injustices.**
- Use theory to help us survive, grow, and nurture ourselves in day-to-day work.**

In Sum -- Doing Justice Involves...



Theorizing Improves Practice

- **“There’s nothing so practical as a good theory” (Lewin)**
- **“He who loves practice without theory is like the sailor who boards ship without a rudder and compass and never knows where he may cast.” (DaVinci)**

The Role of Theory & Theorizing

- **Practice theories are often taught as static or assume emphasize adaptation not change.**
- **Practitioners & students are often impatient with theorizing or intimidated by theory. They want to know “how” but not “why.”**
- **Yet, theorizing improves practice by:**
 - **Enhancing our understanding of how context & power affect people’s lives**
 - **Clarifying what we should do to promote change and why we should do it.**

Which Theories Should We Use?

- **Those that help illuminate different kinds of power & how injustice is perpetuated**
- **Those that take multiple social locations into account & how they interact**
- **Those that emphasize the influence of contexts, differences & power**
- **Those that focus on change & agency, not adaptation**
- **Those that embrace complexity**

Social Justice Practice Requires

- **Regular negotiation of boundaries & conflicts – Opportunities for growth & positive change**
- **Awareness of the implications of context at different system levels**
- **Recurrent analysis of multiple power dynamics**
- **Consciousness of the role played by identities**
- **Critical contextual analysis**
- **Continuous focus on & struggle with the forces that create injustice at all levels of practice**

Using Both Reflection and Reflexivity

- **Reflection = Regular critique of our actions, interactions, processes, progress, & social contexts, to learn & deepen our understanding & sense of options.**
- **Reflexivity requires us to place ourselves within our practice, along with all of our positionalities, historical contexts, & assumptions.**

It asks: How does “who we are” influence the situation & our understanding of it?

Selecting an Approach to Change

- **Focus on what will best achieve social justice goals rather than satisfy our preferences.**
- **Involve service users in shaping goals, change strategies, acceptable risks & consequences.**
- **Assess options & analyze your assumptions.**
- **Use multiple frames & types of knowledge.**

Addressing Consequences of Oppression

- Reframe symptoms & struggles to include different types of coping and resilience.**
- Acknowledge & negotiate power differences in all practice situations**
- Recognize the knowledge, skills, & power that each person brings to the transaction.**
- Examine how our social positions may distort views of ourselves & others.**

Challenging Power & Using Conflict

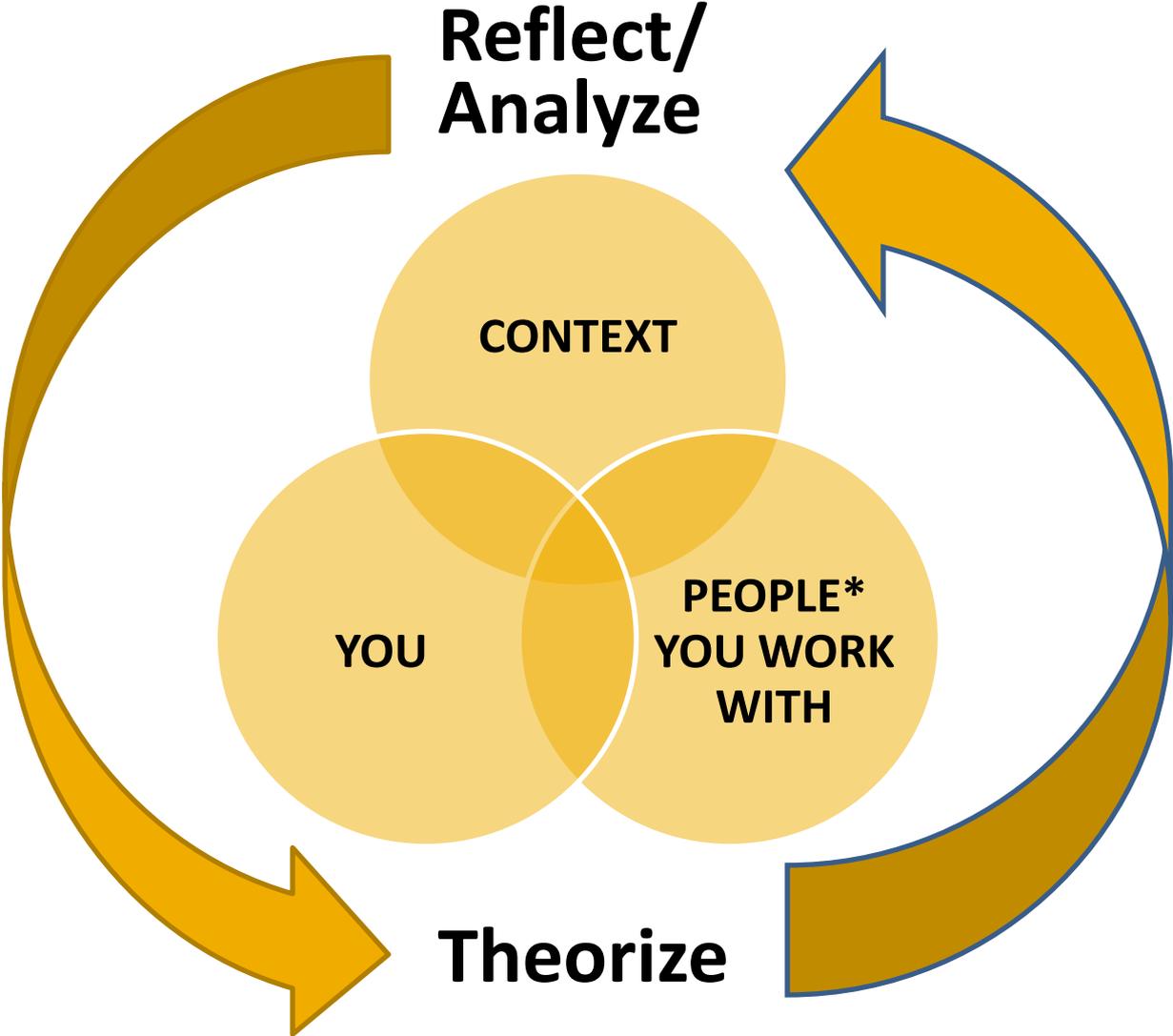
- Rename/interrogate the meaning of words and symbols used in practice especially as to how they define justice & obscure power dynamics.**
- Continuously examine how power and conflict are being negotiated**
- Identify sources of domination & subordination in our practice (sexism, racism, homophobia)**
- Help members of all constituencies challenge the negative consequences of unearned power & develop & use their own power**

Step 1: Critical Analysis

Regular reflection, analysis, and theorizing across three major areas:

- 1. Yourself, your multiple social locations, using reflective & reflexive methods**
- 2. The people with whom you interact: clients, constituents, collaborators, bystanders, allies, & targets of action**
- 3. The immediate and larger contexts—historical, cultural, political, social**

Figure one: Critical Analysis



* People/organization/community you work with

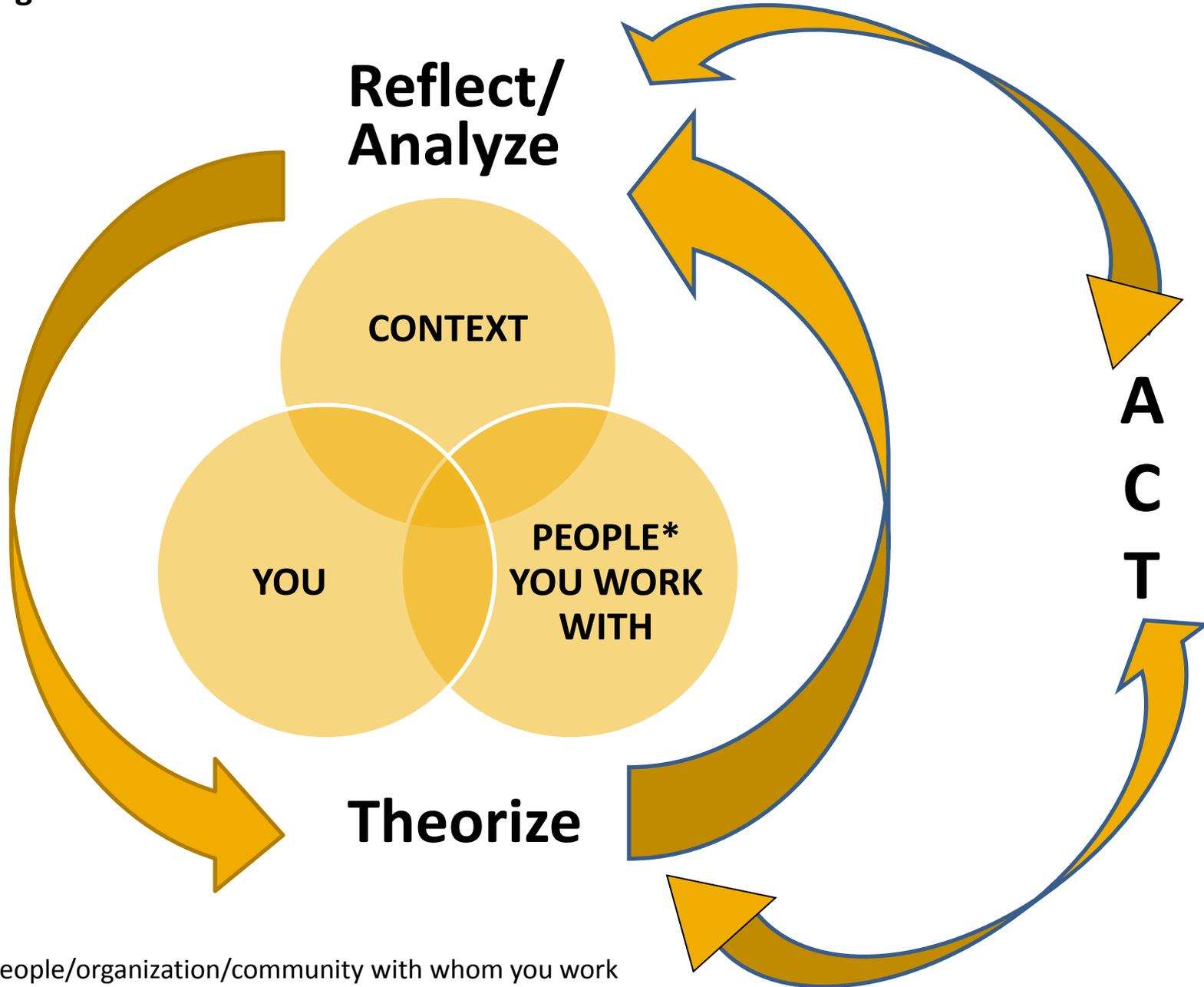
Step 2: Praxis & Critical Consciousness

- **Praxis = the dialectical processes of taking action in conjunction with critical analysis of the action itself**
- **Necessary to develop and maintain critical consciousness**
- **Critical consciousness helps overcome false assumptions & enable people to become subjects – to “name the world”**

Applying Critical Contextual Analysis

- **Know the History of Key Actors/Groups/Issues**
- **Be aware of Positionalities/Standpoints of Actors**
- **Identify Underlying Assumptions re Community, Social Goals, Politics, Inter-group Behavior**
- **Analyze Ideological/Theoretical Assumptions and World Views About Society, Change, etc.**
- **Identify the Self-Interests of Actors and Groups**
- **Be Conscious of Dynamics of Power & Influence**

Figure Two: Praxis and Critical Consciousness



* People/organization/community with whom you work

Applications in “Micro” Practice

Practice with individuals, families, & groups to attain individual and family aspirations, solve problems, obtain resources, and secure social justice

Social Justice & “Micro” Practice

- 1. Raise individuals’ consciousness about how the pursuit of social justice can create a more supportive environment**
- 2. Help families understand how social injustices are barriers to the attainment of their goals or promote dysfunctional family relationships**
- 3. Helps group members understand how social injustices hinder the attainment of group goals & promote dysfunctional relationships in the group**

Key Practice Components

- **Applying self-knowledge**
- **Going beyond “Cultural Competence”**
- **Using critical analysis and critical theory**
- **Challenging power imbalances**
- **Becoming comfortable with own power**
- **Becoming comfortable with conflict**
- **Reducing unintended unjust consequences**
- **Monitoring, evaluating, constantly learning**

Step 3: Information Gathering and Knowledge Construction

Issues

- **What information and knowledge are possible to obtain and be useful -- Initially and ongoing?**
- **Who defines, collects, & interprets this information?**
- **What assumptions and paradigms underlie the measures, methods used, and interpretations?**
- **Key: We need multiple types, sources, & perspectives on knowledge to de-center dominant paradigms & undermine dominant assumptions**

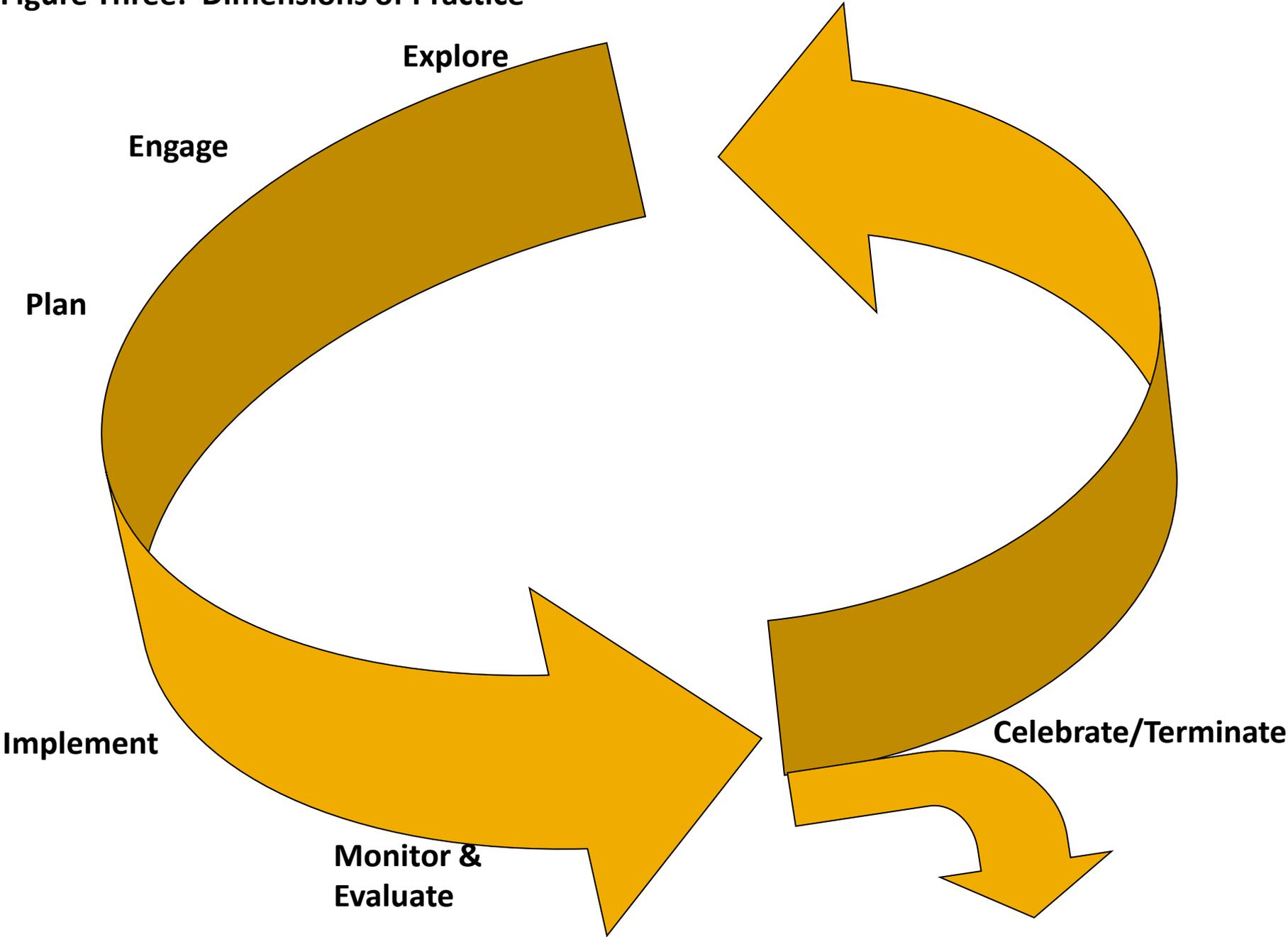
Purposes of Information/Knowledge

- **Capture & monitor important processes**
- **Ensure making progress towards goals**
- **Illuminate new issues**
- **Reinterpret existing issues**
- **Identify unintended consequences**
- **Strive not to increase or replicate injustices**

Social Justice Practice Phases

- **Exploration**: How do people perceive the issues confronting them and their community? What program or policy changes do they prioritize?
- **Engagement**: Working within and across lines
- **Planning**: Creating shared goals in shared way
- **Implementation**: Use multiple organizational forms
- **Monitoring & Evaluating**: Ongoing negotiating
- **Celebration & Termination**: Sustaining efforts

Figure Three: Dimensions of Practice



Social Justice & Macro Practice

**Effecting Change in Communities,
Organizations, & the Policy Arena**

Social Justice & Macro Practice

- **Dimensions of socially just macro practice parallel those of socially just practice with individuals, families, and groups.**
- **Importance of self in all aspects of macro practice because of the significance of one's social location, history, and standpoint.**
- **Broaden conceptualization of macro practice beyond SJ GOALS to incorporate the social justice components of processes involved. These include the centrality of relationship.**

Practice Components

- **Develop Shared Vision of Just Community**
- **Organize Within and Across Boundaries**
- **Blend Issue and Identity-Based Approaches**
- **Expand Participation by Creating Diverse Means for People to Participate**
- **Ongoing Assessment of Participation's Impact**
- **Surface and Deal with Power & Conflict**
- **Be Clear About Your Positionality & Values**
- **Forge Diverse Coalitions and Allyships**
- **Infuse Global Perspectives and International Influences into all Aspects of Practice**

Socially Just Organizational Practice

- **Create and Strengthen Social Capital**
- **Focus on Leadership Development: Accept Different Concepts & Styles of Leadership**
- **Employ Socially Just Decision-making to Allocate Resources & Responsibilities**
- **Create a Socially Just Organizational Culture**
- **Deal with Intra & Inter-Organizational Conflict**
- **Use Technology in a Socially Just Manner**

Figure 4I . Dimensions of Practice - Praxis

* People/organization/community you work with



DISCUSSION

OTHER QUESTIONS?

COMMENTS?

ADDITIONAL POINTS?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

mreisch@ssw.umaryland.edu