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## THEORY: WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

If you were asked what is the ultimate goal of research in any discipline or subject matter, what would you say? What do geologists, psychologists, family scientists, medical researchers, experts in human development, chemists, political scientists, sociologists, biologists, astronomers, plant pathologists, and anthropologists have in common? No, the answer is not that they all have pointy heads and wear white lab coats. What they share is a common goal: the desire to increase understanding of their subject matter. They want to find out how things work and why they work the way they do. Why? Two major reasons: (a) to know for the sake of knowing and (b) to figure how some problem or issue can be better dealt with.

How do the study habits of students with good grade point averages (GPAs) differ from those of students with not-so-good GPAs? Why do they differ? What makes some families seem more resilient to stress than other families and how do they become this way? What makes some families less likely to reach out for help? Is exposure to successful parental behavior a way for new parents to learn how to be good parents? What particular teaching approaches work best with which student predilections for learning?

To make progress on these kinds of intellectual and practical questions, individual researchers (and, indeed, the entire research enterprise) operate in two distinct but highly related worlds: the abstract (the world of concepts/ideas) and the concrete (the empirical/observable world). What scientific theories do is link these two separate domains and, in so doing, provide descriptions, summaries, integration, and explanations about what is known from research as well as guidance for additional research and practice that will increase further understanding.

Theorizing, then, is the process of systematically developing and organizing ideas to explain phenomena, and a theory is the total set of empirically testable, interconnected ideas formulated to explain those phenomena<sup>1</sup> (Doherty, Boss, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993; White & Klein, 2002). It is extremely important to be clear that if one deals only with the conceptual, or idea, level without testing those ideas against independent empirical information (empirical means “available to the senses”), or if one deals only with observable information without trying to systematically explain it, then scientific theory development is not possible. It also must be understood that the process is not linear in nature.

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For example, one can start with observations of some aspect of family life and then try to explain those observations (e.g., the children in a family seem to be less patient with one another when their mother or father has had an “adult temper tantrum” at some point in the day than when this has not occurred), or one can start with an explanation and then make empirical observations (e.g., what children come to know about how to be parents results from *modeling*—that is, from observing and re-creating the behavior of their parents).

We wrote this book to help increase your appreciation of how important theory is to the advancement of knowledge in family science and human development (as it is in every field of scientific inquiry) as well as to the practical application of ideas. Indeed, the level of theoretical development is one yardstick indicating the maturity and usefulness of a discipline such as family science (Marx, 1969; Weis, 1998). Is research in a given area conceptualized and carried out to test predictions from a theory? Is the development and implementation of practice (e.g., educational efforts or therapeutic interventions) fostered and supported by theory? If so, then there is likely to be a relatively strong knowledge base in the area of study. Contrary to the view that theory is “dry” or “not relevant” or “not needed” or “not important for the average person,” it is simply the case that summarizing, organizing, testing, relating, reevaluating, and attempting to explain and understand things (which is what theories do) is absolutely crucial for all humans in virtually every facet of our lives. A famous thinker and psychologist, Kurt Lewin (as cited in Marrow, 1977) once said that there is nothing so useful as a good theory. This is true in regard to scientific theory as we have just defined it (and which is the focus of this book). But *theory building*—the process of accumulating, evaluating, linking, testing, retesting, and explaining information on an ongoing basis—is also an essential feature of everyday living. Of course, there are some clear distinctions between how this process works in everyday life and in scientific research.

As a way to begin to understand these distinctions, let us first introduce Professor S. Canon, who does research on the development of families over the life course. Canon may work in a university, a government research agency, a private company, or a foundation. Assuming that she is well trained in the ways of scientific research and is inclined to ethical behavior in her research (e.g., Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002), she follows a fairly specific set of rules for the overall process of discovering and explaining. These “rules of the game” have been defined and refined over many years by researchers, theorists, and philosophers of science. They comprise the integrated processes of information gathering and explanation building and characterize how researchers operate back and forth in the concrete and abstract worlds. This way of “knowing,” or developing understanding, must be understood so that you can appreciate the specific roles of theory and theory development in knowledge building, including the development of concepts and their relationships, the testing of predictions, and the uses of research results to modify, support, or not support theoretical explanations (e.g., Babbie, 2003; Miller, 1992; Sadler & Hulgus, 1989).

The following outline of important parts of the scientific research process is presented for your review (but be careful—the process only rarely proceeds in the kind of linear fashion that a list might suggest) along with how a family researcher such as Professor Canon might proceed to use the process:

1. Canon develops an interest in some general area of family studies or human development through reading, thinking, and talking with colleagues and students and by casual or planned observations (e.g., Benson & Piercy, 1997). Let us assume that she is interested in how families facilitate or inhibit the development of friendliness and concern for others; perhaps, phrased somewhat negatively, she is interested in the development of individual as well as family arrogance and self-indulgence.

2. Canon assesses the current state of knowledge and ideas about these family issues that have piqued her interest by examining

- prior scientific research,
- personal experience,
- practice,
- theory,
- advice/suggestions from a colleague or a teacher,
- armchair ideas.

3. Using the kinds of information identified above, Canon identifies and refines a problem or a set of problems she wishes to investigate. Depending on how she sees the state of knowledge of the phenomena in which she is interested, she may wind up testing very specific hypotheses, doing exploratory data gathering, or doing qualitative research that helps generate other ideas and/or gives voice to usually unheard perspectives.

- Canon refines the problems (one can't study everything).
- She carefully defines all major variables; for instance, what do the terms *arrogant*, *self-indulgent*, and *concern for others* specifically mean?
- Canon clarifies the *what* (i.e., specific questions or hypotheses), the *why* (i.e., the rationale for the research in terms of increasing understanding or with regard to important implications for practice or policy), and the *how* (i.e., the approach and methods to be used to answer the questions) of the research.

4. To address the identified problem(s), research questions, or hypotheses, data/input/information/facts/observations (DIIFO) of two general types are collected:

- DIIFO directly experienced by the researcher/theorist—either intentionally sought as part of planned research or not intentionally sought
- DIIFO indirectly received from someone or something else—again, either intentionally sought or not intentionally sought by the researcher/theorist

5. Canon uses already-developed ways to measure all major variables in her study (or

invents new ways to measure them). All available and relevant DIIFO is

- assessed as to its reliability and credibility (the quality of all DIIFO is systematically assessed and is not simply assumed);
- summarized and integrated;
- evaluated as to its importance relative to other DIIFO, and all procedures that produce DIIFO are systematically described, organized, and evaluated.

6. Canon integrates and explains the obtained results. The interpretation of her empirical findings may or may not link directly to an already-existing theory about the phenomena. Even in this case, however, she will consciously (and, one hopes, conscientiously) link her research findings to other empirical research on the same issues. In so doing, Canon's results become part of the ever-developing knowledge base on family issues.

- Although the study may or may not have been generated by a specific theory, the results of the study can still be used to test a theory or theories (another example of how the whole process is anything but neatly linear). For example, do Canon's results tend to support the symbolic interaction theory of family functioning (Chapter 8), or do they support social learning theory (Chapter 4), or neither, or both?
- Depending on the nature of the results of her study, Canon (and other researchers, since research is a public process) may conclude that they provide strong or partial support (or nonsupport) of a theory or theories. This can then lead to modifications of the theory or to restudying the same issues to check if they were reliably investigated.
- Implications of the data and explanations generated may include specific suggestions of additional research that needs to be done to further test and enhance the explanation(s), and/or may produce specific ideas about practical interventions or practice.

7. The process continues as other researchers and theorists question, repeat, refute, refine, and so forth, the work that Canon has done. Others are able to evaluate Canon's work because she

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has followed the rules of scientific research, including, in particular, the public nature of the research and theory-building process.

Within this overall process of information gathering and explanation developing, steps 6 and 7 are the ones that most directly emphasize theory or explanation of phenomena (which is not to say that all the other steps are not influenced by researchers' theoretical predilections—to one extent or another, they may well be). We hope we have been clear that theory development depends on an intricate process of ongoing empirical research that both generates and tests theoretical ideas, which in turn gets reflected back on additional research and practice in an ongoing iterative manner. It is instructive and essential to remember that scientific research is a collective enterprise. It therefore follows that a single study of any family issue is almost never definitive, either in regard to the research (empirical results) or in regard to explanation. Theory building and the testing of theoretical concepts through empirical research is not solely the prerogative of Canon or of any other single researcher. Although we have talked about this process in reference to Canon's research, many other researchers will use her work to inform their own and will integrate it with other research to reach both empirical conclusions (i.e., about what the facts are on a given family issue) and to explicate family theory (i.e., why the research facts are what they are).

#### NOTABLE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EVERYDAY LIFE AND FAMILY RESEARCH

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As noted previously, there are many similarities between scientific research and everyday life in the process of gathering data and developing explanations. The overall quests to seek information, to summarize it so that we can handle it, to check out its reliability and validity, and to explain what we see are quite similar overall. Humans have to do these things to live as well as to research. But there

are also some truly key differences in how this process works in the world of science compared to how it typically works in everyday life. Here are several of the most important differences between scientific theory development and the development of understanding in everyday life, and between scientific information gathering and the gathering of information in everyday life.

First, the process in scientific theory development is consciously public. All steps, from problem definition (including why it is important to study this or that family issue, for example) to the methods of gathering information, to the reporting and interpretation of results, are open to scrutiny, testing, and refutation by other researchers. Second, clarity in definition and communication in all aspects of the research process, such as unambiguous definition of variables being studied and clear articulation of all procedures used, including data analysis decisions and choices, is fundamental in scientific theory building. Third, all concepts and the relationships between them (the "guts" of theory) must be testable in the empirical world (philosophers of science say they must be capable of disproof). Fourth, there is ongoing effort to keep personal or other biases out of the research process (certainly this is not always successful, but it is a value inherent to scientific research). White and Klein (2002, pp. 5–9) provide a relevant overview of the last point in their presentation of different philosophies of science. It is important to recognize, however, that one theoretical approach, feminist theory (Chapter 7), has made significant contributions to understanding families, particularly conceptions of gender development and power structures within families, by emphasizing research methodologies that are *value committed*—that is, research that acknowledges and builds upon the values of those who conduct it, a reflection of the belief that research cannot be truly value-free. The key issue for us is that although the practitioners of scientific research are not valueless or bias-free, the entire enterprise is structured so as to identify and police the interference of such intrusions on research or, as in the case of feminist theory, to

integrate those values into the research process itself. One implication of all this, because the entire enterprise is public, is that research findings that are assessed by other researchers to be biased are, at minimum, open to attempts at replication and, at maximum, likely to be completely discounted (the most egregious example of the latter being cases of fraud, which regrettably do occur).

We will demonstrate some of these distinctions by taking a close look at how Mr. H. C. T. Judge's approach to studying family issues differs from that of Canon. Judge (who, in a move toward greater discretion, recently changed his last name from Judgmental) is a person who seems to be quite active in his pursuit of information and in reaching conclusions about other people's lives and how they got to be how they are. Leaving aside for a moment how it is that Judge got to be how *he* is (a question primarily of individual development), at first glance Judge seems to follow the same kind of process that Canon does when the latter pursues her research on the development of individual and family characteristics. For example, Judge observes things (sometimes on purpose, sometimes not), evaluates, integrates and summarizes information, reaches generalizations, makes informed (or not-so-informed) guesses about important things to look for, has unresolved questions, moves from the realm of observation to attempted explanations, tests one explanation against another, may or may not share all the previous with other observers, and may or may not test the reliability of his observations.

Judge sees his neighbors, the Hubris family (husband, wife, and two teenage children who are the offspring of the husband and wife), as self-indulgent and arrogant. He sees the Friendly family (husband, wife, and three children, ages 4, 10, and 12, from the wife's prior marriage) as having a giving nature and as possessing down-to-earth characteristics. What kind of information did Judge use to arrive at his conclusions? Do his conclusions and the bases for them match those of the family members themselves or those of other people outside the families? Given the

information he has about the families, are his conclusions reasonable, or are they based on some bias of his? In general, observations or facts or information about the families could have come to Judge's attention directly (he experienced them himself, whether intentionally or not)—for instance, Judge tried to listen or observe something or he happened to see something when he was walking his dog—or indirectly (someone or something else conveyed information to him—again, either intentionally or not)—for instance, he asked a neighbor for some information or a neighbor offered some information.

Let us conjecture about how Judge may have reached his conclusions about his two neighbor families. Some kind of direct or indirect observations, DIIFO, of the families must have occurred. For example, Judge may have witnessed Mrs. Hubris or one of the Hubris children being haughty to the mailperson (or someone else may have told him that this occurred) and seen Mr. Friendly being very nice to a Girl Scout delivering cookies. A number of these kinds of experiences over time (not all of which were necessarily equally supportive of his conclusions) may have occurred. Of course, in general, in everyday life we constantly take in information of many kinds. The taking in may be deliberately sought out, it may be whimsical, or it may be purely incidental and it likely will be from multiple sources. Judge may have deliberately tested his conclusions about these two families, perhaps by asking each to do a favor for him or another neighbor.

There is much involved with the taking in of information. For example, it seems to be the case that, after a while, humans have a tendency to prefer information that is more rather than less consistent with prior conclusions, and, because our brains can handle only so much information, we have built-in processes that help us selectively tune in only certain kinds of information (consider, for example, how hard it would be to successfully drive a car if the driver paid equal attention to all sources of input at any given moment). On the other hand, family researchers

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routinely try to build in protections to guard against selective attention and against ignoring information that does not fit preexisting theoretical ideas or personal predilections.

In any case, at some point in time, Judge had enough information (from his perspective) to reach conclusions about the two families. In fact, a function of theories, whether of the everyday variety or the family research variety, is to help summarize information. Instead of Judge listing in detail each of the 10 or 35 or 200 observations he had made of the Hubris family, he *induces* (from a bunch of specifics to a general statement) that a good summary is to describe his observations as depicting haughtiness in the Hubrises.

Now, perhaps you can imagine some reasons that Judge's conclusions may or may not be right on. He may be haughty himself, for example. Or maybe his interactions with and observations of the Hubrises always occurred on days when he was feeling insecure or perhaps his interactions with and observations of the Friendly family always occurred when he was feeling very positive. Perhaps he relied too heavily on second-hand information from someone who had a personal bias against the Hubrises. With regard to the latter, Judge may, at some point, have heard from a friend something fairly outlandish about how one of the Hubrises had talked to the friend about some local issue. Although it seemed to fit his own conclusions, he may have checked it out himself, for example, by asking Mr. Hubris what he thought of the new school budget proposal. If he did this, their discussion may have either supported or been inconsistent with the friend's assertions. If the former, then another "fact" to support his prior conclusion about the Hubrises would have been gathered; if the latter, then perhaps Judge might have begun to question his prior conclusions, or he might have simply ignored this information since it did not fit his prior perspective.

The next step for Judge might well be to reach some conclusion about *why* and *how* the two families he has been thinking about came to be as they are: Judge builds a personal theory to

explain what he has observed. This is similar to what Canon does, and both of these information gatherers and theory builders may well have been generating explanations all along the way—that is, rarely do regular people and researchers wait until all the information is in before at least tentatively reaching some conclusions about why and how. But Canon's approach will follow the rules of the game we specified previously (she does have a well-developed and specific set of rules to follow, after all). In particular, Canon will deliberately test her theory by deriving hypotheses and research questions from it and putting them to empirical test. Judge may or may not do something like this, but if he did, rarely would it be systematic, well-defined, ongoing, and public.

In the next section, we present a brief synopsis of what a scientific theory looks like. We hope to reinforce your understanding of how theories develop, how they are tested, how they increase scientific understanding, and how they therefore provide a foundation for practice such as educational and therapeutic interventions.

### EXAMPLE OF THEORY BUILDING AND THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Recall that a family theory is the empirically testable interconnected ideas that explain some phenomenon. Let us consider the issue of family violence and develop a very basic theory. First, assume that (a) we, the editors of this book, have some professional experience with families involved with family violence (we do), (b) there are some published research studies on family violence (there are many), and (c) our general awareness of various theories on family issues leads us to favor *social learning theory* as a generally strong theory for explaining parental and child behavior (certainly true for one of us!). If we did some thinking about all this information we might think that a number of concepts are important for understanding family violence: a person's own family history, overall family and

individual stress, emotional support both within and outside the family, personal and family risk factors such as alcohol and substance use, personal experience with different models (parents and others) of how adults might deal with children's issues and behaviors, and personality characteristics of individual family members—to name a few possibilities. (As a brief aside, please note that it is entirely possible that a similar or different group of concepts of presumed importance to understanding family violence could be developed by, say, your grandmother, the person who delivers your mail, or a novelist. The *source* of a theory about families or children, the so-called context of discovery [White & Klein, 2002, p. 4], is not particularly important.)

Second, to be considered a scientific theory, the concepts (ideas or abstractions) within it must be capable of being represented at the empirical level (otherwise communication would be impossible—for example, 10 different thinkers might each mean something different by “emotional support”), and they must be specifically related to one another in some fashion (*propositions* in theories are simply statements of how one concept relates to another). How does one empirically represent a concept? It's easy; we say exactly how the concept can be measured. For example, emotional support might be a score received on a pencil-and-paper assessment that is developed for the purpose of measuring the concept. Or it might be ratings given on the quality and quantity of listening behavior exhibited by family members having a discussion about something.

Using previous information (other studies, observations from clinical practice, etc.), the following propositions might make sense to us: “The greater the culture of extrafamilial violence experienced as a child (*a*), the more family violence experienced as a child (*b*)” and “The more violence experienced in the family of origin (*b*), the greater the level of violence produced in the family of procreation (*c*).” We can deduce (i.e., logically conclude) from these two propositions a third one: “The greater the culture of extrafamilial violence experienced in childhood

(*a*), the greater the production of violence in the family of procreation (*c*).”

It is important to observe that the three propositions are logically related. If the process stops there—with “mere” logic—then we do not have a scientific theory. With due respect to philosophers and other thinkers, we may have a perfectly reasonable set of propositions, but from a scientific perspective this is inadequate. Scientific theories must be empirically testable for them to be taken seriously. That is, the propositions and their relationships spelled out in the theory must be amenable to disproof through research. (This is a great distinction between everyday and scientific use and understanding of what theory is.) As things stand to this point, we have done conceptual (abstract) work only. Can we do research to test the theory? Well, you won't be surprised to discover that the answer is “yes,” or we would not be going on like this!

First, we get out of our “thinking” chair and try to *operationalize* the major concepts in our proposition. Operationalize simply means to choose a good way to measure the concept (note that this does not mean that what we choose is the only way to measure the concept, nor does it mean that the measurement equals the concept). We need to change our conceptual hypothesis (the proposition we developed by linking the concepts *culture of extrafamilial violence* and *violence in the family of procreation*) to a measurement hypothesis. Let's say we operationalize *culture of extrafamilial violence* to mean the number of police reports filed over a given period that concern neighborhood assaults and armed robberies, and we define *family violence in the family of procreation* as the number of police calls over the same period to investigate within-home acts of violence alleged to have been committed by parents against each other or against their children. Perhaps you can think of better ways to operationalize these concepts.

There are lots of important, and often quite “messy,” methodological details (e.g., taking account of age, race, ethnicity, and education levels of parents) that would have to be addressed to adequately test what has become a

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testable measurement hypothesis. This process of refinement helps define one of the other distinctions between scientific and everyday information gathering and explanation developing. For the former, specific research designs are developed and carried out to help answer questions. And, although unexpected things happen all the time throughout the research and theory-building process, the point is that the information gathering is systemized and matched in the best ways possible to provide information directly on the question(s) of interest.

It is very important to note that the outcome of the research process is, in fact, determined in large part by the carrying out of all the messy details. That is, results that are either consistent or inconsistent with a given theory or theories must be evaluated in regard to how well the study was done. For example, the researcher may have done a poor job in measuring variables, in sampling, or in ignoring contradictory information. To the extent that methodological problems influence results, judgments about the theory must be tentatively made.

Nonetheless, the point for theoretical development is that whatever the outcome, there will be implications for our theory—and for other theoretical approaches that may seek to explain the same phenomenon. For example, perhaps one or more of our propositions is simply wrong. Perhaps adding several propositions related to age and other family history variables would lead to a different hypothesis and outcome, and so on. None of this potential theoretical refinement, or change, or even discarding of the entire theory and starting over (which almost never happens) would be possible without the ability to bring the abstract/conceptual ideas to the level of concrete/empirical operations that allow research to be conducted. This is how the link between empirical work and theoretical explanation occurs, and it is what contributes to an ongoing process of scientific discovery and knowledge refinement.

In addition, as mentioned previously, the practical impacts from ongoing theoretical explanation are often extensive. For example,

assuming reasonably consistent empirical results that support our little theory, what would be some of the implications for the prevention and treatment of family violence from the above basic theory? What policy recommendations might follow? Family and human development theories almost always have strong implications that are very practical, even if the research studies undertaken to test them may not have been designed with particular practice or policy issues in mind.

This concludes our presentation of what theory is and what it is good for. We hope it is clear that the goal of researchers, to increase understanding of this or that phenomenon by developing conceptual linkages (theories) and testing those against empirical reality, is also something that people do in everyday life. We all seek to understand things, and we do this by observing, or collecting, and integrating information, by assessing the strength of our information, by reaching tentative or strong conclusions and explanations, and so forth. Although it is true that there are, indeed, extremely important differences between the realms of research and everyday life in the pursuit of information and explanations, it is good to keep in mind that these differences are often in emphasis, degree, or articulated sophistication, and that theory building in science and theory building in everyday life are really quite similar in their basic content and nature.

### DEFINING *FAMILY*?

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Before you begin to peruse the readings and the commentary we have developed on each of the theories presented in this book, we want to bring an important issue to your attention. The history of attempts to define *family* presents an interesting paradox for family researchers and theorists, particularly since (as we have noted earlier in this chapter) the rules of scientific research place a premium on the careful definition of terms. In a very informative discussion of this matter,



White and Klein (2002, pp. 18–23) present a list of 19 characterizations (Box 1.3, p. 22) and ask, “Which of These Is a Family?” They also suggest four major ways in which families differ from other social groups. Families last longer, are intergenerational, contain both biological and “affinal” (e.g., legal, common law) relationships, and are part of a larger kinship network. Families are a particular kind of social group, *but* “the distinctiveness of family groups tends to be only a matter of degree” (p. 21). After reading White and Klein’s very thorough discussion, we are left with the feeling that we have some understanding of what families are, but remain frustrated at the apparent difficulty inherent in precisely defining family.

Family researchers and theorists, as well as the public at large, demonstrate an amazing ability to talk about families, to identify families, to do research about families, and to theorize about families without actually defining them! This is not a new conundrum. Although there may be other reasons for this state of affairs, we think two contribute mightily. First, we think that some of the difficulty family researchers and theorists, and others, have in defining family occurs because one can immediately think of existing groups of individuals who think of themselves as families, but who do not fit the definition being developed. Second, we believe that there is a general reluctance to define family in a way that seems inconsistent with important legal definitions that relate to family, such as the legal definitions of marriage.

This all sounds reasonable, but we are left with the same question: *What* is a family? We all live in, or lived in, or will live in families. Is the concept restricted to legally sanctioned heterosexual couples who procreate? We think not. Does family include a single parent living with his or her child? We think so. You may note that the difficulty in defining family to everyone’s satisfaction provides another example of how everyday life and science often seem to deal with the same issues—simply in different ways.

Unfortunately, from a scientific perspective, this difficulty with definition has deep historical roots in family science. There has been a consistent lack of consensus regarding a common functional definition of families as definitions of families have evolved throughout the twentieth century. In the 1930s, families were simplistically defined as parent-child relations of some duration (Nimkoff & Ogburn, 1934). From that relatively superficial perspective, modern definitions must attend to the complex and varied nature of families. For example, Seccombe and Warner (2004) recently suggested families may be defined as a relationship by blood, marriage, or affection, in which members may cooperate economically, may care for any children, and may consider their identity to be intimately connected to the larger group. While this is certainly not the only recently stated definition of families, it does reflect increased scientific (and public, we think) awareness of the complexity involved in defining family.

Although we like Seccombe and Warner’s (2004) definition of family, you may decide another is more appropriate. Rather than suggest one appropriate definition of families, we bring this issue to your attention to encourage you to consider it as you read this book. Although all of the possible structural representations of family types simply could not be included in one volume, you will note as you progress through the book that a wide range of family types or structures is evident. As you read, think about how the various authors choose to define the subject of their scholarship. Ultimately, we may not be able to do much better in defining families than the supreme court justice who said about pornography, “I know it when I see it!”

## ISSUES FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

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1. Write a short theory about any individual or family development issue that interests you. Include four to five concepts and several propositions. Is your theory testable?

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2. Why is it correct to say that a theory is never proven? Why is it more correct to say that a theory is supported or not supported by the research results to varying degrees?

3. What are the major ways in which scientific theory building and everyday life theory building differ?

4. Does the absence of particular types of families from this book (perhaps a type of family from which you come, which you belong to right now, or which you have friends in) mean that that combination of individuals does not compose a family?

5. Given the focus of this chapter on the interplay between theory and research, what might be the impacts of ongoing definitional problems on family research and theory development? Will theory testing and development be hindered?

## FURTHER READING<sup>2</sup>

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Babbie (2003), Miller (1992), Sadler and Hulgus (1989), Seccombe and Warner (2004), White and Klein (2002).

## Notes

1. A wide variety of other terms indicate the same general idea as the term *theory* (Thomas, 2001). Such terms as *model*, *paradigm*, *conceptual framework*, and *explanatory scheme*, like *theory*, all indicate an attempt of one kind or another to explain phenomena. What is important for purposes of this book is to realize that, whatever term is used by researchers, the attempt to explain is tested against data and that the offered explanation is repeatedly assessed with respect to how the empirical world supports or does not support the explanation.

2. The complete citations for all publications listed under the Further Reading sections in each chapter are in the References section at the end of the book.