CHAPTER 1

An Overview of Social Policy Analysis

I<small>N THIS CHAPTER</small>, we provide background information and define terms needed for the reader to move through and understand the content of this book. We begin with what we think is necessary groundwork to the understanding of our approach, followed by a case example of how policy and practice are interconnected. We then examine what constitutes a policy, especially what are called *social policies*. We will look at different forms of policy and then at multiple policy levels (i.e., local, state, national, and international), recognizing that these levels may be public or private and that the lines across sectors are often blurred. We will examine ways in which policy analysis may be conceptualized, including conceptual frameworks and theories of policy process, as well as the differences between policy models and approaches. We do this in order to make sense of the primary ways used to analyze policy, thereby preparing for our position regarding policy analysis as research, the conceptualization of which is laid out in Chapter 2.

Our focus is on *social policy analysis*, not public (government) policy analysis in its most general form. There are hundreds of books on public policy analysis in general (e.g., Gupta, 2001; Heineman, Bluhm, Peterson, & Kearny, 2002; Lejano, 2006; Patton & Sawicki, 1993; Sabatier, 2007) to which the reader can be referred. Popple and Leighninger (2008) discuss just how broad the term policy analysis can be, referring to writers who have described policy analysis as a "babel of tongues" or a "slippery slope"; one could learn how to do it but could never fully define it. They adapt a definition by the Canadian political scientist Leslie Pal that is inclusive of a range of approaches:

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''policy analysis is the disciplined application of intellect to the study of collective responses to public [in our case social welfare] problems'' (Popple and Leighninger, p. 43).

This is why this book is being written—analytical skills are needed to determine the usefulness of a particular policy response. A social problem, then, *is* the context for social policy analysis, and since most policies do not include a full analysis of why they are being proposed, or even a statement of the problem they are designed to address, having the skill to analyze the underlying social problem is vitally important. Blau (2007) points out that most practitioners encounter situations in which they ''must live and work according to the definition of social problems as other, more powerful people construct them. That is not always easy, because the definition of a social problem shapes the social policy designed to address it'' (p. 8).

We are defining social policy analysis as *a systematic study of chosen courses of action within unique contexts with goals of preventing and addressing social problems*. Unpacking this definition reveals that

- Policy analysis, like research, is systematic and intentional.
- Policies (as courses of action) can be made in a vast array of contexts through public (governmental) and private (nonprofit and for profit) auspices.
- These unique contexts include any level of decision making (as broad as the U.S. Congress and as narrow as a local agency).
- Our focus is on problems that influence quality of care or quality of life for individuals and groups.

The policy practitioners who would be involved in analyzing policies are those who are involved in or concerned about the human service delivery system across a broad scope of arenas and contexts.

NECESSARY GROUNDWORK

In this section, our focus is on the analytical skills that are needed to understand policy at any stage of development, recognizing that without those skills the practitioner has little hope of figuring out what political, interactional, or value-clarifying approaches to take. In other words, without analytical skills the practitioner is disempowered to advise others or to take action. This does not mean that analysis is a ''step'' or that it stops when one gets in the middle of a policy process. Analysis is ongoing, and when continuing analysis reveals new

insights, policy practitioners may need to alter what they are doing or advocate for changes in policies. They can do this when the analysis is based on two important elements of knowledge and skills: critical thinking and political philosophy.

CRITICAL THINKING

No rigorous or even-handed policy analysis is possible without the basic building block of critical thinking. Paul and Elder (2009) suggest that critical thinking is an art for ''analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it'' (p. 2). When critical thinking is called an art it might be rejected as not sufficiently rigorous for the purposes of research and analysis. On the contrary, we see the process as intensely rigorous and complex. Critical thinking is a set of activities, a frame of mind, and a set of attitudes that allows for the examination of assumptions, goals, questions, and evidence. These are all basic to the creation of a social policy. To thoroughly understand a social policy, one needs to use reasonable and reflective thinking focused on what to believe and what not to believe through the self-conscious monitoring of strategies (in this case, policy analysis approaches and models) being applied to the problem or policy that is the focus of analysis.

For us and for others (see Rehner, 1994), critical thinking is part of problem solving, not just an assessment of claims or arguments. This means that it is not focused solely on discovering mistakes in thinking such as those identified by Gambrill and Gibbs (2009)—for example, *ad homonym arguments*, where the person rather than the argument is criticized; *begging the question*, where certainty is alleged based on illogical reasoning, unfounded generalizations, trick questions or ignoring the issue; *sweeping generalizations*, where the unique or the specific becomes the rule; *straw person arguments*, where the point is misrepresented in order to refute it; or *psychological persuasion*, where pressure from tactics such as pleasing, liking, fearing, threats, or labels are used to persuade. Our understanding of critical thinking is broadened to allow for a deep understanding of issues through a dialogic process that requires reflective or analytic listening, active and independent pursuit of clarity of expression, and a search for evidence and reasons with the certain inclusion of alternative points of view.

To employ the type of policy analysis we are proposing here, the analyst must engage in the process with fair-mindedness, seeing the interplay between various beliefs and ideologies and having the capacity to test those beliefs. That sort of testing requires a good deal

of self-knowledge about personal strengths and limitations regarding reasoning and decision-making capacity as well as the courage to be an independent thinker, fully capable of questioning what others accept. Basically, this type of critical thinking requires the ability to depart when necessary from the perspectives of the ''experts'' in order to generate and assess multiple perspectives. It also requires the nimbleness required for shifting one's own patterns of thinking when needed.

Rehner (1994) has extended critical thinking to include critical reading and critical writing, both of which are essential to powerful policy analysis. Critical reading is not a passive pursuit of simple descriptive understanding. Rather it is a process of meaning making through an interaction with the written word based on recognition of personal experience aimed at discovery of patterns in order to build relationships among the ideas—a process that considers the situation, the ideology, the culture, history, and the time in which the text was written. Critical reading of the sort needed to address a written policy requires going beyond one's personal reaction to what is written based on personal preferences to critical judgment of the text. This critical judgment requires identifying the author's purpose. In the case of policy, it would involve identifying the intent of the policy. Critical judgment also includes identifying the reader's purpose, which in this case would be the goal of the policy analysis. Then, for full critical reading, there needs to be a shared meaning between the reader and the text about what words are saying. This requires attention to word choice, connotations, patterns, figures of speech, tone, biases, or methods of persuasion. What is both present and absent are needed to identify shades of meaning for the analytic process.

The activist policy analyst will also engage in critical writing. This involves a nonlinear recursive moving forward and backward in the writing process so that the writing itself becomes a tool for organizing and clarifying thinking. Moving backward and forward rather than starting at the beginning and establishing a middle and then an end in a linear fashion allows the opportunity for more learning. That type of learning establishes the potential for more persuasiveness; the final product is clear because the writer is clear. The recursive process allows the writer to recognize and clearly and strategically articulate (or not) assumptions because the writer is clear about what he or she is attempting to accomplish, about personal and professional attitudes, and about what the writer wants to convince the reader.

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

In the policy arena, a deep understanding of the history and intellectual basis of different political and ideological belief systems is also necessary. Thus using critical thinking in combination with knowledge of political philosophy may help the reader to engage in the work that follows.

For hundreds of years, philosophers have examined the role of government within various societal contexts. As far back as 378 BC, Plato asked how an ideal society would be governed in order to meet the needs of its vulnerable citizens. Aristotle, Plato's student, analyzed society as though he were a physician, prescribing remedies through a hierarchical, aristocratic, and undemocratic form of government. In the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes focused on the social contract, the individual power given over to the ruler (or society) to oversee the actions and behaviors of people who were seen as depraved and self-interested by nature, but who agreed to be civil, based on the rules set down by the larger society to control them. John Locke continued this focus, examining governmental authority as depending on a contract of mutual consent between rulers and citizens, with government depending on law (not force) to maintain order. Years later John Stuart Mill, a severe critic of Locke's emphasis on majority rule, assumed a utilitarian view that the rightness of any action should be determined by its consequences. Mill thought that majority rule should be limited and sometimes trumped by minority interests, and that government should not intrude in the private lives of citizens These early philosophers raised many of the questions policy analysts ask today regarding the role of government, where power belongs, what structures should be formed to oversee the formulation and implementation of policy, how minority interests are viewed, and how to address social problems (Reamer, 1993).

No mention of political philosophy would be complete without referencing the work of Karl Marx. Marx's criticism of capitalism focused on how human labor had been transformed from a creative activity to a unit of production, replacing the worth of a human being with the abstract concept of human work. Marx questioned a world-view that commodified labor from human worth to monetary value (Marx, 1887). This was a radical notion that is discussed in Chapter 7, which focuses on critical theory. Other critical philosophers such as John Rawls (1971) stimulated a great deal of thought about distributive justice. Building on the concept of the social contract that establishes a just society, Rawls proposed that if individuals operated under a ''veil

of ignorance'' in which they did not know who was advantaged and who was disadvantaged, they would create a moral principle that protected the disadvantaged; they would be benevolent. In a just society, Rawls argued, there could be some differences in wealth and assets, but only if those who are not as well off benefited in some way. Rawls reacted to utilitarian philosophers who assumed that a just society is concerned with equity of distribution according to maximizing the total of a group's utility, satisfaction, or happiness. He viewed as unfair any approach that benefited the greatest number of people but still did harm to citizens who were not in the majority. Rawls's work has served as a starting point for other philosophers to counter some of his arguments and look for new ways to envision the welfare state.

Thus, political philosophy is concerned with basic concepts and the systems of beliefs that inform the way in which one views the roles of various societal sectors in addressing the needs of people. Mullaly (2007) discusses four sets of views: neo-conservative, liberal, social democratic, and Marxist. Each view envisions human nature, society, the nation-state, social justice, and social change in a different way. A neo-conservative philosophy views human nature as self-interested, society as a series of individual interests, the nation-state as a necessary evil to maintain law and order, individuals as responsible for looking out for themselves, and social change as slow and evolutionary (p. 79). A liberal philosophy sees human nature as moral and rational, society as loosely collective, the nation-state as protective of natural rights, redistribution of resources as important to social justice and social reform as valuable as long as it does not fundamentally change the society (p. 97). A social democratic philosophy views human beings as social animals and communal by nature, the nation-state's role as balancing the interests of different groups with equality of conditions as a social goal, and social elements as transformative but in an evolutionary way (p. 123). Finally, a Marxist philosophy views human beings as communal, with production being the basis of the nature of society. The nation-state is viewed similarly to the social democratic view, but with social justice meaning a classless society and change being much more revolutionary than the other three views (p. 143).

Political philosophy influences how one views every aspect of policy. If one believes that the role of the nation-state is to control, then policies will be controlling and highly regulatory. If one believes that change must be kept to a minimum, then policies will limit how much change can occur. If one believes that society should be

transformed in order to address the needs of vulnerable groups, then policies will be designed with transformation in mind. What is critically important is that multiple ways of viewing human nature, society, and the role of the state come together in the stew that we refer to as ''politics.'' Furthermore, policy analysts must be savvy enough to recognize that the politics surrounding policy formulation and implementation are deeply rooted in diverse political philosophies, whether they are played out in an organization, in a community, or in a broader policy-making arena.

We are assuming that the reader is someone who wants to *understand* policy, not simply to jump into the fray, feeling the adrenaline rush of engaging in a political process, or merely moving with the tide. We also assume that the reader is someone who recognizes that policy affects every aspect of life, who is most likely a practitioner whose job description includes many more tasks than policy analysis, and who often feels the direct or indirect impact of policy decisions in daily practice. ''If practitioners and beneficiaries, professionals and recipients, workers and clients apply the skills to analyze the processes whereby policy comes into being, they are empowered'' (Flynn, 1992, p. 1). This is our purpose here—to offer relevant analytical tools for the empowerment of practitioners.

Practitioners who engage in clinical work are immersed in policy, yet most may not consider themselves ''policy practitioners.'' Thus, we begin with a case example that illustrates just how immersed practitioners are. This example was contributed by one of our doctoral students who is a true pracademic (a practitioner who is also an academic) and has years of clinical experience. Immediately after presenting the case, we will focus on definitional concerns.

Initiating an Involuntary Commitment

Jayne is a 30-year-old woman who has been in therapy for two years with Constance. She has been diagnosed with major depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Jayne and Constance have a solid working relationship, and Jayne has made progress in disclosing her history of abuse and in forming a trusting relationship. Jayne's social support is minimal in that she has no family in

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the state and she has only two close friends who are currently out of town. She recently lost her job.

Jayne had previously been hospitalized for attempting to commit suicide by overdosing on prescription medications. Earlier in the year, she changed her medications from name brands to generic brands and over the last few weeks her depression has worsened. She has just confessed to having stopped taking some of her medications due to the cost. Since she is now unemployed, she simply cannot afford them.

During her session, Jayne verbalizes suicidal ideation with a plan to overdose on medications. When Constance further explores her feelings and plans, Jayne expresses ambivalence about following through on the plan, but she is unable to commit to a contract for safety. Constance explores the risk factors present, which include the availability of medications that she could use in the suicide plan, the lack of her support systems in the area, the loss of her employment, the change in her medications, and her inability to contract for safety. The use of hospitalization is discussed, yet Jayne is unwilling to voluntarily admit herself.

Due to these risk factors, Constance feels ethically bound to initiate an involuntary commitment order. She is aware that the first step is to contact the police, who will come to her office and monitor the situation through the use of a temporary detention order (TDO). The police will then initiate an emergency custody order, allowing Constance to contact the area hospitals and locate an available bed for Jayne. In addition, Constance knows she must contact the treating psychiatrist and the area Community Services Board for the next steps in the process.

When Constance contacts the police, she is met with a series of questions that appear to assess the need for police involvement prior to an on-site evaluation. Is your client physically aggressive? Are there any family members who could transport her to the hospital? Would your client be willing to have you as her therapist and transport her to the hospital? Would your client be willing to drive herself and have you follow her to the hospital?

This process consumes 30 minutes, during which Jayne becomes more agitated, verbalizing a desire to leave and not ''be such a problem.'' Given that Jayne is noncombative, the police state that they will not be coming. Constance's job becomes one of containing

Jayne and simultaneously arranging transportation to the hospital or the area Community Services Board for the initial assessment.

Constance is painfully aware of the implications of what she is planning to do in getting Jayne to the hospital. She is a resident of a state in which the involuntary commitment legislation has been altered after a mass shooting at Virginia Tech University by a lone gunman with a history of mental illness. The legislation surrounding involuntary commitment states:

> *That a person may be contained involuntarily if there is evidence readily available, including recommendation from physicians or clinical psychologist treating the person that the individual (i) has a mental illness and that there exists a substantial likelihood that, as a result of mental illness, the person will, in the near future, (a) cause serious physical harm to himself or others as evidenced by recent behavior causing, attempting, or threatening harm and other relevant information, if any, or (b) suffer serious harm due to his lack of capacity to protect himself from harm or to provide for his basic human needs, (ii) is in need of hospitalization or treatment, and (iii) is unwilling to volunteer or incapable of volunteering for hospitalization or treatment. (DMHMRSA, 2008)*

Constance knows that the mental health system is responsible for the ''evaluation of the potential involuntary patient, the threshold decision as to whether the patient should be detained and long-term commitment sought, the patient's treatment, and the decision as to when to release the patient'' (Appelbaum, 1992). She also knows that the justice system is responsible for providing safety to the client and the community during the decision-making process. This safety, seen frequently as containment, begins with transporting the client to an appropriate destination for evaluation by mental health professionals. According to the legislation, with an execution of a temporary detention order (TDO), Jayne will remain in law enforcement's custody until detained in a secure facility or custody accepted by appropriate personnel at a TDO facility. If Constance transports Jayne or has her transported, the therapeutic relationship will shift into an arena that has Constance assuming a different form of power and authority over Jayne. Once this process begins, their relationship will be forever affected.

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Constance asked for assistance by the police, which was denied. She was informed that the transportation was her responsibility. Should she transport Jayne or find someone else to take her? However Jayne is transported, Constance needs to be there with her for the assessment, for she has initiated a commitment process for her client. If Constance accompanies Jayne, what will happen with her next client in the waiting room? Constance might very well lose clients; her income base may be affected, her home life may be affected, and she may be responsible for Jayne for the next 6 to 10 hours. As a practitioner in private practice, there is a disincentive for her to initiate a TDO, given that the unintended consequences can be far-reaching at a professional and personal level. Yet, in her best clinical judgment, Constance sincerely believes that Jayne will do harm to herself. She has no choice but to begin this process and to follow the established protocols in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

This case was contributed by Linda E. Love, LCSW.

IDENTIFYING DEFINITIONS AND FORMS OF POLICY

Given that policy is such a broad concept and can be applied in so many settings, it comes as little surprise that there are so many definitions of policy in the literature. For example, Guba (1984, pp. 64–65) identified eight different definitions of policy: (1) an assertion of intents or goals, (2) the accumulated decisions of a governing body to guide that which is within its sphere of control, (3) a guide to discretionary action, (4) a strategy used to solve or ameliorate a problem, (5) sanctioned behavior approved either formally or informally, (6) a norm of conduct, (7) an output of the policy-making system, and (8) the effect of the policy-making and policy-implementing system. In the broadest sense, Guba's categorization suggests several levels of policy formality and several approaches to determine policy, each producing policies of different levels of complexity and type. As we move through this chapter, these levels, types, and complexities will be examined.

Guba (1984, p. 65) points out that the first four definitions can be viewed as *policy-in-intention*, as having something to say about the purpose of a policy and why a particular policy may have been

formulated in the first place. Items 5 through 7 are viewed by Guba as *policy-in-implementation*, including those actions, interactions, and behaviors that occur in the process of implementing the policy. And the final definition is viewed as *policy-in-experience*. Here Guba points out something very important that should never be lost—policy-in-experience is the *consumer's* actual experience (not the practitioner's experience, but the experience of the persons whose original needs were targeted in the first place).

In the case example of Constance and Jayne, policy-in-intention, policy-in-implementation, and policy-in-experience are all present. Intention is reflected in the newly amended involuntary commitment policy—no one wants another Virginia Tech episode ever to happen again. The intent is for practitioners to use their best judgments and to act as needed. The implementation, however, is never clear-cut, no matter how the policy is worded. Since the police do not feel that they need to come, the process comes back to Constance to figure out how best to carry out the next steps. And policy-in-experience speaks directly to the way in which both Constance and Jayne live the process that unfolds along with the unintended consequences of how the policy is carried out. Both their lives are about to change due to the intended and unintended consequences of a policy.

Given so many definitions of policy, Gilbert and Terrell (2010) take another approach. Acknowledging that an entire introductory text could be written on describing various approaches to defining policy, they say, "no single definition is universally, nor even broadly, accepted. . . . Skirting the conceptual swamp of social policy, public policy, and social welfare policy distinctions, we will focus instead on examining the functioning of those major institutions in society that structure and provide social welfare" (p. 2). At that point, they provide an overview of those institutions seen as providing the major activities of community life, including "kinship systems, religious organizations, workplace sites, economic markets, mutual assistance arrangements, and government organizations" (p. 2). Although they do not define policy or types of policy, they offer insight into the many contexts in which policy emerges. Context is particularly important in the way we define policy in this book.

Recognizing that there are multiple definitions and varied contexts, we are defining policy as *a chosen course of action within a particular context that is intended to achieve valued goals*. In this definition we see value-based judgments driving policy, because every choice (whether one admits it or not) is based on some value or valued set of principles or preferences. Otherwise, a chosen course of

action would not be important enough to pursue in a social (often political) context composed of persons having different values or principles in mind. This means that more than one person (often many persons) will have to ''buy into'' a policy before the proposed course of action can be pursued.

Policy is a broad concept. Think about why. Consider that to get through all those decision-making points and to get as many people as possible to buy into a policy, it has to be broadly stated. For example, a number of years ago we were involved in what was called the National Health Care Campaign. The campaign was a movement across the country to get as many people engaged in advocating for policy change at the national level that would support health care coverage for persons who were employed but could not afford (or did not have options) to pay for health insurance. There was very little resistance to the goal of this proposed policy. Everyone from the American Medical Association to the National Association of Social Workers supported the policy in concept. As long as there were few details on how this policy would be implemented, everyone was on the bandwagon. As soon as there was dialogue about the specifics of how this would change a free-market system of health care into a more social democratic form, the national coalition fragmented across groups who held very different ideologies about what is a right and what is a privilege in this country. Interestingly, those ideologies are still part of the public discourse today.

Health care policies such as the one in this example and mental health policies such as the one in the involuntary commitment case have an impact on the lives of individuals and groups. They influence access to care and quality of care once services are provided. When policies are intended to make a difference in quality of life they can be included in a special type of policy—a social policy.

SOCIAL POLICIES AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

We are not yet finished with defining policy. In this book, we are concerned with a subset of policies that are called *social policies*. This raises the question of what makes a policy ''social,'' since policies typically involve many people in some ways. Aren't all policies some- what social? Similar to the health care example just provided, a social policy is concerned with problems of individuals or groups in relation to the social context of which they are a part.

Jansson (2008) defines social policies as ''a collective strategy that prevents and addresses social problems'' (p. 9). Building on Jansson's

definition and our definition of policy, we are defining social policies as *''chosen courses of action within unique contexts with goals of preventing and addressing social problems.''* In addition, social policies may contain or lead to principles and procedures that guide a course of action dealing with individual and aggregate relationships in organizations, communities, and societies.

So what are social problems? A social problem generally involves issues related to maintaining or achieving quality of life for groups of people. Depending on the context, these concerns can be the result of a wide consensus within members of an organization, community, state, or nation. The concern can also be voiced by the socially powerful or economically privileged. A problem, then, to be considered a social problem rather than an individual one, needs to be big enough (impacting numbers of individuals or groups), severe enough (representing sufficient concern, even danger), or important enough to be called a social problem by those who are powerful enough to name it as such. Thus, Jansson's distinction between ''preventing and addressing'' is decisively important, since prevention requires different strategies to alert people to potential impact or concern before the social problem has become so obvious to demand a reaction. In the United States, we tend to have trouble dealing with problems before they are defined.

Since most policies tend to be reactive (addressing rather than preventing), Chambers and Wedel (2009) suggest that a social problem usually is an aftereffect of first-order economic, business, technological, or environmental problems. Jansson (2008) also offers a word of caution in this regard, suggesting that there are not ''rigid boundaries between social policies and other kinds of policies'' (p. 12). He uses the example of tax policies, some of which are definitely social policies in that they impact individuals economically in certain ways that affect unemployment and poverty but others of which may be specific to large corporations in terms of how they depreciate their equipment or other properties. Similarly, policies intended for the oversight of water and sewer systems are not typically considered social policies until public health issues arise when a water system is compromised. Then those more general policies become critical to addressing the quality of life of individuals and communities.

In the United States, due to the incremental nature of our public policy-making process, it sometimes appears that almost every policy response results in unintended consequences that in themselves then become social problems requiring a policy response. For example,

when national policy tried to eliminate segregation in housing based on race, segregation in housing based on economic status, was created because middle- and upper-class African Americans could move out of the inner city to the suburbs, leaving the inner city principally for the poor. These changes shifted tax bases and had implications for public education and other public services.

When these consequences are recognized as social problems they give rise to social policies, and the programs that are derived from the policies serve as corrective measures. This process represents a link between policies and practice. To truly understand a particular social policy and what it is intended to accomplish requires understanding the context of the social problem, the goals of the policy, and the response that is implemented as a result of that policy.

We now turn to the different forms of social policy that can be the focus of that analysis.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF SOCIAL POLICY

Whether a policy is being considered by a nonprofit board of directors in a local agency or in a proposed bill before the state legislature, many decisions must be made. Who should be involved in the process; who needs to be convinced to help move the process along; what should be included in the actual wording of the policy (and what should not); what approach should be used in presenting the policy to a decision-making body—these and numerous other decisions are central to the formation of a policy. As Blau (2007) points out, sometimes this means you will be involved in the policy formation process, but it is more likely that you may inherit policies constructed by decision makers in powerful positions, just as Constance did in our case example. What you inherit or what you might construct could appear in a multitude of forms.

Jansson (2008, pp. 12–14) identifies the following forms:

- *Statutes*—A public form enacted by some level of government.
- *Policy objectives*—Mission-type statements within statutes that shape actions and choices of persons implementing a policy.
- *Rules and regulations*—Specific directives intended to constrain what persons carrying out the policy can and cannot do.
- *Budgets*—Policies that determine the nature and amount of resources allocated to implementing policies.

- *Court rulings*—Judicial decisions that either enforce or rescind policies typically made by government.
- *Formal or written policies*—Those policies issued in writing by public (e.g., legislative, judicial) or private (e.g., standard-setting bodies, agencies, or interorganizational) groups.
- *Informal policies or unwritten policies*—Courses of action taken by persons and groups involved in implementing policy when the formal policy is not specific about how to proceed, thus requiring the use of discretion and judgment.

One more form can be added—standards. *Standards* are normally developed and approved by professional associations to guide ethical decision making as practitioners do their work. Standards guide action and could be viewed as professional policies often captured in the form of codes of ethics and practice approaches. Standards are usually regulated and overseen by public credentialing and licensing bodies. Their intent is to protect consumers from unscrupulous practice. They, too, can be understood as a type of social policy aimed at ensuring quality of care. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the various forms of social policy.

Regardless of what form a social policy takes, the choice to even begin a policy process most often involves a cluster of decisions governed by rules and regulations, budgetary concerns, court rulings, and standards. Although there may be hundreds of pages of written

Table 1.1
Forms of Social Policy

Form	Description
Statute	Enacted by federal or state government (public)
Policy objectives	Mission-type statements
Rules and regulations	Specific directives, often directing administrative aspects of policies
Budgets	Allocation of resources
Court rulings	Judicial decisions
Formal	Any policy that is in written form
Informal	Any policy that is unwritten but takes the form of practice
Standards	Professional policies such as codes of ethics, best practice protocols, and credentialing requirements

policy, some aspects may not be covered or may be left to the informal discretion of the practitioner tasked with implementation. There may be practice precedents such as informal procedures about how decision making should happen within a specific context that one needs to know which may not have been codified in written form. It is this complexity in policy forms that requires a good deal of savvy on the part of the student of policy.

Some statutory social policy (enacted by government) may be vaguely written, containing the hoped-for policy objectives in general terms, the identified targeted population of the policy, and the designation of which agency of government is responsible for implementation. In these cases, to aid policy enactment more specifically construed administrative rules will be issued to guide implementation of the policy, including standards and regulations, ''that have the force of law developed subsequent to some enabling legislation. . . . Federal administrative procedures, legislation and the administrative procedures, acts of virtually every state requires a rather detailed and explicit set of routines for an administrative agency to follow in publishing proposed rules . . . in receiving and responding to input offered on the part of those affected and final legislative review prior to promulgation of the rules'' (Flynn, 1992, p. 187). Other nonstatutorial social policies may contain more detail, essentially embedding rules and procedures within the initial policy. The norm for policy advocates though is to set the agenda for the policy without going into so much detail that the decision-making process bogs down because of different interpretations of details. But lack of detail at the agenda-setting level is not necessarily advantageous at the implementation level. Vague language that allows agreement on general principles rarely gives sufficient specific instructions needed to shape precise instructions at the implementation or programmatic level.

Most practitioners will feel the full weight of statutory policies when they work in settings mandated by enabling legislation. There they encounter huge volumes of administrative rules that have been promulgated to guide their work. As one will see throughout the text, policies in the form of rules are in constant tension between precision and vagueness, centralization and discretion, incentives and punishments, seriousness and blameworthiness of violations, or off-targeting of the consequences of the choice. In the United States, this push/pull tension of different positions and ideologies means that statutes and even the administrative rules and procedures derived from them are in constant flux. It is in the midst of this constant tension

that policy analysis gains its meaning and its power. The process of analysis of the formal rules along with the interpretation of those rules can result in intended and unintended consequences. Thus, the most potential impact in shaping future policy choices may be what is learned in the implementation process.

In our case example, Constance and Jayne would certainly be aware of how the police interpreted their roles. Had Jayne been violent, they would have come. Yet, as long as Jayne appears passive, the transportation mandate is seen by the police as flexible. When they refuse to transport, this does not change the expectation for Constance to protect Jayne. While she is going to the effort to enact that protection, there are important unintended negative consequences to other clients and to the financial stability of her private practice.

Compliance and Power Within Policy

Policies as sets of rules operate as a form of social coordination. These rules induce compliance about something without invoking too many coercive sanctions for the actions of those governed by the rules. As such, policies derive power from legitimacy. They prescribe actions in particular situations or contexts. Rules are accepted based on the political choices that set the policy framing in motion. Since policies are political, they may include, exclude, unify, or divide by creating categories of those served or not served by the policy choice. Policies also create natural alliances of privilege and lack of privilege (those who receive the benefits of the policy and those who are not allowed to become beneficiaries or those who can avoid following the policy as compared to those who must comply with the policy). These alliances represent yet another aspect of how political and complex policies are.

Depending on the form that the enactment of the policy takes, there will always be formal and informal interactions between obligations and duties prescribed by the policy rules. There will always be some sort of mandated behavior both on the part of those enacting the policy and those who are targets of the policy. Thus, policy confers power on how the implementers of the policy must act. That power will be greater or less depending on the degree of consensus about what constitutes the chosen policy response. See if you can determine how that seems to have worked in our case example.

Good rules have precision, but policies are a result of compromise, so policies generally represent vague rules very much open to interpretation about meaning and expectations. Precise rules assure fairness so

that cases that are alike are treated alike. Precise rules provide predictability and assure that people involved in the policy response are insulated from political or ideological interpretations (some say whims) of those enacting the policy. Equal treatment is thought to be possible with precise policies. However, precision in rules sometimes also allows different cases to be treated as if they were alike in the sense that unique situations are not considered in a ''one size fits all'' policy response. Equality may impede social justice. Precise policies also stifle creative responses to new situations. Vague rules, on the other hand, leave room for discretion. They allow for flexibility, interpretation, and sensitivity to differences. Vague policies may well allow for the expression of community ideals and values that are different from the ideals and values of the framers of the policy.

What is certain is that public debate about policy at any stage allows for the balancing of formal with informal power, precision with vagueness in the policy, discretionary power with control. The goal of the debate in democratic settings is to eliminate unnecessary discretionary power and to create precise rules that are also perfectly flexible, neutral, and enforceable. As you probably know, these goals are hardly possible in diverse organizational, community, and societal arenas, but there is a sense that the myth must be preserved because it is essential to the legitimacy of laws. In the United States, belief in the rule of law is persistent. So the myth must exist to counteract the natural libertarian or individualistic pressure for evasion or disobedience of the policy or law.

Recognizing the issues surrounding compliance and power is just the beginning in discovering the levels of complexity in policy. Policies and procedures will be developed at various levels of government and within the private sector that influence what practitioners do. All of these policies and procedures carry their own constraints beyond those already identified. Nested within these layers of public policy, and sometimes derived from them, will be administrative policies that have been approved by decision-making bodies responsible for overseeing what happens in organizational settings. Those policies will interface with internal policies that direct organizational activities, additional levels of power, and additional expectations regarding compliance. ''The nested structure of rules within rules, within still further rules, is a particularly difficult problem to solve'' (Ostrom, 2007, p. 24). Thus, with this additional complexity in mind, it is important to examine in detail different levels and scope of social policies that range from the grass roots to the highest echelons of government.

RECOGNIZING LEVELS AND SCOPE OF SOCIAL POLICIES

The narrowest level of social policy would be a personal or family policy. A personal policy that states that ''I won't smoke cigarettes'' or a family policy that mandates that ''all family members must remove their shoes before entering the home'' are examples of policies that apply only to a particular individual or to all members of a family. Technically, these would be social policies on the most grass-roots level. They would likely be informal in the sense that they are not written down, and they are ''social'' because they influence the quality of life of self and others and are adhered to only by particular groups of people. Knowing the effects of secondary smoke, an individual's decision to refrain from smoking has an impact on others' quality of life. This decision may be tested even more in the local community when a smoking ban in restaurants is enacted by the city and the ''choice'' not to smoke is no longer the individual's but the city council's. In short, what was originally an individual policy decision has become the choice of government exercising control over the individual.

The family's decision about taking off their shoes upon entering the house is an example of an unwritten policy. Note that this policy is very specific—one either takes off one's shoes or one doesn't. But what is the problem that makes this a social policy rather than simply a rule superimposed by a head of household over its members? If one assumes that the problem is that the house becomes dirty much faster when family members track in debris, so much so that no one can possibly maintain a clean living environment, then the actual policy goal (albeit unstated) may be that family members owe it to one another to pitch in as a unit and maintain the quality of their living space. In this situation, what sounds like a targeted policy is actually stated in the form of a ''house rule'' that does not fully articulate the reasoning behind it. It is a family social policy that can be simply described, but determining why people take off their shoes represents the beginning of a policy analysis.

Clearly, these personal or family policies might impact those around them, but they rarely are the source of generalized policies, nor are they the primary focus for this discussion other than to demonstrate that personal and family policies are value or preference driven, like other policies. Whatever consequences by way of coercion to comply or sanctions for lack of compliance are only within the individual or within the scope of how a family defines its members.

In summary, at the most local and familiar level, policies can be personal and familial. The decision not to smoke is an example of how one's personal policy can have an impact on others and illustrates how sometimes personal policies become the basis for broader social policies, such as banning smoking in restaurants in order to protect the public's health. A family's desire to share in the responsibility of keeping their immediate environment clean and healthy can actually trigger rules such as taking one's shoes off at the door.

As you can see, even these simple examples can have a certain level of complexity. They are useful, but for our purposes here we are primarily interested in the policies that are directly linked to the larger practice environment. Moving beyond the individual/family context, we now focus on organization/community, county/state, regional/national, and international policies to illustrate just how diverse social policies can be.

ORGANIZATION/COMMUNITY LEVEL AND SCOPE

Organizations are the arena in which policies are most often implemented, because they are legal entities in which programs and services are carried out. They are also the context within which most practitioners feel the most impact of how policy at any level influences practice. This will be true regardless of the particular organizational culture or organizational type, ranging from large public bureaucracies to small grass-roots associations and including everything in between (O'Connor & Netting, 2009). All organizations, regardless of size or culture, along with their employees must comply with federal, state, and local policies that pertain to their activities, whether that compliance relates to employment policies or policies governing how an organization can care for other people's children. Thus, an agency or association setting is one in which practitioners experience the intermixing of policies from various sources that impact what they can and cannot do.

In addition, other organizational or programmatic rules and procedures may exist as the result of organizational administrative choices, such as specifying appropriate work apparel or policies stated by board directives governing practice in such things as the budget or program design. Human service practitioners should note that ignorance of the policies governing practice has never been a legal excuse when problems occur that land the worker and the agency in court. The message here is that the first level of responsible, professional practice is to be

able to describe and understand the policies governing practice at whatever level practice occurs. It is also important to understand that remaining at the descriptive level (knowing what the policy is) is not sufficient. Analysis of social policies and their impacts are a central function (some would say an ethical expectation) of human service professionals. In order to engage in sophisticated social policy analysis, regardless of the policy source or level, a few more details regarding policies are needed.

Mancini and Lawson (2009) offer an example of policies that pertain to a mental health agency. They report the results of a study on consumer-based mental health services in which persons who have experienced mental health problems themselves are recruited to provide peer support to others who are in distress. The consumer-based movement represents a nationwide trend that began in the 1970s when grass-roots activist groups advocated for mental health rights. As this informal network grew, self-help groups emerged, with peers helping peers. Today, consumer-operated programs continue to advocate for consumers' rights and are a common component of many established community-based mental health service systems. As part of these programs, local level ''peer providers'' use what they have learned from their own psychiatric disabilities to help others deal with their unique challenges. One difficulty in designing a peer-provider support approach is that this is highly intensive emotional labor in which peers can quickly become overwhelmed by trying to help others.

When peer-providers are employed by formal mental health systems, they are often called ''peer-employees or peer-specialists'' and they ''are embedded within larger non-peer organizations and have mostly non-peer coworkers and supervisors. . . . Unfortunately, without adequate organizational supports, negotiating the roles and demands of work in nonpeer organizations can lead to isolation, role-ambiguity, stigmatization, and emotional exhaustion'' (Mancini & Lawson, 2009, p. 5). This study reveals how important it is for mental health providers that hire peer-specialists into their organizational cultures to be able to support these workers and to establish optimal job configurations that maximize the use of peer and professional staff in an interactional manner. The authors elaborate on the concept of emotional competence for peer-workers and for organizations to support their development through interventions such as practice ''circles'' in which peer and non–peer-providers can exchange information and provide mutual assistance and emotional support (p. 18).

It may seem that this is a direct service dilemma about how to integrate peer-workers into a mental health provider system, and in fact it is. But it is also riddled with policy considerations. No national or state agency is dictating to a local mental health agency that it must include peer-workers in its staffing pattern, so it is up to the agency's board of directors to debate the issue. If they move with the trend and incorporate peer-workers into their systems, the limited empirical evidence to date suggests that there must be supports in place to integrate these workers into the system. Before a decision is made to hire peer-workers, a good deal of debate must focus on the pros and cons of many important issues. Agencies will need to consider at a minimum how a new hiring policy will impact the current professional staff, the liability issues of having nonprofessional staff interface with consumers, and appropriate supervision and monitoring of the new workers. In the process of considering this decision, an analysis of the issues surrounding such a policy must occur. And should the board decide that peer-workers should be hired, the process of implementation should become an ongoing policy analysis of performance and impact for the good of the agency and the clients they serve.

In summary, the example of the problems associated with mental illness and the need for mentally ill persons to receive appropriate treatment shows that one can approach policy at the organizational level. How to respond to the social problem of persistent mental illness is often left to the discretion of mental health agencies that must make choices about how to intervene. A board of directors searching for options may consider policies different from those guiding standard programming. Many issues will be associated with whatever policy choice is made. Analyzing those issues and recognizing beforehand all the consequences—both intended and otherwise—will avoid unfortunate surprises or complications. In this example, what appears to be a simple and empirically based staffing choice will become more complicated as it interfaces with professional practice standards and credentialing requirements.

COUNTY/STATE LEVEL AND SCOPE

State and county policies apply only to people within the confines of that state or county. These rules also tend to apply to cities or localities as well. In most states, cities are part of county government structures. In the four commonwealths (Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and

Massachusetts), cities are separate governmental entities with their own legal and policy structures separate from the counties that may be contiguous to them. At times this may be confusing because of paralleling political and administrative structures, but for the most part (including in the commonwealths), state, county, and city policies are made to conform with federal policies and guidelines and to each other. In all of these cases, various governmental entities, officials, and citizens interact on a policy level, and there is a great deal of diffusion. The policies specifically apply to people residing in a state, county, or city, but they apply also to those who may be passing through. For example, if someone from South Carolina was driving through Virginia, the Virginia state laws regarding speed limits, when driving lights should be on, and when it is okay to stay in the left lane of the highway would apply even if they differed from the laws under which the driver from South Carolina gained a driver's license. These rules would apply whether the driver were in a city or a county in Virginia. However, there might be specific policies in particular cities or counties for public parking, for example, that would not apply statewide, nor would they necessarily resemble what the South Carolina driver experienced at home.

Because there are so many areas in which social policy is made at the state level without the universal shaping mandated by some federal policies, there is great variation across states. For example, Mollica (2008) provides an overview of the way in which ''assisted living'' has gained increasing popularity as a balance between independent living and nursing home care in the United States. Since there is currently no federal legislation that oversees this burgeoning industry, there is no uniform definition of what constitutes ''assisted living.'' State regulators use the term differently to include a range of residential facilities for older adults, such as what was previously known as residential care, adult care, personal care, or boarding homes. There is no consistency from state to state regarding what sort of services should be the target of regulations. Facility developers use the term ''assisted living'' for marketing purposes, but with no consistency in terms of what services are actually offered to older consumers.

Mollica provides background information on how the industry has grown since the late 1980s and early 1990s. By 2007, 41 states and the District of Columbia used the term ''assisted living'' in their regulatory policies (p. 68). Policy makers at the state level have to determine what the definition will be for that state's assisted living, resulting in different regulations in each state. Regulatory policy is continually being

updated as new variations on the theme emerge and as the assisted living industry markets new products that do not always conform to state definitions. In short, the evolving industry is a moving target. ''The frequent review and changes in state regulation help policy makers to keep pace with changes in consumer preferences and changing business models'' (p. 68). According to Mollica, regulators across the United States have continuing concerns about residents' abilities and status, staff/resident ratios, and appropriate rates of occupancy at a time when state revenues are in decline, reducing the number of staff available to survey facilities and investigate complaints. Policy analysis is an ongoing process at the state regulatory level, just to keep up with developments.

Chambers and Wedel (2009) suggest that policy analysis is undertaken in order to understand how the social problem is defined and how and what another person or group thinks and believes about a given situation that is being described as a social problem. Only from an understanding of the problem that the policy has been designed to eliminate can one make judgments about policy effectiveness. In addition to the foregoing example, we could have mentioned a plethora of problems related to various age groups, about which a variety of people would have different definitions. For example, states struggle with how to define abuse and neglect both for child protective service workers and for adult protective service workers, just as states vary in how they define assisted living for the regulation of a section of the long-term care industry. In other words, even with model statutes circulating about a particular subject, context must be considered and state policies will overlap in some ways and diverge in others. The major point is not to forget the social problem that a social policy is trying to address.

In the assisted living example, the underlying problem is that the population is aging and as people age in place they may need supportive services beyond what they can receive in their own homes. They may not qualify for nursing home care, and most people do not aspire to be placed in a nursing facility, so assisted living is a marketed service to fill the gap in the continuum of care. But the difficulty that arises as one analyzes this situation is that left on their own, developers may build facilities with profit rather than care as the top priority. What policies, then, need to be in place to protect vulnerable consumers of service? Understanding this situation is necessary in order for any viable policy to be formulated, and that's where analysis comes into play.

In summary, as the context for policy becomes more complex and diverse, the need for analysis becomes both more important and more complicated. As the examples presented here have demonstrated, county- or state-level policy is particularly context dependent. What is preferred and accepted as appropriate policy will change from context to context, because what is defined as the problem that the social policy is developed to address tends to change to some degree from context to context. Because of the differences in interpretation, universal application of regulations and even universal methods of analysis may present great challenges.

REGIONAL/NATIONAL LEVEL AND SCOPE

At this level or scope, we are interested in the policies that are linked to the political and governmental structure of the United States. We include ''regional'' here because many federal agencies have regional offices that actually oversee the implementation of policies. For example, decisions that are made regarding whether or not state-level interpretations of federal expectations related to public child welfare practice are acceptable is not determined at the Children's Bureau in Washington, D.C., but at the various regional offices located throughout the country. Some of these offices are known to be more conservative in their interpretations, while others are known to be more liberal in their ability to accept state differences regarding implementation of federal policy. This means that even at the federal level, interpretation of policy and universal application of regulations is challenging.

Even with the existence of regional offices, federal-level policy has the widest scope. Federal policy applies to everyone within the boundaries of the United States and its protectorates. Federal policy is found in the public laws developed by the Congress and signed into law by the president. It is also found in the rules and procedures of the federal agencies charged with enacting the particular policy instrument or program that develops as a result of the policy choice. Finally, federal policy is found in the decisions of the Supreme Court, which is charged with monitoring legal findings for their congruence with the Constitution of the United States and its first 12 amendments, better known as the Bill of Rights.

There is probably no policy debate that recycles through the Congress more than what to do about access to and the cost of health care in the United States. In a policy analysis of health care systems worldwide, Tanner (2008) points out that most health care systems are

struggling with concerns regarding access and rising costs and that it is somewhat of a myth that the United States has unique problems in this regard. Tanner points out that trend data suggest that health insurance does not mean universal access because many countries actually promise universality only to ration care and have long waiting lists; that costs are rising everywhere not just in the United States; that countries heavily weighted toward government control have access, rationing and physician choice issues; and that countries with the most effective national health care systems still incorporate market mechanisms into their systems. Using data from the United States, France, Canada, Norway, The Netherlands, Spain, and Japan, Tanner embarks on a comparative analysis that concludes with a recommendation that the United States learn from the successes and failures of other systems, which means increasing consumer incentives and control rather than ''follow the road to government-run national health care'' (p. 36). He concludes that the United States needs to be cautious about ''heading down the road to national health care but [needs to learn] from the experiences of other countries, which demonstrate the failure of centralized command and control and the benefits of increasing consumer incentives and choice'' (p. 1). Whether one agrees with Tanner's analysis or not, a thorough policy analysis at the national level requires comparing what is known about a problem in a global context when it comes to pressing needs such as health care.

In summary, then, at the federal level even more considerations are involved in any policy decision. For without careful consideration, policy makers would be operating without meaningful information on which to make critical decisions that affect the quality of care and quality of life of millions of people. Competent policy analyses are central to decision making. Hopefully, it is also becoming clear how political both the analysis and the decision making may become.

International Level and Scope

Although our focus is on policy within the United States, the previous example on health care illustrates how interconnected national policies are within an international arena. Therefore, we provide two examples of social problems that are currently on the international radar screen just to demonstrate how important it is to analyze these problems in a global context. The first deals with international adoptions, and the second deals with the consequences of establishing a national language.

The point is that international policy in many ways has local, family, and individual impacts that must be understood.

Roby and Shaw (2006) offer a set of policy quandaries in their analysis of the problems associated with international adoption, particularly in light of the number of orphans in Africa. Even though they focus on adoption in their analysis, they are careful to say that adoption is only one option for African children. Even setting boundaries around one option reveals a multitude of complex policy issues such as the lingering effects of American slavery, modern-day slavery and child trafficking, the identity and well-being of children, and the disproportionate number of African-American children in the U.S. foster care system. From a position of protecting the child in the adoption process, there are countless legal and procedural issues. What is revealing about Roby and Shaw's analysis is the complicated overlay of national, state, and private policies. For example, the United States may have in place all sorts of provisions stipulating how children may enter the country, but the country from which a child is coming may have conflicting, limited, and different policies with which to contend. Within the United States, state child welfare systems reflect a mixture of federal and state policies, just as within the country of origin nongovernmental and private organizations have their own policies. And on an international level, organizations such as UNICEF have position statements and standards for inter-country adoption. Further, the creation of the Hague Convention has established a baseline for acceptable practice for all nations that are signatories of the Convention. Understanding this complex set of interrelated (and often incongruent) policies challenges the most reflective practitioner and is essential to anyone whose practice involves intercountry adoptions.

As another example, Van Parijs (2000) has written a provocative analysis of native languages in a global world. There are approximately 6,000 living languages, out of which 2,000 have fewer than 1,000 living speakers and are thus dying out. That still leaves 4,000 languages surviving in the world. As various countries establish national languages, the expectation is that anyone entering that country will be able to communicate in the official language. For example, immigrants entering a country in which their native tongue is not spoken will find themselves in classes and their children in schools that teach the official language of that country. Since language is so important to culture, the impact of superimposing a linguistic requirement on persons who speak other languages is essentially a policy decision

Table 1.2
Levels of Social Policies and their Operationalization

Level	Operationalized Through
Personal and/or Familial	Members of domestic units
Organization and/or Community	Grass-roots associations and coalitions Health and human service agencies and their boards Community groups
County and/or State	Public agencies serving counties and states
Regional and/or National	Federal agencies
International	Public and private organizations and groups that have cross-national missions

with extremely significant consequences for the identities and well-being of individuals and entire groups, communities, and cultures.

In summary, as one moves among the levels just described there are proportionately more and more people affected by policies. See Table 1.2 for an overview of the levels just discussed. Just as it is important to know that there are levels of policy nested within one another that take different forms, it is equally helpful to know that there are different approaches for conceptualizing policy analysis.

CONCEPTUALIZING POLICY ANALYSIS

To be politically astute and effective, practitioners need to be able to see connections between social policies and direct organization and community practice. At this early stage it should be clear how complicated understanding policy and all its important connections can be. One engages in policy analysis to understand something about the policy and so that judgments can be made about its worth. Determining the appropriate focus for the analysis is essential so that the results have meaning and impact. This is the clue to sophisticated policy analysis. That focus will be influenced by whatever conceptual frameworks guide the analysis.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS AND THEORIES OF POLICY PROCESS

Ostrom (2007) points out an important conceptual consideration when she defines frameworks, theories, and models. These terms are often used interchangeably or without specificity. A conceptual framework is the broadest of the three terms, helping the analyst ''identify the elements and relationships among these elements that one needs to

consider . . . they provide the most general list of variables that should be used'' for analysis (p. 25). Often a practitioner knows what themes or areas are important to analyze, but does not have a theory about how they all fit together. The use of a conceptual framework is a reasonable starting point in approaching one's analysis. We define *conceptual framework* as ''any intellectual structuring used to corral assumptions or related concepts into some form for understanding.'' Frameworks may be skeletal (just beginning) or complex. They may be broad or narrow, but practitioners should think architecturally when arriving at frameworks, because they are mechanisms for making ideas hang together in a sensible way. Sometimes these frameworks are tightly constructed enough to be considered theories.

Ostrom contends that ''the development and use of theories enable the analyst to specify which elements of the framework are particularly relevant to certain kinds of questions and to make general working assumptions about these elements'' (2007, p. 25). According to Mullaly (2007, p. 205), theories carry out four basic functions: description, explanation, prediction and control, and management of events or changes. In a traditional way, theories are sets of interrelated concepts that explain how and why something works or does not work for the purpose of enhancing understanding. For example, sociological theories describe how societies, institutions, communities, or organizations function. These *descriptive theories* assist in analyzing what is happening within these systems, but they do not provide the practitioner with methods to change a situation once it has been analyzed. Descriptive theories show how elements are held together. In contrast, *prescriptive theories* are intended to provide direction or guidance for persons wanting to change or intervene in a situation and are the underpinnings for practice models (Netting, Kettner, & McMurtry, 2008). Prescriptive theories provide avenues or directions to cause incremental change. Challenging traditional theories are *critical theories*, which are committed to change the world ''in ways that can help 'emancipate' those at the margins of society by providing insights and intellectual tools they can use to empower themselves'' (Mullaly, 2007, p. 215). Some critical theories provide prescriptions, much like prescriptive theories; however, the prescriptions are in the direction of transformative structural changes. Sometimes theories are used in policy analysis to identify the cause of the social problem; sometimes theories are used to predict the impact of the social policy when enacted. Theories, then, when used to guide one's policy analysis will influence the questions one asks and how descriptive, prescriptive or critical the analysis will be.

Sabatier (2007) identifies seven frameworks for analysis of the policy process, based on the following criteria: (1) concepts are relatively clear and there are causal relationships among variables, (2) the framework is viewed by policy scholars as viable to understanding the policy process, (3) each must be positive in that it seeks to explain much of the policy process, and (4) the framework must address aspects of policy-making process such as conflicting values and interests, how information flows, organizational relationships, and environmental variations. Sabatier views five of the frameworks ''as focused on explaining policy change within a given political system or set of institutional arrangements (including efforts to change those arrangements)'' (p. 10). As you read the bulleted list below, see if by their descriptions you can tell whether they are built on descriptive, prescriptive, or critical theories:

- *The stages heuristic*—Views the policy process as going through stages of development from formulation to evaluation.
- *Institutional rational choice*—A family of frameworks focusing on how self-interested individuals make choices within established relationships with specific sets of institutions.
- *Multiple-streams*—Developed by Kingdon (1984) and based on Cohen, March, and Olsen's (1972) garbage can model of organizational behavior, the policy process is viewed as three streams of actors and processes coming together. These streams are (1) problem (data and definitions of the problem), (2) policy (proponents of solutions), and (3) politics (elections and elected officials).
- *Punctuated-equilibrium framework (PE)*—Views U.S. policymaking as punctuated by brief periods of major policy change in a characteristically long period of incremental change.
- *The advocacy coalition framework (ACF)*—Proposes that policy change occurs when interaction occurs between advocacy coalitions (as subsets of the larger system), composed of activists with shared beliefs, and the larger political system.

Two additional theoretical frameworks ''seek to provide explanations of variations across a large number of political systems'' (Sabatier, 2007, p. 10). These are

- *The policy diffusion framework*—Explains adoption of specific policy innovations across a wide area (such as multiple localities or states), arguing that adoption emanates from both specific characteristics of political systems and various diffusion strategies.

- *The funnel of causality and other frameworks in Large-N comparative studies*—Focuses primarily on budgets to explain variations across large numbers of states and nations. (Sabatier, 2007, pp. 8–10).

Sabatier's listing of frameworks provides a sample of the richness and complexity of what is available as tools for the policy analyst.

MODELS AND APPROACHES

Models are more focused than either conceptual frameworks or theories, making ''precise assumptions about a limited set of parameters and variables'' (Ostrom, 2007, p. 26). Like frameworks, they are built around theories (whether broadly or narrowly construed or whether stated or implied). Models are prescriptive in that they tend to direct the analysis in a predetermined direction. Most dominant in the social policy field have been models built around what Sabatier calls ''the stages heuristic'' and ''institutional rational choice'' theoretical frameworks. These are called *rational models*.

Stages and rational choice frameworks create models of analysis that assume that there is a single truth—that is, one right answer. This single truth can be arrived at through a series of well-defined steps in a fixed, prescribed sequence. Rational models also assume that with defined steps, control can be exerted to assure certainty about the ''rightness'' of the findings of the analysis. This is possible because it is assumed that the social system within which social policies are constructed is a system in which individuals pursue their own welfare by exchanging things with others (i.e., a market economy). These models assume that self-interests drive policy making. Rational models also assume that policies are arrived at in a prescribed way by a collection of rational decision makers who choose the best policy response based on the most benefit for the least cost. Elsewhere (Fauri, Netting, & O'Connor, 2005) it is also suggested that the rational model of analysis is rather linear, built on ''if/then'' steps with prediction based on objectives, alternatives, and assessment of consequences such that decisions are made by selecting from alternatives and minimizing objections. Here, reason is the basic building block based on market assumptions where choices feature selection of that which will provide the ''biggest bang for the buck.'' On the whole, this type of policy analysis is expert dominated, because only the expert knows the appropriate steps in the analysis and is able to make the determination that the policy choice actually provides the most benefit for the least cost.

The rational approach works well for policies that are theory driven, and where the problem is well defined and well accepted as defined. Unfortunately, based on our earlier discussion about diversity and complexity of policies and their interpretations when scope of the problem and the policy are at issue, most social problems and the social policies that are developed to address them are value laden. There is much dispute about the value(s) that should have precedence when either the problem is defined or the policy is selected as a response. Disputed values create a political forum where the costs and benefits of the problem and the policy response are also in dispute, because what is a problem to one group may well be a benefit to another. Further, it is essentially impossible to objectively judge conflicting or competing costs and values since weighting and even-handed comparison is difficult, even with the most advanced, computerized analytic techniques. Even if that were possible, it is generally impossible to predict with certainty what the intended and unintended consequences of policy alternatives will be. Cost/benefit analysis cannot simply be considered as part of the market economy; diverse social, economic, and political values must be recognized when assessing the policy choice and its impact.

A way to manage these challenges is through a *nonrational approach* to policy (Fauri, Netting, & O'Connor, 2005) which is based on assumptions of multiple and competing truths with no fixed sequence or analytical steps. Note that we are no longer using the word ''model,'' which implies a predetermined, prescriptive process. Instead the word ''approach'' implies that there is not just one best way, but multiple ways. For example, the multiple-streams and advocacy coalition frameworks identified by Sabatier (2007) are more likely aligned with an ''approach'' rather than a ''model'' orientation in that they allow for uncertainty, given that groups of uncontrollable advocates intervene in the policy process in unpredictable ways. Without predictability and predetermined ends, these approaches are nonlinear and nonrational.

A nonrational approach to decision making includes multiple perspectives or understandings of the social problem and the policy response with decisions based on power and politics. It assumes that what goes on in organizations, communities, and societies is particularly political. It assumes that ideas are the medium of exchange rather than the cost and benefits of the market. Context and influence from diverse stakeholders influence what is seen as ''good'' and what should be avoided for being ''bad'' in the policy choice. The policy shaping is actually occurring through the participation of all with a

Table 1.3
Frameworks, Theories, Models, and Approaches

Concepts	Definitions
Frameworks	Any intellectual structuring used to corral assumptions or related concepts into some form for understanding.
Theories	Sets of interrelated concepts that may serve different functions: description, explanation, prediction, and control. Types of theories include *Descriptive*—Telling what is happening. *Prescriptive*—Providing direction about what to do about what is happening. *Critical*—Providing insights that empower one to change what is happening.
Models	An approach based on rational prescriptions having predetermined outcomes. Thus models are a type of approach.
Approaches	Possibilities that can take the form of models, but can also be based on nonrational and critical assumptions. Thus an approach is a broad concept that can be used in any paradigm.

stake in the issues making it part of a community dialogue. Shared meanings motivate people to action. This dialogue may turn dialectical when paradox and politics become such a part of the process of agenda setting and decision making. What is clear here is that political reasoning is very much a part of the process, which means that this sort of policy analysis is more value, ideology, or passion driven than the theoretically driven rational approach. This approach is more fluid and circular than linear. Table 1.3 provides an overview of frameworks, theories, models, and approaches.

From this perspective, policy is political, because the political system has the task of ordering and ranking values in order to make choices about which policy to select. Some, such as Stone (2002), would argue that the political system determines what is important and then persuades society's members to accept the ranking, perhaps manipulating the choices. The political system can reorder the ranking of preferences in accordance with the socio/cultural/economic environment. With changes in the ranking of preferences come changes in the structure of the chosen policy position. So in many ways policies represent changing goals, shifting problem definitions and shifting acceptable solutions at any given time in politics.

In summary, two principal perspectives or approaches seem to predominate the policy analysis field. Regardless of the details of

the theory, the framework, or the focus of the analytic process, they are based on either rational or nonrational assumptions. Later it will become clear how both perspectives help to shape our arguments about policy analysis being research. Chapter 2 explains that it is possible to take a policy-analysis perspective that in fact combines both rational and nonrational (and sometimes irrational) assumptions in ways that do not set up impossible paradoxes.

CONCLUSION

This introductory chapter was intended to offer an overview of the major aspects of social policies and a preliminary understanding of the challenges that comprehending social policies represents. It provided an initial discussion about how to approach social policy in more than just a descriptive way. We hope we have set the stage for further enhancement of both critical thinking and leadership skills for human service practitioners in the social policy context. These skills are elemental for competent, ethical practice, because in most cases, human service practitioners are being called to a practice guided by policy at some level. It is essential for the professional practitioner to know more than just what the policy says about the expected practice. It is also important to competently assess the policy and, when necessary, advocate for alternative policy responses.

Returning to the involuntary commitment case presented early in this chapter, we suspect that Constance and Jayne are well aware of just how value laden policies can be. The stated policy seems so rational—call the police, transport to the hospital, assess the client, determine whether to admit. It reads like a critical pathway in a medical setting. But in this process, both Constance and Jayne recognize that this ''approach'' is far from a prescriptive model. Depending on the cir-cumstances, each client's situation is unique, and when it comes to implementation, the process may look different. For anyone wanting to analyze this seemingly straightforward policy, how one interprets it would be based on the questions asked, and with each client there would be unique questions to ask.

As we move further into the material of this text, we hope that this first chapter has begun to establish the argument that in enacting policy analysis much critical thinking is necessary to select the appropriate tool for that analysis. Because of the complexity of the policy-making and policy-enacting process, it is impossible to rely on only one framework, theory, model, or approach to guide analysis. In the following chapters

you will see that our guidance entails approaching policy analysis as research. In what follows we hope to provide you with a variety of resources and tools to create powerfully constructed, evenhanded approaches to understanding social policy, judging the worth of social policies, and establishing reasonable alternatives to policies requiring changes in order to assure that they address the social problems as defined.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What assumptions do you bring to policy analysis? How did you develop these assumptions, and have they changed over time? How might they influence your work as a policy analyst?
2. In the involuntary commitment policy example, what would you have done if you had been Constance (the therapist)? What do you consider to be the pros and cons of allowing the therapist to transport a client?
3. We have defined social policies as a specific subset of public policies, but it is often difficult to distinguish when a policy is ''social.'' Identify at least three policies being heavily debated in current political discourse. Would you describe these as social policies? Why or why not?
4. According to Guba, there are three categories of policies: intention, implementation, and experience. Using the same policies identified in item 3, dialogue about how you would categorize these policies and why. What form do these policies take?
5. In Table 1.1, we list a number of policy forms. In a substantive area with which you are familiar, come up with examples of each form. How do these policy forms interact within your substantive area? What are the places in which they work together and in which they conflict? Who has the power to address the places in which they conflict?
6. In Table 1.2, we list levels of social policies and their operationalization. Given your response to item 5, discuss how the forms you've identified fit with various levels and scopes.
7. Different writers use terms in different ways. Review Table 1.3 and how we are defining frameworks, theories, models, and approaches. How do these concepts work with what you have learned in other places? Are there ways in which you would use these terms differently? Why or why not?