Editorial

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With great pride, we offer this special issue on a critical review of theories of human behavior in the social environment (HBSE). The original idea for this special issue stemmed from several simultaneous issues. First, I taught a doctoral class on theory development twice, with three resulting articles (Daley et al., 2005; Gentle-Gennitty et al.; and Decker et al. featured in this issue), which indicated that theory critique and advancement was rarely in the social work journal literature. Second, the Council on Social Work Education (1994) has required that Master in Social Work students should be able to "use theoretical frameworks to understand the interactions among individuals and between individuals and social systems" (p. 137) and that "the professional foundation must provide content about theories and knowledge of the human bio-psych-social development, including theories and knowledge about the range of social systems in which people live" (p. 140). Third, there are various textbooks that focus on HBSE and discuss different theories (i.e., Shriver, 2004; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007). Fourth, we could not find such a critique in any recent journal. In summary, our profession seemed to require HBSE theories for our education; the theories are frequently discussed but not critically evaluated in popular HBSE textbooks and such a review is long overdue.

We sent a call for papers with five parameters for each manuscript. First, we asked for each author to describe a historical analysis of theory development, including how theory links to HBSE. Second, we asked that the author clearly describe the components of theory and operationalize the relationship between the variables within the theory. Third, we asked that the author provide a discussion of the goals or outcomes intended with theory and the boundaries of the theory. Fourth, we required that the author provide a description of empirical studies that have supported and/or progressed the theory. Fifth, we requested that each author describe any specific next steps for theory progression and implications for social work. We received a wide range of manuscripts that were diverse in perspective. Some articles focused on well-known theories, such as ecological theory or psychodynamic theory. Some articles introduced innovative theories that are new to our profession, such as semiotic metatheory or complexity theory. The result is a special issue that is likely to expand any reader's horizons!

There are some cautions to consider. Different scholars have developed frameworks for evaluating theories (e.g., Fischer, 1973; Payne, 2005; Turner, 1996; Witkin & Gottschalk, 1988) and some of those authors would challenge our emphasis on "operationalize" or "empirical studies" as being positivist biased. Other authors would probably acknowledge the importance of empirical testing but say that we should have demanded proof that the theory advanced social justice or was ethical or that everything is unique in its own way and cannot be compared to another setting. The arena of theory development is rampant with diverse perspectives of what constitutes a theory, what value any evaluation has, and whether theory progression is a useful term to use. I have had lively discussion in my course on these very top-

ics. Each reader must decide for him or herself how much weight to put on empirical validation of the theory.

I encourage the reader to see each article as an intellectually stimulating journey into a theory's framework and credibility. Consider how that theory could be incorporated into your professional toolbox of skills. How might this article help you to better understand your client and the context of their actions? Then compare and contrast different articles and theories. How could affect control theory (Forte) be compared to attachment theory (Page & Norwood) or kinship ties (Hall)? Finally, consider, after you have read all the articles, what expansion of knowledge has occurred in you. Social work is a broad profession demanding a diverse set of skills. These articles can help you continue to heighten your awareness of the many ways to impact our clients, whether person, family, or community.

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