Family Ecology: An Approach To The Interdisciplinary Complexity Of The Study Of Family Phenomena*

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In this article we continue our discussion of the precursors to a Family Ecology by articulating the conceptual commonalities and differences that are found in the utilization of an ecological framework within the social and behavioral sciences. We then examine the implications of human ecology for an ecological study of the family. Finally, we identify and discuss four critical tenets for a Family Ecology which is offered as an alternative interdisciplinary approach to the complex study of family phenomena.

After reviewing a substantial amount of literature from a variety of disciplines (Herrin & Wright, 1988), we have found that there probably is only one commonly recognized and accepted element of ecological thought. Virtually everyone agrees, at the most fundamental level, that the science of ecology is concerned (at the very least) with the study of the interrelationships among organisms and their environments. Yet, it is quite disconcerting to think that this may be the only element about which a consensus exists. There is a certain amount of frustration involved in limiting the scope of ecology to a narrow set of widely recognized boundaries and precepts when "ecology" also represents so many things to so many people.

Seeking insight and guidance from documented historical references is of some help, but the exact origins and meanings of ecology remain as diverse and vague now as they ever were. We say this realizing others maintain that much progress has been

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made. Such statements typically are based on a comparison of the naturalistic "arcadian" philosophy (Worster, 1977) of the 18th century with the "high-tech" ecoenergetics of H.T. Odum (1983) and others who have captured the global energy-matter systems in complex energy systems diagrams.

Involved in the on-going debate of what ecology "is" or "is not", is the viewpoint that ecology has been elevated onto a pedestal and is dangerously close to a form of religious belief (McIntosh, 1985) or an "alternative" natural science (Cramer & van den Daele, 1985). In other words, some may argue that ecology has overstepped its functional boundaries as a science and has encroached inappropriately upon areas such as ethics and even metaphysics, which typically have been associated with philosophy. On another extreme, some are disillusioned with the overemphasis of the mechanistic frameworks of cybernetics, engineering, and systems theory in ecology. As we have stated before (Herrin & Wright, 1988), many have questioned the existence of "ecology" in all of the feedback loops and calorie charts which are typical of many current ecological studies.

Therefore, as part of the continuation of our inquiry into the historical precursors of ecology, human ecology, and the study of the family, we pose two basic questions. What are the similarities and differences that exist among the disciplines in the conceptual domain of human ecology?, and what are the implications of these commonalities for an ecological study of the family? We will proceed with a discussion of our responses to these important questions.

CONCEPTUAL COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE UTILIZATION OF ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS AND RELATED PARADIGMS

*Humans as Ecological Organisms*

The majority of disciplines now regard humans as ecological organisms. In other words, there is an ecology of humans that is accepted and studied within both the natural and social sciences. However, as we noted earlier (Herrin and Wright, 1988), this was not always the case. For example, in an historical analysis of the emergence of ecology, McIntosh (1985) made the following generalization:

An early distinction restricted biology and ecology to a concern with organisms controlled by their genetic makeup and the study of humans to other disciplines, presumably because of the cultural component of humans. The term human ecology...was applied to a variety of ways of looking at physical and cultural responses of humans, with little integration with general ecology or effective development of a unified field of human ecology. (p. 315)

Dunlap (1980) has argued that in the past, the social and behavioral sciences failed to understand that humankind was highly interdependent with its biophysical environment for survival. Consequently, humankind was not seen as being subject to the same ecological principles that governed other species. This perspective, which views humans as separate from nature, is part of the "exceptionalist paradigm" (Catton & Dunlap, 1980). With the advent of the "ecological crisis" and the environmental movement of the past two decades, however, a human ecology has re-emerged that includes humans as part of the overall picture in ecological studies.
We have found that many disciplines have included "ecology" in their efforts to study human phenomena within a much larger sphere which takes into account many more relevant factors. It is hoped that this enlarged sensitivity will transcend the limitations and "shallow" conceptual frameworks that were traditionally used within the respective disciplines when humans were regarded as an ecologically "exempt" species.

As many scholars increasingly promote an "ecological" perspective within the social and behavioral sciences, several issues emerge. Should there be a consensus among the disciplines so that we have one discipline representing human ecology? In contrast, should each discipline have its own perspectives about human ecology? Micklin (1984) has aptly analyzed this situation and identified a slightly different question. Is the solution to be "human ecologies or human ecology?" (p. 82). Our response to Micklin's question is to suggest that both options should occur.

It is argued here that there is an ecology of human species which includes professionals from different areas of expertise and fields of interest, as well as academicians from many disciplines and fields of study who are interested in synthesizing a unified ecology of humankind. Such a perspective is best represented currently in the Society for Human Ecology. This organization investigates and "emphasizes the intricate relationships of humans within their relevant contexts" (Borden, 1986, p. v) and is probably in the best position to argue the case for a human ecology. But the case for human ecologies also can be made. This is because the various interested academic disciplines have proceeded to study the ecology of humankind in a pluralistic manner, all too often going in different directions, using different "languages," at different levels, and with different units of analysis.

It was suggested during open forums at the Second (October, 1986) and Third (October, 1988) International Conferences of the Society for Human Ecology that the majority of participants attended the conferences because their respective disciplines and professional organizations were not offering or providing what they needed. Conference participants expressed the need to participate in an organization that would contribute and communicate more to their understanding of humankind and its interactions within a complex world. Nevertheless, those in attendance agreed that reaching a consensus on what human ecology "is" or "should be" was going to be a long, difficult task.

Yet each discipline that has pursued some aspect of human ecology has remained more concerned with its own "brand" of human ecology than with constructing a more unified perspective. The resulting product is a "compartmentalization" of human ecology. And until there is a general consensus about human ecology, there will continue to be the existence of a sociological human ecology, anthropological human ecology, ecological anthropology, human ecology/home economics, landscape ecology, urban ecology, ecological psychology, environmental psychology, family ecology, social ecology, feminist ecology, ad infinitum.

Organismic and Holistic Orientations

Another commonality that is characteristic of many disciplines focusing on human ecology is an emphasis on organismic and holistic orientations in conceptual frameworks and the tendency to avoid mechanistic or deterministic perspectives. Overton and Reese (1973) described this organismic orientation and its holistic emphasis as follows:

The basic metaphor in the organismic model is the living organism, an organized whole. The whole is organic rather than mechanical, and rather
than being the sum of its parts, the whole is presupposed by the parts and
gives meaning to the parts. (pp. 69-70)

It is no wonder that the concepts within ecology and human ecology are compatible
with a holistic paradigm. They share a central emphasis on the *interrelationships* among
organisms and their environments. Holistic characteristics are evident in ecological
concepts such as *ecosystem* where emphasis is placed on the realization that "everything
is connected to everything else," and that organisms cannot be studied in isolation or
separate from their interconnected "wholes" or contexts. This is not to say that ecology
is primarily or always holistic. The lack of a holistic orientation becomes apparent when
one views the way human ecology has been "compartmentalized" and "dichotomized"
(e.g., deep ecology and shallow ecology; big ecology and small ecology; masculinist
ecology and feminist ecology).

In fact, given the stated importance of *interrelationships* in both ecological and
holistic perspectives, one would think that this emphasis would enhance the
interrelationships between disciplines interested in holistic aspects of ecology and human
ecology. To the contrary, this is seldom the case, as McIntosh (1985) indicates.

The holistic approach, ideally characteristic of ecology, did not
traditionally appeal to government agencies. It is not easy to reverse decades
of institutionalized bureaucracy in government agencies or, for that matter, in
academic institutions or scientific societies. The holistic approach is not seen
equally clearly as desirable even by all ecologists, or at least their views of
what constitutes holism differ. (pp. 320-321)

Regardless of whether or not holism and ecology are mutually compatible, one
cannot doubt ecology's central emphasis on interrelationships among organisms and their
environments. This is a *transdisciplinary* construct of the highest order. Thus, as ecology
is applied to humans, it brings to the foreground the interconnectedness of people and
their environments. For example, this construct is integral to some perspectives of life-
span human development, as Lerner and Busch-Rossnagel (1981) suggest.

Developmental changes occur as a consequence of reciprocal
(bidirectional) relations between the active organism and the active context.
Just as the context changes the individual, the individual changes the context.
As such, by acting to change sources of their own development, by being a
product and a producer of their contexts, individuals effect their own
development. (1981, p. 3)

The construct of ecology also is important to family studies, as Bubolz and Whiren

An ecosystem approach emphasizes the biological and physical dimensions
of organism and environment, as well as their psycho-social characteristics and
interactions...An ecosystem model is based on a systems perspective, a
unifying holistic model which focuses on the inter-relationships and feedback
processes between components of a system. A basic tenet of this approach is
that a change in any part of the system affects the system as a whole and its
other sub-parts, creating the need for system-adaptation rather than simply
attending to a single part. (pp. 5-6)

These statements indicate how a host of concepts such as *reciprocal relations*,
*systems*, *holism*, and *interrelationships*, have "interconnected" with "ecology" to form a

The *FAMILY SCIENCE REVIEW* November, 1988
particular approach to the study of humans and their environments. What the labels are
does not matter. Whether the labels represent parts, elements, actors, organisms, or
humans, they are studied as interconnected and interdependent entities within their
contexts, their situations, their environments, always in situ. The term "embeddedness"
(Lerner & Busch-Rossnagel, 1981) is highly descriptive of this orientation, especially as
it pertains to dynamic reciprocal influences and the dialectic of organism and context.
The fact that human phenomena are not reducible to the "sum of their parts" is the
essence of the paradigm shift that is realized in a holistic perspective. Therefore, if one
seeks to understand any human phenomena of scientific or aesthetic interest in human
ecology, the whole, the interconnected systems, or the ecosystem(s) must be a central
consideration.

IMPLICATIONS OF HUMAN ECOLOGY FOR AN
ECOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE FAMILY

The commonalities found throughout human ecology have important implications
for the utilization of an ecological perspective in family studies. First, human ecology
and an ecological study of the family share the same underlying emphasis as described
by Borden.

Human ecology emphasizes the intricate relationships of humans within
their relevant contexts--expanding upon the scientific perspective of biological
ecology and embracing the approaches of the social sciences, the humanities,
arts and design. (italics added, 1986, p. v)

With this in mind, and under the broad rubric of human ecology, we propose that an
disciplinary perspective for studying families, their environments, and the intricate
relationships among them be added to other major conceptual frameworks contributing
to our understanding of family phenomena.

Inherent within the commonality of a contextual perspective is a plethora of
competing conceptual terminologies, which are attempts to provide a "language" for
capturing the essence and expanse of human ecology. This leads us to the second
important implication of the commonalities found within human ecology for an
ecological study of the family. Conceptual terminologies that originate in one discipline
or domain of ecology may or may not transfer well to another. Since human ecology is
multidisciplinary in content, there is a clear need for "bridge-building" and deriving a
common language so the various terminologies can be understood and communicated.
Otherwise, there are many intradisciplinary concepts that may be misconstrued or
misused when applied in an interdisciplinary manner.

For example, given that the application of a systems perspective in the study of the
family has been previously undertaken (e.g., Kantor & Lehr, 1975), it is important to
clarify and differentiate the study of the family as a system (Montgomery & Fewer, 1988;
O'Connor & Lubin, 1984; Vetere & Gale, 1987) from the study of the family as an
ecosystem (Andrews, Bubolz, & Paolucci, 1980; Kilssdonk, 1983; Melson, 1980; Paolucci,
Hall, & Axinn, 1977). Both perspectives emphasize the interconnectedness of families
as systems within contexts utilizing cybernetic processes.

By conceptualizing the family as an ecosystem, we assume cybernetic processes
(feedback, homeostasis, etc.) are present and effect family adaptation and growth. It has
been suggested in a natural science framework, however, that ecosystems are non-
cybernetic (Engelberg & Boyarsky, 1979). Although this argument was challenged

November, 1988 Family Science Review 257
(Jordan, 1981; McNaughton & Coughenour, 1981; Patten & Odum, 1981), the lesson learned is that we need to be careful when integrating knowledge from other ecological perspectives (e.g., community ecology, population ecology, bioecology, behavioral ecology). This is especially true when the terminology is used to describe and explain family dynamics (Montgomery & Fewer, 1988).

Another case in point is the association of systems theory and the ecosystems concept with a holistic perspective. Recently, Huchingson (1985) has challenged the systems perspective by proposing that this perspective promotes a "technocratic elitism" which runs counter to the holistic paradigm. He asserts that "a systems approach" has been promoted falsely as "the only viable means by which earth's multitudinous and complex problems may be successfully inventoried, addressed, and solved" (p. 441). Hence, Ludvig van Bertalanffy is often referred to as the "Gnostic Hero" (Huchingson, 1985). Similarly, several family scholars (Bogdan, 1984; Massey, 1986; Mook, 1985) have discussed analogous "problems" that surface when emphasizing a systems perspective in family studies. Massey (1986) has cautioned that family researchers "can obscure the composing parts by fixating on the whole" (p. 24) when they utilize a systems approach for studying or working with families. He has warned that:

Cybernetics and physical analogies can overemphasize the system at the expense of understanding the dynamics of its constituent members. Their mechanical orientation does not fully explicate the systemic processes of human families...Remaining wedded to the cybernetic model threatens to restrain further progress in elucidating family systems. (1986, p. 35)

This critique has important implications for the use of an ecological perspective for studying the family. How are systems and ecosystems similar or different? What constitutes the "eco" in ecosystem when it is applied to the study of the family? How is the family an ecosystem? Is Family Ecology the study of the family as an ecosystem or the ecological study of the family? Furthermore, as the ecological perspective emphasizes the dynamic and reciprocal interrelationships among families and their environments, we will have to avoid the trappings of over-emphasizing the "system" (i.e., family ecosystem) at the expense of the family members who constitute the system.

Since human ecology is integrative and interrelational, it depends on inputs of information from many different academic disciplines. This brings us to the final implication of our survey of human ecology for an ecological study of the family. In short, what is said of human ecology in the following observation, can also be said of an ecological study of the family.

It [human ecology] depends on inputs of information from many different academic disciplines, and thus benefits from the active involvement of 'sympathetic specialists' who are interested in the integrative ecological process and who are, in the context of a given human ecological or biosocial problem or issue, willing to contribute pertinent knowledge and ideas from their particular areas of expertise. (Boyd, 1986, p. 7)

Therefore, an ecological study of the family also should be integrative and interrelational. Although it has been argued that family studies have progressed to the point of being a bona fide discipline (Burr & Leigh, 1983), we believe that family studies is more multidisciplinary as a field than as a full-fledged discipline (e.g., famology, familyology). With time, family studies will become more integrative. As a field becomes more integrative, it also evolves into an interdisciplinary perspective (Jungen, 1986). Because this issue is critical for an ecological perspective, it will be discussed in more detail in another paper.
detail in the next section. At this point, for reasons outlined in the remainder of our paper, we propose Family Ecology as the most suitable label for representing and describing an interdisciplinary ecological perspective for studying the dynamic interrelationships among families and their environments and contexts.

TOWARDS A FAMILY ECOLOGY

In a previously published article (Herrin & Wright, 1988), we discussed the background of ecology, human ecology, and the "ecological" precursors to current conceptual studies in the fields of home economics, family studies, family therapy, and life-span human development. The major objective of that article was to establish a historical legacy of the ecological perspective as utilized in both the natural and social/behavioral sciences. Furthermore, we proposed in the earlier article that ecology has been designated and described as many things: a science, a philosophy, a paradigm, and as a guide to ethical and moral issues. We also have documented that in the social and natural sciences, many disciplines have integrated ecological frameworks in their theoretical and empirical studies to understand and comprehend a variety of complex interactions among the organism (human) and its environments. (For a diagrammatic representation of these areas of study, see Figure 1.)

The areas of family studies and home economics are no exceptions to this process of integration. In fact, an ecological focus in home economics (i.e., home ecology) was initiated at the turn of the century (East, 1980; Kilsdonk, 1983). Recently, the utilization of ecological frameworks in family studies and home economics has increased dramatically. At the same time, many colleges and departments have changed their names from Home Economics to Human Ecology, a reflection of renewed interest in studying "people interacting with their environments, and especially the reciprocal relationships that humans have with their environments" (Beck, 1985, p. 1).

Perhaps the greatest catalyst for the adoption of an ecological focus in many colleges and departments affiliated with home economics and family studies comes from a recognition by both faculty and students within the family studies field. Increasingly, they have emphasized that "we live in a time of dramatic family change" and that an ecological perspective can facilitate the development of "systematic knowledge about family issues and family policy" (Mayer & Zick, 1984, p. 1).

The traditional American family (e.g., the "Ozzie and Harriet" family: breadwinner husband, homemaker wife, and children) is an elusive entity, as the "family" now appears in a myriad of forms and lifestyles. Therefore, when policy making decisions are formulated and implemented for the "family" at the federal, state, and local levels, we are compelled to ask: For which "family" are decisions being formulated and implemented?

Furthermore, when faced with understanding family dynamics in a rapidly changing society, many professionals have found the traditional conceptual frameworks and methods to be limited in application and in explaining the complex reciprocating factors among families and the variety of contexts in which they live. Mayer and Zick (1984) have succinctly described the advantages and benefits of utilizing an ecological perspective to facilitate "new ways of studying family phenomena" in the following statement.

The primary focus of [traditional] family studies has been on the internal dynamics of the family....Family Ecology still urges the investigation of internal family dynamics but within the broader context of the family's natural, human
Figure 1. Historical Origins of Ecology and Human Ecology
constructed, and social environments....[Rather than viewing the family as the mere product of environmental forces] Family Ecology views families as active, creative agents of change....in which functions are reverting back to families....The Family Ecology framework is not only useful in describing and analyzing the behavior of families; it is also a valuable tool in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of public policies. (pp. 3-4)

We are proposing that one of the primary means by which the goals and objectives of a Family Ecology framework (i.e., the development of systematic knowledge about family issues and family policy within an ecological perspective) can be attained and realized is by the active integration and convergence of knowledge about family dynamics from a diversity of disciplines and academic areas. As has been demonstrated in other fields of study (Micklin, 1984; Micklin & Choldin, 1984), it is important to continue the interdisciplinary emphasis on family studies. The field will be enhanced by integrating the predictive and explanatory powers of various theories from different disciplines as they apply to the complex study of family phenomena.

Doherty (1986) has suggested that the interdisciplinary aspects of "complementarity" (a term typically associated with quantum mechanics) "may offer the best prospect for understanding family phenomena" (p. 258). In other words, various theories from different disciplines are all equally valid in their explanatory power for family phenomena. At the same time, they also may be mutually contradictory. In this way, the family studies field would remain flexible to "competing explanations" from various related disciplines.

Of course, what we are proposing is not new or dramatically innovative. Yet the most simple and obvious goals are often the hardest to implement and attain. Family Ecology has the unique capability to integrate and "weave" various perspectives and issues about families into a cohesive and comprehensive "whole." Family Ecology is a descriptive label that does not connote a new discipline. It does not subsume or replace the existing area or field known as "family studies." Rather, Family Ecology is a prismatic label that emphasizes and is represented by four major tenets:

(1) A philosophical orientation that follows closely the framework of three levels of world views as proposed by Altman and Rogoff (1987): the interactional; the organismic; and the transactional world views.

(2) A methodological pluralism for investigating family phenomena with both qualitative and quantitative methods that capture the dynamic interactions of families and contexts.

(3) The promotion and synthesis of an integrated curriculum on family phenomena based on knowledge and conceptual issues from complementary disciplines (i.e., psychology, sociology, biology, anthropology, consumer studies, history, ethics, architecture, design, geography, urban planning, law, and political science).

(4) The active promotion of policy and intervention programs based on the synthesis of the stated tenets mentioned above.

We now will briefly elaborate on the four tenets of a Family Ecology framework.
Tenet 1: A Taxonomy of Ecological Perspectives

There is an imperative need to clarify and differentiate the burgeoning growth of terminology that has been utilized in home economics, family studies, family therapy, and human development to describe the interrelations among families and their contexts. Consider the following representative and competing terms that are found throughout the social and behavioral sciences that have or could be applied to the study of family phenomena:

- Structure/Function
- Organismic
- Holism
- Gestalt
- Interactionism
- Contextualism
- Transactionalism
- Dialectics
- General Systems Theory
- Social Systems Analysis
- Micro-, Meso-, Exo-, Macro-, and Chronosystems
- Dynamic Interactionism
- Developmental Contextualism
- Probabilistic Epigenesis
- Environmental Psychology

- Landscape Ecology
- Evolutionary Ecology
- Deep Ecology
- Community Ecology
- Ecosystems
- Eco-Feminism
- Ecosysteming
- Behavioral Ecology
- Human Ecology
- Urban Ecology
- Social Ecology
- Ecological Anthropology
- Ecological Psychology
- Eco-Behavioral Analysis
- Ecological Demography
- Ecosystemic Epistemology

We encourage the development of conceptual terminology to describe the dynamics of and give clarity to the interrelations of families with their environments and contexts. We also, however, need to carefully scrutinize our tendencies to adopt "new" terminology and labels that potentially could be redundant, confusing, and create some eco-babble instead of a common language.

This matter of clarifying related concepts and terminology applies directly to the use of the ecosystem concept, one of the major concepts in the natural sciences that has been adapted conceptually to human organizations in the social and behavioral sciences. Young (1974) has observed that "no one seems very sure of how to define a human ecosystem and no one can be positive what is meant when a student from another discipline uses the term" (p. 86). We agree with Young's observation and are concerned that this example (i.e., human ecosystem) is probably just the "tip of the conceptual iceberg" of ecological terminology in the social and behavioral sciences.

It is unfortunate that ecology has come to mean so many things to so many people. This problem is amplified to the degree that people glibly compare and borrow from different ecologies (e.g., general ecology, bioecology, human ecology, social ecology). This is particularly problematic when this is done without considering whether or not a construct or principle of ecology in the natural sciences actually has an analogous meaning or usage in the area of human ecology to which it is applied. Such examples of slippage across ecologies will continue until we acquire the capability and understanding to carefully compare ecology as it is used in the natural sciences with its use in the social and behavioral sciences (Richerson, 1977).
By way of example, one only has to survey current indices, abstracts, and/or listings of college curricula to acquire a sense of the popular proliferation of ecology as it is applied, seemingly, to every human phenomena, event, and situation that can be studied, measured, and reported. In order to illustrate this panorama, we have listed below examples of current research which proposes to study various particular human phenomena from an ecological perspective.

The ecology of adolescents' marijuana abuse (Smith, Koob, & Wirtz, 1985)

An ecology of affiliation (McPherson, 1983)

The ecology of aging: Neighborhood satisfaction in an older population (La Gory, Ward, & Sherman, 1985)

The ecology of child maltreatment: Identifying and characterizing high-risk neighborhoods (Zuravin & Taylor, 1987)

Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives (Bronfenbrenner, 1986)

The ecology of racial discrimination in housing: An exploratory model (Galster, 1987)

The ecology of rape victimization: A case study of Buffalo, New York (Ploughman & Stensrud, 1987)

Ecological determinants of parenting (Reis, Barbera-Stein, & Bennett, 1986)

The ecological paradigm in child, youth, and family services: Implications for policy and practice (Whittaker, Schinke, & Gilchrist, 1986)

An ecological perspective on duration of foster care (Milner, 1987)

Coping and ecology: An integrative model for community psychology (Holahan & Stearly, 1980)

Toward ecologically based intervention in residential treatment for children (Guterman & Blythe, 1986)

Children's adjustment to parental divorce: An ecological perspective (Kurdek, 1987)

Families with physically handicapped children: Social ecology and family systems (Kazak, 1986)

Group home location and host neighborhood attributes: An ecological analysis (Hall & Joseph, 1988)

This list is far from exhaustive, but it illustrates the ways ecology as a conceptual and methodological apparatus has permeated the social and behavioral sciences, including related areas of home economics and family studies. Aside from the numerous theoretical and conceptual studies that have been promoted by various respective authors as "ecological," many empirically oriented studies have been designated "ecological" based on a completely different set of criteria that is discussed in greater detail under Tenet

November, 1988

Family Science Review

263
2. Unfortunately, there are not any "across-the-board" agreements as to what makes a conceptual study or research project ecological, aside from an author's self-selected definition.

Another fundamental transdisciplinary "ecological" agreement appears to be that human behavior is not simply an outcome of personality alone (e.g., trait theories) or the environment alone (e.g., behaviorist theories), rather it is a function of both. This formulation relates well to ecological studies that emphasize the interrelationships (and the mutual dependence) among organisms and their environments. Beyond that, we have found in our review of the literature, that the label ecology has been associated with a wide range of issues and applications from being a "holistic" conceptual orientation to representing an elaborate "kitchen sink" research design that includes every variable possible or one that uses some sophisticated multivariate statistical technique (e.g., LISREL analysis).

We are not saying that all previous published research in the social and behavioral sciences has misused (or abused) the label ecology. Rather, we are concerned about the ever increasing use of the label of ecology by researchers who neglect to discuss what "ecological" conceptual framework they are using or how or why their study is ecological. If the label is used to make a study sound more appealing because it appears to be more comprehensive by using a "kitchen sink design," the study fails to justify itself as an ecological study. Instead, it is much more likely to present itself as ecology as little more than "window dressing" (McIntosh, 1985, p. 308). An even more disturbing tendency is for authors of "so-called" ecological studies to fail to identify references or citations of previous studies that have used an ecological framework or research design upon which new studies could be based. Such practices deny historical sources and particular threads of ecological thought and can only aggravate the conceptual fragmentation of human ecology.

In an attempt to remedy this fragmentation, at the same time respecting the "pluralistic" nature of ecology and human ecology (McIntosh, 1987), we have begun to develop an organizational framework which we believe has great utility in providing structure and a basis of synthesis for the growing numbers of conceptual and empirical studies purporting to be "ecological." It is our hope that this framework will be useful in family studies, home economics, family therapy, and human development, as well as in the other social and behavioral sciences. The framework is based on Altman's and Rogoff's (1987) typology of world views (or philosophical orientations) in psychology. The four world views are: trait, interactional, organismic, and transactional. These world views are differentiated according to:

Different assumptions about the nature of person-environment relationships, varying conceptions about the philosophy and goals of science, and potentially different theories, methods, and strategies of research. (p. 7)

Altman and Rogoff (1987) developed this taxonomy of world views as a way of providing structure to the different conceptual and methodological studies in environmental psychology that use various units of analysis and temporal aspects of psychological phenomena. We believe this framework also has great potential for facilitating the process of identifying studies that are indeed "ecological" and to what degree or level such studies advance ecological principles in theory, methodology, and practice. Since it is beyond the scope of this article to fully present the dimensions of this framework, we are completing a more comprehensive discussion which addresses the use of different world views and ecological perspectives in home economics, family studies, family therapy, and human development (Wright & Herrin, in preparation).
However, at this point, we will provide a brief description of the properties of this taxonomic framework.

Following along the same lines as Altman and Rogoff (1987), the world views (and their respective goals and philosophy of science) are used to structure the different ecological perspectives in the literature. This is done according to the explicit and implicit use of ecology as a conceptual or theoretical orientation and in the use of particular methodologies in research design. Before proceeding, however, we need to address two caveats regarding the proposed taxonomic framework as it relates to structuring the literature of human ecology. Although the framework of world views we have adapted is designed to "sort out" the vast array of conceptual and analytical research which utilizes an ecological perspective, our goal is not to apply rigid categories to each example of ecological research found. Instead, we hope to provide a framework that will provide general guidelines toward the ultimate goal of understanding that there are different levels of ecological research.

Thus it is entirely possible that an ecological study may contain several "ideas" from each world view. For example, in a representative ecological study the conceptual orientation may be associated primarily with the organismic level, while the methodology is more characteristic of the interactional world view level. We do not think that any one world view provides the "best" or "correct" ecological approach toward investigating and understanding human behavior in a family context. World views "result in different forms of inquiry, understanding, and theory" (Altman & Rogoff, 1987, p. 36). Thus, each world view provides a different ecological "lens" for perceiving human phenomena and what is taken to be important and relevant.

In Figure 2, the trait level of world views has been omitted from our taxonomic framework. Research that is associated with this level is not considered ecological because the focus either is strictly centered on the individual or on the environment. The fundamental ecological premise in our framework is that "environmental and situational factors play an important role in human activity, often in combination with person qualities" (Altman & Rogoff, 1987, pp. 11, 14). This represents (at the very least) the basic foundation of ecological studies that can be organized in our framework: a conceptual orientation that stresses the interrelationships among individuals, families, and their environments with a methodology that attempts to measure these in order to understand the interrelating effects of one on another.

Of course there are more complex issues to resolve. The unique aspect of our framework is its ability to organize ecological research (given that it has met the fundamental premise of ecological research) on several key issues that are characteristic of the different levels of each world view. For example, ecological research can be associated with certain levels (based on world view assumptions) by examining how each study examines the role of the environment, temporal factors, units of analysis, philosophies of science (e.g., assumptions about causation), and the role or position of observers vis a vis those being observed or the family phenomena being described.

In summary, these criteria can help establish a taxonomic structure for research that could be part of a Family Ecology. Family Ecology is not associated with a single paradigm or theory per se. Family Ecology integrates various world views, conceptual frameworks and research studies that operate within the interactional, organismic, and transactional world view domains (Wright & Herrin, in preparation). Just as there is not a single theory in other fields of emphasis like gerontology or life-span development (Baltes, 1987), Family Ecology offers a metatheoretical view of family phenomena.
Figure 2. A taxonomy of Family Ecology over three world views and across related conceptual, methodological, and policy domains with representative examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORLD VIEW</th>
<th>CONCEPTUAL</th>
<th>METHODOLOGICAL</th>
<th>POLICY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERACTIONAL</td>
<td>Identify qualities of persons and environments; qualities treated as separate; interaction between parts. (Bronfenbrenner, 1966)</td>
<td>Focus on elements and relations between elements; observers are separate and objective. (Young &amp; Gatelly, 1988)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORGANISMIC</td>
<td>Holistic entities composed of separate parts; relations and interactions yield qualities of the whole; &quot;more than the sum of the parts.&quot; (Andrews, Buboltz, &amp; Paolucci, 1980)</td>
<td>Focus on principles that govern the whole; holistic systems assume change is tentative; system stability; observers are separate and objective. (Kantor &amp; Lehr, 1975)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRANSACTIONAL</td>
<td>Holistic entities, not separate parts; mutually defining temporal qualities. (Dovey, 1985)</td>
<td>Confluence events people-place-time; changes occur continuously; emergent, not directional; phenomenal, ethnographic. (Pennington, 1986)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tenet 2: Methodological Pluralism

Aside from the numerous theoretical and conceptual studies that have been promoted by various respective authors as "ecological," many empirically oriented studies and several alternative modes of research (e.g., grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnomethodology) have been designated "ecological" based on a different set of criteria. For example, when researchers say they are collecting ecological data, this may mean that the data are collected by direct observation. Other researchers may infer they are using ecological methods because they utilize non-experimental designs (Willems, 1973).

In the area of eco-behavioral analysis, the "eco" in "eco-behavioral analysis" was added to indicate increased attention to "identifying a larger set of environmental variables which influence behavior" (Rogers-Warren, 1984, p. 287). Thus, for many disciplines, "ecology" functions as a research label to represent the expansion and utilization of variables from a variety of environmental settings that are included in research designs and statistical analyses in an attempt to capture a more complete "picture" of the influences or causal effects on selected outcomes of endogenous variables. Since the term "ecology" has become associated (naturally) with "something to do with the environment," many researchers have capitalized on this association. They have identified ecology as a methodological orientation focusing on all the relevant environmental variables that possibly could be included in their research designs.

In many cases, ecological research may be associated with studying person(s)-in-context (Rosnow & Georgoudi, 1986) where "context" may mean any number of things (e.g., family, neighborhood, rural and/or urban, state, region, ad infinitum). Given our penchant for careful use of terms, however, we should point out that Rosnow and other "contextualists" are far more careful in their explication of what a "context" is or is not than suggested by our use of the term. In fact, in view of the discussion of contextualism by Rosnow and Georgoudi, our use of "context" and "environment" as virtually interchangeable terms is in many cases erroneous. They identify some definitional properties of contexts that are simply too exclusive in their meaning and application for "environment" and "context" to be synonymous. But for the most part, as far as we have determined, researchers in the family studies related fields ignore or are unaware of these differences and use the terms interchangeably.

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977a, 1977b, 1979, 1986) has been a major influence in advocating a contextual emphasis in ecological research in family studies and human development for many years (see also Pence, 1988). He has been very active in altering the fundamental underlying assumptions of research in human development and related fields by stressing the importance of research in naturalistic settings that encompass much larger views for observation. He argues:

The understanding of human development demands going beyond the direct observation of behavior on the part of one or two persons in the same place; it requires examination of multiperson systems of interaction not limited to a single setting and must take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing the subject. (1977b, p. 514)

This "contextual" perspective also has been promoted as the "new" direction in family research for the next decade by Hill (1981). Hill maintains that the "final challenge for the 1980s [is] the developing of research designs for capturing the family as a transacting energy system with its near to far environment of space and time" (p. 257).
Bronfenbrenner (1977a) also proposes that ecological research must transcend the simple foundation of ecological validity. That is, research must be conducted in "real-life" situations rather than laboratory settings that are artificial and "unnatural." Bronfenbrenner consistently has advocated the following elements as characteristics for ecological research:

(1) Bi-Directional influences
(2) N-Person models (beyond dyadic models)
(3) Investigate multiple environmental settings
(4) Analyze both characteristics of subjects and contexts
(5) Analyze changes in both humans and in the micro- and macro-structures that envelope humans
(6) Research cannot only be behavioristic (objective observation) but must take into account the phenomenology of human ecology (what a particular ecological context means to the person in it)

Certainly these guidelines for ecological research in human development, family studies, and related areas are steps in the right direction. But more steps must be taken to allow a wider representation of research designs and methods to reflect the different levels of ecological perspectives that are possible within the domain of Family Ecology (see Tenet I). We are proposing that a Family Ecology should be based on an "ecumenical" or pluralistic research perspective that integrates the traditional positivistic paradigm with newer research paradigms (Altman, in press; Brown, 1985; McGrath, in press; Folklinghorne, 1983; Reason & Rowan, 1981; Rogers, 1983; Strauss, 1987; Thomas & Wilcox, 1987).

In relation to this proposal, research topics such as the "meaning of home" (Korosec-Serfaty, 1985; Sixsmith, 1986) and the qualities of neighborhood networks (Altman, Werner, Oxley, & Haggard, 1987; Oxley, Haggard, Werner, & Altman, 1986; Werner, Altman, Oxley, & Haggard, 1987) are excellent examples of research designs that pertain to family studies and are generated from alternative research paradigms. Given the "pragmatics" (Larzelere & Klein, 1987) of family research (e.g., apparent need to conduct and publish mainstream research, scarce resources, restricted funding opportunities), it is highly unlikely that alternative research paradigms will be allowed to compete effectively with traditional research designs. We believe this is a critical concern for all fields of study. There clearly is a need for greater tolerance for and acceptance of different modes of research. Larzelere and Klein (1987) point this out in the recent Handbook of Marriage and Family:

The optimal methodology for a particular study depends on several factors, including the nature of the topic, the specific research question, what is already known in the literature, and the resources available to the researcher. There is no single best methodology. (p. 125)

Following this line of thinking, we are in agreement with Klein, Jorgenson, and Miller (1978) and others (e.g., Baltes, Reese, & Nesselroade, 1977) who suggest that other methods of data collection beyond the traditional survey and observational techniques should be employed in research studies. Klein et al. (1978) recommend the following:

We can make greater use of the relatively sophisticated segmented and sequential designs for identifying the sources of variation in developmental change functions. Finally, we can go beyond the conventional dichotomy between non-parametric methods and parametric techniques, combining different perspectives in a single approach.

Finally, it is important to note that this approach may be applied to research topics related to the study of family functioning. For example, Korosec-Serfaty (1985) explored the "meaning of home" and analyzed the qualities of neighborhood networks (Altman, Werner, Oxley, & Haggard, 1987; Oxley, Haggard, Werner, & Altman, 1986; Werner, Altman, Oxley, & Haggard, 1987). These topics are excellent examples of research designs that pertain to family studies and are generated from alternative research paradigms.
between survey and direct observational methods and not only employ novel methods such as the retrieval of archival and biographical materials but also combine methods for validation purposes and to provide complementary perspectives. (pp. 131-132)

Finally, perhaps the most important concern of the second tenet of Family Ecology pertains to "mixing or matching" the conceptual and methodological levels of ecological perspectives as represented in our taxonomic structure (see Figure 2). It is possible that an "ecological" study may conceptually emphasize the holistic nature of a particular family phenomena which "fits" within the organic perspective level of ecological perspectives (e.g., emphasizing reciprocal influences among all variables; focusing on principles that govern the whole). Yet, the methodological design of the same study may use statistical techniques that typically are associated with the interactional level of ecological perspectives. For example, at the interactional level, the focus is on elements and relations among elements which utilizes unidirectional and linear assumptions found in statistical models such as multiple regression or path analysis.

Clearly, the conceptual and methodological examples mentioned above could be considered part of an "ecological" study, yet it highlights how many studies can use a methodological design that does not directly address the assumptions of a particular conceptual ecological perspective. The avoidance of "mixing" the conceptual and methodological levels, especially as it applies to the different world view levels of ecological perspectives is recommended with good reasons that should be apparent. As Spanier, Lerner, and Aquilino (1978) have pointed out, most data analytic techniques are incapable of handling reciprocal relationships which are characteristic of "holistic" and "systems" perspectives. This is a major obstacle to assessing the "ecological" nature of family interactions at the organismic level.

This whole matter is further complicated by understanding that reciprocal causation is a difficult matter for measurement and analysis. This is especially true for issues of "causation" in the social and behavioral sciences. Some advancements have been made in this area, particularly in estimating structural equation models by means of the LISREL program (Sorbom & Joreskog, 1981; Sorbom & Joreskog, 1982). Yet, we still must keep in mind that the LISREL program is based on linear model assumptions. Furthermore, because the program is so versatile, it is also very complex and certain conditions must be met before theoretical models can be interpreted and evaluated correctly (Hayduk, 1987; Pedhazur, 1982). Given these caveats, it appears that in general:

Current statistical techniques, based on linear mathematical models and buttressed by Aristotelian logic, are not fully appropriate to analyze contextual reciprocities. Circular statistical models, based on dialectical logic, and, as such, attentive to the unique measurement issues raised by this logic, will have to be devised. (Spanier, Lerner, & Aquilino, 1978, pp. 329-330)

Thus, at this time, most current research designs and statistical analyses are inadequate for capturing ecological relationships in family interactions at certain levels of our taxonomy. While it is recognized that statistical analyses for assessing reciprocal relationships are limited, the continued attention to implementing a pluralistic methodological framework will help advance the quality and rigor of "ecological" research.
Doherty (1986) makes a similar argument by stating that if family studies can accept "the possibility of equally valid, but mutually contradictory theories" (p. 259) and integrate them, then this effort "may offer the best prospect for understanding family phenomena" (p. 258). Currently, there are many 'equally valid theories' that compete in explaining family phenomena. For the past several decades the family studies field has relied heavily on theoretical and conceptual activity generated from the "parent" disciplines of psychology, sociology, and to a lesser degree, home economics. The following conceptual frameworks are typically identified as the major (past and present) theoretical orientations in the family studies area (Burr, Hill, Nye & Reiss, 1979a, 1979b; Christensen, 1964; Hill, 1966; Hill & Hansen, 1960; Holman & Burr, 1980; Nye & Berardo, 1966, 1973):

1. Structure-Function
2. Institutional
3. Situational
4. Interactional
5. Developmental
6. Exchange
7. Conflict
8. Symbolic Interactional

Recently the general systems approach and literature from the life-span human development perspective have provided additional conceptual frameworks and terminology for understanding family dynamics. But family studies is still heavily reliant upon and indebted to sociology and psychology for its conceptual frameworks and theoretical orientations. There is a great need to accept and to integrate conceptual frameworks and terminologies from other disciplines. We strongly encourage this even though it is an arduous task. Some have observed that such a task is close to impossible:

These disciplines have acquired so much information about the family that it is becoming extremely difficult for anyone that is well grounded and keeping current in one of the more traditional disciplines to keep up...There is much more than a minimal amount of theory and research; there is almost more than any one scholar can digest. (Burr & Leigh, 1983, pp. 468-469)

The difficulty of the task suggests to us the need for developing collective strategies for processing and integrating the enormous amounts of available relevant information and scholarship. The integration and synthesis of conceptual frameworks from other disciplines has the potential to stimulate and increase the theoretical and empirical rigor of studying family phenomena. Consequently, keeping abreast of and synthesizing information from other disciplines regarding family phenomena is fundamental and central to Family Ecology. Despite the lure of gaining a "specialized" name (e.g., Famology, Familogy) within academic institutions (which seem to encourage specialization rather than the development of interdisciplinary programs), we do not think a study of family dynamics falls so conveniently under the domain of one discipline.

We are in agreement with Klein (1985, 1983) who argues that the concept of "interdisciplinarity" is crucial to the understanding of social and technological problems. Within this concept is the "inexorable logic that the real problems of society do not come in disciplinary-shaped blocks" (Klein, 1985, p. 118). And in the case of studying family phenomena, the same logic applies. Therefore, we propose that the study of family phenomena will be best understood and explained by accepting the validity of competing conceptual frameworks and converging disciplinary contributions.

Many of these disciplines, of course, owe much of their legitimacy to the studies of family phenomena. This is especially true of the field of sociobiology in which the research, especially of the recent years, has contributed so much knowledge about family phenomena. The further contributions of this discipline, however, remain largely to illustrate the importance of the study of family phenomena.

A group of current sociobiological research has been to address the evolutionary roots of the traits which are considered to be the "building blocks" of complex family patterns. These disciplines have contributed to the understanding of the evolutionary perspectives from which one interprets the family. One of the most important contributions of sociobiology is the recognition of the role of kinship in the evolution of social behavior. The idea that kinship structures influence the development of social and psychological traits is not new (Faux & Wilson, 1965; Wilson, 1975). But the recent emphasis on "kin ecology" by sociobiologists has led to a greater appreciation of the role of kinship in shaping human behavior. This has been particularly evident in the study of father-child interactions.
conceptual frameworks and by realizing the potential gain that would follow from a convergence or synthesis of competing frameworks.

Many other disciplines or academic fields of interest (e.g., biology, anthropology, ethics, consumer studies, architecture, design, history, etc.) also have investigated aspects of family phenomena. Such fields currently are engaged in scholarly discourse from which the "traditional" areas of family studies (psychology, sociology, and home economics) also could benefit through active interdisciplinary exchange and communication. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the many contributions of each of these "other" disciplines to family studies, we will include a cursory overview of the contributions of biology (or behavioral ecology) to family studies to illustrate this point.

A growing body of literature is emerging from the biological sciences pertaining to research about family phenomena (Filsinger, 1988; Phillips & Farrington, 1987). Much of the renewed interest in biological explanations of family phenomena has been attributed to the extension of the volatile principles of sociobiology to humans and human reproductive behavior. Sociobiology is defined as the systematic study of the biological basis of all social behavior (Boorman & Levitt, 1980; Williams, 1981; Wilson, 1975). Of course the tenets of sociobiology are not without their critics (Kitcher, 1985; Lewontin, Rose, & Kamin, 1984; Sahlins, 1976). However, the synthesis of evolutionary biology and the social and behavioral sciences has continued to show increased momentum in both theoretical and empirical studies (Alexander, 1985; Barash, 1986; Charlesworth, 1986; Durham, 1978; Graubard, 1985; Greene, Morgan, & Barash, 1980; Hallpike, 1986; Kort, 1983, 1986). These integrative efforts also have produced many related terms and areas of study such as: human ethology, biosociology, social biology, behavioral ecology, and sociobiology.

The application of evolutionary biology to the study of the family (Betzig, Mulder, & Turke, 1988; Crawford, Smith, & Krebs, 1987; Hughes, 1988) has produced many interesting interpretations about family phenomena. It also has provided additional and complementary information to the scope of literature that predominately is focused on the psycho-social aspects of family phenomena. The conceptual works of van den Berghe (1978, 1979, 1980), Strayer (1984), Leibowitz (1978), and Melotti (1981, 1984) are especially exemplary. What is also interesting to note is the increasing number of articles regarding family phenomena in journals outside of the "in-house" journals found in family studies and home economics (i.e., Family Relations, Journal of Marriage and the Family, Journal of Family Issues, Home Economics Research Journal). For example, the journal of Social Biology has published many scholarly articles that relate to both the biological and socio-cultural forces that influence families. The journal of Ethology and Sociobiology also has published relevant articles relating to family phenomena.

Representative articles from other journals have investigated social relationships, reproductive success, and descriptive characteristics of American women from an evolutionary perspective (Essock-Vitale & McGuire, 1985a, 1985b). Other topics include the familial aspects of Mormon culture (polygyny) from a sociobiological perspective (Faux & Miller, 1984; Mealey, 1985); bio-social perspectives of child abuse (Daly & Wilson, 1985); the sociobiology of bereavement (Littlefield & Rushton, 1986); and the tactics of "mate selection" (Buss, 1988). In other examples, Lamb and Goldberg (1982) and Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1987) have utilized a biosocial (e.g., behavioral ecology) perspective to analyze parental behavior and parental roles, especially the father-child relationship.
Lamb et al. (1987) utilized a behavioral ecology approach to the study of the father-child relationship because of its potential for explaining human behavior at multiple levels. Lamb et al. made this observation:

"Unfortunately, it is clear that research in the behavioral sciences seldom addresses the issues of primary relevance to the questions raised by behavioral ecology; indeed, one has to wonder whether the constructs popular among sociologists and psychologists are the most useful when it comes to explaining even the immediate (i.e., proximate) determinants of human behavior." (p. 112)

The article on the father-child relationship by Lamb et al. (1987) is but one of many excellent articles that have been published through the sponsorship of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). The SSRC has published a series of books that emphasizes biosocial perspectives. They have examined the biosocial dimensions of child abuse and neglect (Gelles & Lancaster, 1987); school-aged pregnancy and parenthood (Lancaster & Hamburg, 1986); and parenting across the life span (Lancaster, Altmann, Rossi, & Sherrod, 1987) as well as other topics related to family life (e.g., human birth, human reproductive ecology).

In summary, biological perspectives have provided both alternative and complementary explanations to family phenomena in both phylogenetic and ontogenetic "time frames." With an active integration of biological perspectives (Corning, 1983; Magnusson & Allen, 1983) and perspectives from other disciplines into the traditional domain of family studies, the development of an interdisciplinary focus in Family Ecology can be realized.

Tenet 4: Active Promotion of Policy and Intervention Programs

It was previously proposed that one of the primary goals and objectives of Family Ecology was the development of systematic knowledge about family issues and policy. This tenet is perhaps the most visible and important dimension of Family Ecology because it represents the "products" of what the ecological perspectives in theory and research can contribute that directly benefit families. Based on an accurate and scientific approach to the ecological investigation of family phenomena, an ecologically-informed policy decision-making process can then provide the appropriate programs, materials, and information for targeted families.

All too often, however, we have come to realize that most policy decisions have been made assuming that the majority of American families are still represented by a "family type" that is no longer in the majority. In reality, the diversity of families in the United States almost defies categorization. But this is only the beginning of the plethora of problems faced in the area of "family policy" (Schneider, 1985; Steiner, 1981). Even when accurate portrayals of what constitutes American families are presented for legislators and the general public alike, there is uncertainty throughout the general citizenry as to whether or not the government (at any level) should interfere or intrude into the "private" domain of the family (Kamerman & Kahn, 1978, 1981). Certainly this reflects the political polemic that is present in our current two-party system (Democratic and Republican) about the proper role of government in the lives of citizens and families in this country (Berger & Berger, 1983; Nock, 1987; Steiner, 1981).

Indeed, beginning with the administration of Jimmy Carter and continuing throughout the Reagan administration, the "plight of the family" has become a political football of sorts as rhetoric has replaced action in the efforts to provide adequate...
programs to strengthen families. Issues about the family have become "politicized" to the point that families, politics, and religion have become uncomfortably intertwined. And many feel this "intertwining" could seriously jeopardize any constructive progress for effective family policy in the present or future (Pankhurst & Houseknecht, 1983).

Despite the lack of any national family policy in our country, it is recognized that the courts have become the major source of family policy (Mayer & Zick, 1984). Unfortunately even this form of ad hoc "family policy" activity is viewed as problematic. Rubin (1986) has documented that the court system (in particular the United States Supreme Court) has not based its legal decisions on a realistic assessment of what constitutes American families in today's societies. Rubin observes:

Although many of the specific decisions appear to be based on constitutional principles—equal protection, due process, the right to privacy, freedom of religion—the Court often uses these doctrines to protect a different fundamental value—a traditional ideal of the American family that no longer characterizes the reality of what family life often means in the United States of America today. (p. 9)

In view of this analysis, we argue that it is very important, if not imperative, that Family Ecology pursues a more organized and scientific approach to family issues and family policy. In this way, policy making organizations, ranging from city hall to the United States Supreme Court, would be able to make legal and judicial decisions and design service-oriented programs based on accurate information about family living and not on an "ideal" that no longer is grounded (if it ever was) in reality.

Although the domain of family issues and policy are recognized as integral to Family Ecology, an important component of the theory, research, and policy relationship must be clarified. When utilizing an ecological framework at the conceptual, methodological, and analytic levels, we must ask, Are there inherent "values" associated with an ecological framework that may influence or "bias" the policy decision-making process? or in other words, Is an ecological perspective value-free or value-laden?

From one perspective, McIntosh (1985) has argued persuasively that ecology should be regarded less as a guide to "aesthetic, ethical, moral, and even metaphysical insights for the human dilemma" (p. 319) and more as a pure and simple "science." Another perspective states that ecology has transcended "supplying scientific insights" and has become associated with establishing a mandate for social and international organization and improvement (Bookchin, 1980; Sprout & Sprout, 1968). To others, ecology is a model that provides a framework for ethics (Rolston, 1975; Taylor, 1986); or a political party platform (e.g., Green Party; Porritt, 1985); or even the impetus for a social movement (e.g., Eco-Feminism; Caldecott & Leland, 1983; Daly, 1978; King, 1983; Zimmerman, 1987). And for some, ecology is a general world view or "Weltanschaung" associated with the study of ecological values (e.g., "Deep Ecology;" Devall & Sessions, 1985; Golley, 1987; Tobias, 1984).

So we return to our earlier question. When utilizing an ecological framework in conceptual and analytical domains, are there values that are "inherently" a part of an ecological perspective that may influence or guide the policy decision-making process? This is both a difficult question to ask and to answer in relation to Family Ecology. As Miller, Rollins, and Thomas (1982) have indicated, previous research has been considered "good research" if, from the stance of the investigator, it could be characterized as objective and value-free (traditional positivism). However, they also have recognized that the issue has not yet been resolved because more researchers are
considering the role of values in the policy decision-making process. Miller et al. (1982) made the following observation:

We expect that one of the central concerns in the coming discussions will be how the family researcher can most appropriately conduct research if the researcher is viewed as embedded in a sociocultural system of values specific to the historical moment. In that context, does the researcher who attempts to clarify and justify what ought to become similar to other political, legal, or religious spokespersons? (p. 865)

We do not believe that an ecological perspective necessarily imposes a value system upon the applied and policy related aspects of research. But we do think that certain levels of an ecological perspective, the transactional level in particular, should sensitize researchers to their "embeddedness" in a particular "historic moment" and cultural context that includes values and belief orientations. Therefore they cannot be considered separate and isolated from the phenomena they are studying or from the influences of the systems in which they are inbedded (Doherty, 1986; Wertsch & Youniss, 1987).

In our review of the literature, we already have begun to encounter instances where values have played an integral role in the overall concept of an ecological perspective of the family. For example, Sontag and Bubolz (1988) have identified several "core values" that are integrated in the overall philosophical perspective of human ecology in home economics (i.e., respect and caring for the survival, worth and dignity of all humans, cooperation in securing the common good). Similar value statements were proposed as important components in an ecological model designed to influence policy and practice for families of the handicapped (Bubolz & Whiren, 1984).

As discussed earlier (Herrin & Wright, 1988), the family therapy field has been very active in scholarly discourse pertaining to both theoretical and applied issues of an ecological perspective in disciplines related to family studies. This is clearly an important area of family studies that has had to directly confront issues of policy and values. Why this is the case may be based on several factors. Perhaps it may be associated with the fact that those in family therapy are "on the front lines" and therefore are more innovative in utilizing various theoretical frameworks in application to their practice. Guttman observed that "in its short history, family therapy has been noteworthy for introducing into the mental health field a variety of new and exciting ways of perceiving the human world" (1986, p. 13).

Another explanation may be attributed to the concerns many family therapists have about the "ways of knowing" implicit in the views of the world maintained by therapists and clients alike and how such views influence their actions and language in the therapeutic setting. Actions and language are critical in identifying problems, solutions, and the processes necessary to bring about desired changes in the ways things are perceived, actions are taken, and information is communicated. Such views of the world also provide the conceptual contexts in which different theoretical perspectives are conceived and maintained. These concerns are understandable since family therapists are particularly sensitive to "whether a given theory produces useful treatment strategies and desirable results" (Guttman, 1986, p. 19).

This ties in with our previous discussion of how an ecological (holistic) perspective influences the policy decision-making process of what is "good," "healthy," "normative," and "a quality of life" for families. Furthermore, as the debate about "value-laden" or "value-free" research and policy continues, we believe the resulting discussions and
consensus points will have dramatic implications for the formulation of family policy within Family Ecology.

**FINAL STATEMENT**

In our attempt to systematically investigate the background of ecology, human ecology and the application of an ecological perspective to the study of the family, we have considered the potential for the development of an area of inquiry known as Family Ecology. As outlined in the paper, ecology has been associated with the study of organisms and the interrelationships among them and their environments. This perspective is found throughout the natural sciences and also has been utilized as a conceptual framework in the social and behavioral sciences for understanding the interrelationships among humans and their environments (both natural and human-constructed).

The human dimension of ecology has been an integral philosophical component of the early beginnings of home economics (or "home eokology"). After several decades of "ecological dormancy," the ecological perspective has gained renewed interest in home economics as well as in the field of family studies, family therapy, and human development. The area of Human Ecology has progressed much in the last two decades and has proven to be highly influential in providing terminology and conceptual frameworks for many disciplines. Fortunately, the potential for continued interdisciplinary integration is still evident and growing.

Our primary concern has been the documentation of conceptual frameworks, methodology, research, and the applied aspects of human ecology which would provide substance to the domain of Family Ecology. Family Ecology is not offered as a substitute for other existing perspectives in family studies; rather, it is the label that represents a interdisciplinary approach to the complex study of family phenomena. As a result, we have argued that Family Ecology can provide a useful integrated framework for capturing the complex and diverse phenomena of family life.

**REFERENCES**


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