

# *Toward a Theory of Family Well-Being*

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## Preface

Kappa Omicron Nu is indeed proud to publish this discourse about family well-being. You might ask, “What’s in it for Kappa Omicron Nu to use its resources for this purpose?” The answer is simple. With the mission of *empowered leaders*, it is incumbent upon the organization to provide the means for achieving this ambitious objective. The scholarly study of family well-being contributes to this agenda.

Kappa Omicron Nu promotes the concept of non-positional leadership and thus holds the view that all professionals have the responsibility to lead. The subject of this publication—family well-being—is certainly one possible target for leadership. Professionals, in an integrative field such as ours, need to consider the ultimate goal of practice. Well-being, including individual and family well-being, is surely such a candidate. It is rather unsettling to think that with all of our attention to definition for almost a century, we have not spent more time on this concept.

Continuing the study of and dialogue about family well-being should be a priority, and Kappa Omicron Nu will support efforts to expand the participation. A goal of this publication is to provide a resource that stimulates thought, reflection, and inquiry—all of which ultimately encourage construction of multiple interpretations. Further dialogue to understand differing points of view will help participants to become more sensitive to and acknowledge incoherence. Confusion and contradictions will mark the early stages of dialogue (note these characteristics in the summary of the dialogue at the end of this publication), and it will take time, suspended assumptions, and collegial regard for the development of a free flow of meaning and of windows to new understandings.

Won’t you join with the authors of the following papers in exploring **family well-being**?

Dorothy I. Mitstifer  
Executive Director, Kappa Omicron Nu

Note: We, you and I, owe a debt of gratitude to Frances Smith and Edith Baldwin for initiating the planning for the AAFCS sessions that provided the focus for this publication. A follow-up session in 1997 has been planned, and announcements will be distributed widely when details are available.

***FAMILY WELL-BEING:  
A CONCEPTUALIZATION GUIDE TO PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE***

Edith E. Baldwin, Ph.D.

We do not know how Thomas Jefferson conceptualized "the pursuit of happiness" as an inalienable human right when drafting the *Declaration of Independence*, but we do know that he was employing a concept of considerable interest to his contemporaries. Garry Wills (1978) points out that writings of that time reflect a preoccupation with the nature and conditions of achievement of happiness, and that "[w]hen Jefferson spoke of pursuing happiness, he had nothing vague or private in mind. He meant a public happiness which is measurable" (p. 164).

The concept of human happiness continues to intrigue us (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). While contemporary researchers are more likely to focus investigations on "quality of life" and "sense of well-being," and while differences among these and related concepts are sometimes recognized, there is still a concern for what, in essence, may be expressed as happiness. And as the literature indicates, effort is directed toward measurement of factors presumed to influence this desirable state of being.

Since the 1940s there has been an exponential growth in literature relating to human well-being and increasing interest in assessing quality of life (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Campbell, 1981; Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Gross, 1966; Tolman, 1941). More recent studies have focused on the well-being or quality of life of certain populations such as cancer patients (Chaturvedi, 1991; De Groot, 1986), psychiatric patients (Chubon, 1987; Frisch et al., 1992), people coping with adversity (Heady & Wearing, 1990), older adults (Herzog & Rodgers, 1986), and economically stressed families (Rettig, Danes, & Bauer, 1991). In spite of a growing interest in this area, however, there appears to be little agreement on the definition of well-being or on appropriate indicators of it.

Campbell (1981) questions a widely-held assumption that a close and predictable relationship exists between the quality of objective conditions of life and subjective well-being. He points to attempts to assess national well-being by measuring such objective conditions as average family income, numbers of houses or automobiles owned, average length

of the working week, numbers of students enrolled in educational institutions, and numbers of hospitals and doctors available. Critical of the focus on these and other objective indicators, he argues that a sense of well-being incorporates affective feelings of happiness and misery as well as cognitive interpretations leading to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life; and that "[i]f we try to explain the population's **sense** of well-being on the basis of objective circumstances, we will leave unaccounted for most of what we are trying to explain" (p. 2). Moreover, sense of well-being relates to life as a whole as well as to specific aspects of it. Much of the empirical research undertaken tends to compartmentalize, fragment, and oversimplify this complex concept.

Moving away from empirical research, the importance of the family for individual and societal well-being is called to our attention not only by shallow political rhetoric concerning family values, but also by in-depth discussions that have emerged in various fields such as psychology (Bronfenbrenner, 1990), political science (Elshtain, 1990), economics (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993), sociology (O'Neill, 1985), and philosophy (Martin, 1995). Wide-ranging arguments provide different glimpses into the meaning of the complex and controversial concept of family well-being.

Literature in our own field lays claim to a historical professional interest in the promotion of family well-being. Yet, with the notable exception of the work of Marjorie Brown (1993) who argues for a dialectical conceptualization emphasizing the links between socio-cultural realities and personality formation, and more recently, the work of Margaret Henry (1995) who embraces a pluralist, postmodern perspective in her analysis of well-being, there has been little or no attempt to *clarify the meaning* of this complex concept. My purpose today, therefore, is to present some ideas concerning the meaning of the concept of family well-being which can be taken up for further discussion and development.

If a conceptualization is to be clear, it must be connected with several other concepts that also

need clarification. And if time permitted us to carry out this task more adequately, we would go on to develop a network of concepts (Connolly, 1993). Some people become impatient with such "tedious" exercises, claiming that they merely take time from more important professional activity. Brown (1985) has shown, however, that lack of clarification of central concepts has led to serious contradictions in home economics/family and consumer sciences; i.e., while claiming to promote well-being, some of our practices have actually undermined the family. To merely adopt without question concepts and conceptualizations prevailing in our field is to accept established practices that may not be justifiable.

By providing for dialogue concerning the concept of family well-being, we are creating social space for difference. However, this does not mean that we are adopting a pluralistic, relativistic position that assumes that any meaning is as acceptable as any other. Space for interaction should allow for a sharing of our imperfect understanding of the concept and, hopefully, for movement toward the sharing of a more adequate conceptualization to guide practice. In the time available today, I will sketch a conceptual framework that I believe could be used as a basis for more detailed analyses of the concept of family well-being.

In order to forestall a predictable question I must first affirm that I am not assuming that "the family" has a particular form. I am, however, viewing the family as a set of relationships, a communicative environment responsible for the nurturance and well-being of its members.

### ***A Conceptualization of Family Well-Being***

Gaining important insights from the diversity of literature referred to above, it seems to me that we need to bring ideas into a coherent framework—that we need an appropriate,

overarching theory to guide our deliberations on the meaning of family well-being. A familiar example of such a framework is found in the work of Abraham Maslow who, in the 1950s proposed that human needs are arranged in a hierarchy. He claimed that physiological or basic needs for food and shelter must be met before people can be motivated by the higher needs of safety and social support, belongingness and love, and self-esteem and respect for others. Eventually, as these needs are met (usually sequentially), a new and higher need for self-fulfillment or self-actualization emerges (Maslow, 1987). Simplified versions of Maslow's hierarchy have been developed. Campbell (1981), for example, employs a three-tiered conceptualization that focuses on the need for having, the need for relating, and the need for being. While such conceptions and categorizations of need have been employed in recent decades, I believe that they omit certain important aspects of life. For example, they tell us very little about human competencies essential for need fulfillment, and they present us with a passive, apolitical view of human life.

A more adequate framework for conceptualizing well-being can be derived from the work of Habermas, in particular, from his social theory of knowledge and his theory of communicative action. Habermas (1971) argues that as thinking, acting beings, humans both discover and create the world. Knowledge is constituted in light of three fundamental interests; i.e., as human beings we have a technical interest in prediction and control of the natural world, a practical interest in mutual understanding in the conduct of everyday life, and an emancipative interest in critically, reflectively, and rationally pursuing truth, freedom, and justice. Categories of knowledge and science have been constituted as a result of these fundamental interests. Competence in action in each of these broad areas is essential if the human species is to thrive.

Figure 1. Relationship of human interests, action, and knowledge.

Knowledge-Constitutive Interest	Knowledge and Action	Social Medium	Type of Science
Technical, control of nature	Technical/instrumental	Work/labor	Empirical-analytic
Practical, mutual understanding	Practical/moral	Language	Interpretive
Emancipative, autonomy	Emancipative	Power	Critical

Habermas contends that a one-sidedness in knowledge has evolved since the latter part of the nineteenth century. There has been an exponential growth of empirical knowledge and enormous expansion of science-based technology to the exclusion of other types of knowledge and ways of acting (e. g., moral, aesthetic). And we have not reflected upon the meaning of this for the human lifeworld. Emphasis on technique and efficiency has promoted strategic action rather than communicative interaction in everyday life. Without public dialogue and social critique, there has been blind acceptance of the notion that scientific-technological development is synonymous with human progress. Moreover, the fragmentation of knowledge and the isolation of, but dependence upon the "expert," makes it very difficult for ordinary citizens to gain a holistic understanding of society or its problems (Habermas, 1971).

Three specific yet interwoven dimensions of family life emerge from the theory briefly referred to above: (a) a material dimension incorporating such necessities as food, clothing, and shelter; and embedded in this, technical or means-end action expressed through the social medium of labor; (b) a practical-moral dimension emphasizing shared understanding of meanings, values, and norms through communicative action expressed via the medium of language; (c) an emancipative dimension with emancipative action toward the development of human autonomy and freedom, and thus emphasizing reflective critique of social practices and power structures impacting family life. The three dimensions are interrelated in family life, and communicative action is of

*fundamental importance.* However, I will focus briefly on each dimension to show how competence in technical, communicative, and emancipative action is necessary for family well-being.

**1. Technical action and the material dimension of family well-being.**

Recognizing the importance of the material elements of family life, we as a profession have focused to a considerable extent on human needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, and on techniques for meeting them. While these needs may be interpreted within complex socio-cultural and political-economic contexts to generate richness of meaning, it is possible to maintain a largely instrumental attitude toward them both professionally and within family life; i.e., to view work toward meeting family needs as a purely technical activity emphasizing efficient management of resources according to predetermined goals.

Attitude toward work, however, is not necessarily instrumental. Bellah et al. (1986) differentiate between three orientations toward work in everyday life: (a) a purely technical orientation in which work is viewed as merely a job to make money, to make a living, or to succeed economically in life; (b) an individualistic approach to work as a career through which one enjoys achievement and advancement in an occupation as well as gaining social prestige, a sense of power, and self-esteem; and (c) work viewed not merely as a means to economic ends or personal prestige, but as a calling or vocation. Here, work is not viewed instrumentally as a means to one's own advancement; but rather, the moral meaning of

work is paramount as one seeks to make a contribution to the community in the interest of the common good. Although the latter is a less common orientation nowadays, the authors argue that work in this strongest sense is needed in our society. Meanwhile, social practices fly in the face of notions of pursuing moral meaning in everyday life. Powerful forces promote technical and individualistic approaches to work to the detriment of morally oriented social solidarity and family life. Coontz (1992, p. 178) argues that "[t]he way work is organized and rewarded in America today exacerbates consumerism and individual alienation by eating away at family time, neighborhood cohesion, and public solidarities." She states that while most people still try to maintain personal commitments, family life, and social obligations, "they must do so in *opposition* to both job culture and consumer culture."

Conditions that fragment family life and obscure the moral meaning of work within the home should be critically examined in our pursuit of family well-being. The majority of married women and mothers are in the workforce, and while motives include self-esteem and public involvement, many families would not survive without the additional income (Bellah et al., 1991). Although women are making their way into formerly male dominated occupations, they are largely engaged in low-status, low-paid work. On top of this, many come home to a "second shift" since they are still expected to carry out most of the tasks in the home. Under stressful circumstances, work in the home may well be reduced to technical activity and a strategic attitude toward relationships may persist.

A short-term resolution to the problem might be to encourage wider participation in work within the home and a commitment to sharing at least some family time. A sharing, cooperative attitude is needed—people need to feel that the home as well as the work place really belongs to

them and that they contribute to the good of all. A good starting point might be found in tasks associated with the provision of meals. Bellah et al. (1991, p. 260) point out that "the family meal . . . is the chief family celebration;" and that while mealtime can produce conflicts, "learning how to resolve them, to listen and be listened to, is part of the indispensable educational function of the common meal." Also critical of the expansion of a "job culture" at the expense of a "family culture," these authors are adamant that there must be major changes in the organization of work and in related public policy, to promote a balance between work and family life. In a similar vein, Bronfenbrenner (1990, p. 37) states that "one of the principal sources of stress and disarray in the lives of families and their children lies in job stress—the conflict between the needs of the family and the demands of the job." Claiming that it is the mothers who absorb the stress, he argues for provisions such as flexible work schedules, part-time jobs available to men and women without loss of benefits and advancement opportunities, the establishment of family resource offices, and employment of family advocates to deal with family-work issues at the work place. These and other authors emphasize the urgent need in our society for more time for healthy family interaction; and their arguments point to the essentiality of a practical-moral sphere in everyday life.

Work or labor contributes to family well-being; and as human beings, we have the potential to develop competence in technical action, a distinct and essential element of labor. We are also born with the potential to develop and use skills of communication to create a better society; but problems arise when technical action, as strategic action, inappropriately invades social life, i.e., when strategic action oriented toward success displaces communicative action oriented toward shared understanding.

Figure 2. Effects of disturbances in communication necessary for reproduction of the lifeworld.

Disturbances in the domain of	Structural Components of the Lifeworld		
	Culture	Society	Person
Cultural reproduction	Loss of meaning	Withdrawal of legitimation	Crises in orientation and education
Social integration	loss of collective identity	Normlessness	Alienation
Socialization	Breakdown of tradition	Withdrawal of motivation	Psychopathologies

**2. Communicative action and the practical-moral dimension of family well-being.**

For Habermas (1987), the human lifeworld (culture, society, and personality) contains the background of shared meaning that gives coherence and direction to everyday action and interaction. Communication is essential for the transmission and reproduction of our lifeworld. Through *cultural reproduction*, traditions and cultural meanings are passed down; through *social integration*, we recognize norms of cooperation and interaction; and through *socialization*, we form identities both as individuals and collectives.

*Disturbances in communication essential for cultural reproduction* lead to loss of meaning in the culture or lack of agreement on what constitutes valid knowledge (e.g., we no longer share common religious views or a comprehensive moral outlook), the withdrawal of legitimation of social and political institutions becomes evident, and crises in personal orientation and education occur.

*Disturbances in communication essential for social integration* lead to loss of collective identity, normlessness, and individual alienation.

*Disturbances in communication essential for socialization* lead to the breakdown of traditions, withdrawal of motivation in society, and mental illness.

Disturbances in reproduction processes occur in large areas of the lifeworld (e.g., family life, education, citizenship, social welfare) because the "steering mechanisms" of money and power displace rational communication in decision

making. We need to examine a multitude of ways in which communication is distorted in the human lifeworld thereby threatening family well-being, e.g., when the mass media is used to manipulate public opinion; when advertising is used to distort family needs; when public meetings are used to promote the agendas of powerful elites; when the welfare system implements bureaucratic, strategic action closing out face-to face communication with clients; or when money and power invade family life in the guise of consumerism and competitive individualism, creating enormous pressures for achievement and disrupting **family relations**.

Language is an important tool for shaping our perceptions and our identities. Sprey (1990, p. 9) asserts that "[l]anguage, apart from its crucial role in the creation and maintenance of human sociability, shapes our individual and collective potential to think about the world and our place in it." The family environment influences the development of language; and communication within the family plays a major role in the interpretation of social reality and the shaping of world-view. Ideally, dialogue promotes communicative competence necessary for growth toward mature ego identity or autonomy (Habermas, 1979). Communicative competence involves not only the acquisition of cognitive, verbal, and interactive skills but also a progressive development of critical reflexivity. This means that an individual's movement toward mature ego identity is contingent upon the ability to free him or herself from unconscious constraint on thought and action through critical self-reflection. And it is only in

and through dialogue that one can achieve self-understanding and rational self-clarity.

Furthermore, moral development toward the adoption of universal perspectives is accomplished only through dialogue (Habermas, 1979). And if practical-moral reason is to be acquired, the family environment must permit and encourage rational critique of beliefs, norms, and roles. This is not to suggest that there is no place for parental authority, for as Elshtain (1990) points out, authority (combined with parental care, protection, and concern) is essential for the activity of parenting. A child must continually experience love and discipline from the same source. Ideally, the family environment is democratic so that it may, as Elshtain (1990, p. 61) puts it, serve as "a 'launching pad' into more universal commitments." She claims that a young person emerging from such a family is more likely to have the capacity to act in the world as a complex moral being.

Democracy does not require obedient subjects, but autonomous, socially responsible citizens who are prepared to participate in the collective control of life. It requires people who have reflected on their beliefs and are willing to subject them to public critique. However, this presupposes the existence of a public sphere in which people are free to come together to engage in discourse concerning beliefs, practices, and social goals. Major questions here are: To what extent does the social environment permit the development of autonomy and democratic participation? What powerful social forces deny certain groups of people access to public dialogue? How do those forces operate in everyday life? The concepts of power and emancipative action become important at this point.

### **3. Power, and the emancipative dimension of family well-being.**

If we are to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of family well-being, we must grapple with the concept of power. Recent attempts to construct this concept have been made by behaviorists (Dahl, 1957), theorists adopting a communicative perspective (Arendt, 1958;

Habermas, 1983; Fay, 1987), realists (Bhaskar, 1978), deconstructionists (Foucault, 1980), neo-Marxists (Isaac, 1987), and feminists (Miller, 1992), among others.

Ball (1992) points out that while there are some points of agreement among such theorists, they are not compatible in essential respects. Power remains a contested concept. For our purposes here, we are drawing upon communicative concepts of power elucidated by Habermas (1983) and Fay (1987).

Aware of the domination of strategic action in political and social spheres, Habermas (1983, p. 183) argues that we need to be aware of ways in which power is used illegitimately by some individuals or groups "to keep other individuals or groups from perceiving their interests." Legitimate power is formed within communicative action oriented toward agreement and not toward one's own success. Legitimate power arises among those who develop shared understanding to form a common will, through communication free from coercion. Although incapable of being achieved in contemporary society, this communicative conception of power is an ideal to which all political action should aspire.

Also embracing a communicative conception, Fay (1987, p. 130) sees power as a "dyadic" or reciprocal relationship "rooted in part in the reflections and will of those interacting, both the powerless as well as the powerful." Since people have the capacity to reflect critically on their situation and on their self-understanding of it, power relations may change. This means that power can be a relation through which people are empowered to overcome domination and oppression.

In the conceptions of both Fay and Habermas, human beings are viewed as active social agents who can create and sustain all forms of social life, including power relations. Education can be an example of the process of empowerment, as self-understanding gained by a group of people reveals the conditions of their existence and they gain the will to act in concert to overcome oppressive constraints thereby enhancing their well-being.

Many people would not use the term "oppression" in relation to contemporary society in the United States, but as Young (1992, p. 176) points out, "Oppression in the structural sense is part of the fabric of society." There need not be an oppressor as such, but for "every oppressed group there is a group that is *privileged* in relation to that group" (p. 181). Among oppressed groups are women, Blacks, Spanish-speaking Americans, Native Americans, Jews, lesbians, gay men, Arabs, Asians, old people, working class poor, and the physically or mentally disabled. Young explicates "five faces of oppression" or categories of oppression: *exploitation, marginality, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence*. She states, "Being subject to any one of these five conditions is sufficient for calling a group oppressed. Most of the groups . . . experience more than one of these forms, and some experience all five" (p. 194). We need to remember that the groups identified by Young comprise real people in everyday life; i.e., individuals and families whose well being is impaired by powerful social forces and with whom we should be engaged in emancipative action toward freedom.

By "human freedom" I do not mean merely the opportunity to pursue selfish, self-interested goals. Mary Midgley (1994, p. 54) affirms, "the freedom that we need is not sought in detachment, in isolating ourselves from the rest of creation. It has to lie rather in taking our proper place within it, in rightly understanding our relation to it." The freedom we need is that which allows us to participate in determining the conditions of our common life—to collectively establish and pursue goals in the interest of the common good. Two dimensions of freedom are important: the internal dimension relating to freedom from constraint on thought (ignorance, bias, distorted conceptions, unexamined adherence to tradition) and the external dimension relating to the creation and maintenance of public spaces or a public sphere in which ordinary people can come together to participate in dialogue toward the enhancement of shared understanding and the formation of a common will.

Habermas argues that emancipation can only be achieved through participatory democracy, and thus through the regeneration of the public sphere. If this is so, we must create and maintain public spaces for dialogue within the community, within our educational institutions, and within various other collectives—including the family because it can evolve as a kind of public sphere to prepare its members for wider participation.

Arguing for the emergence of critically engaged communities, Putnam (1995, p. 67) states, "Networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust." Interaction can serve to "broaden participants' sense of self, develop the 'I' into 'we'." Engaging in rational reflection and participating in dialogue, oppressed people can share accounts of suffering and felt needs. They gradually form a historical understanding of their oppression as the product of inherent contradictions in the social order (Fay, 1987). As the true nature of their existence emerges, the group determines genuine needs and goals. Collective autonomy and legitimate power are developed through dialogue so that policies are formulated and action is taken to change oppressive social conditions. Examples of this emancipatory process are found in new social movements such as the Women's Movement and the broader Civil Rights Movement.

In light of the history of these movements, we could conceivably generate a *Family Rights Movement* that would cut across socio-economic levels and ethnic and cultural divisions, to empower families to engage in political struggle in the interest of family well-being.

## Conclusion

My purpose here has been to present a conceptual framework as a basis for the development of a holistic understanding of family well-being. In the time available I have barely been able to sketch a network of concepts relating to the material, the practical-moral, and the emancipative dimensions of family life. Research and dialogue are needed for development of this network for an adequate conceptualization of family well-being.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the meaning of the conceptualization outlined here for professional practice. I would simply point out that it would mean engagement in critical social research, with reflective critique and rational dialogue to generate a historical and critical understanding of family life in contemporary society. Theoretical and practical research should be translated into classroom practice, promoting understanding of the complexities of technical, communicative, and emancipative dimensions of everyday life as well as action competence. And research and classroom activity should spill over into the community in the form of dialogue and political action for the enhancement of family well-being.

Finally, I agree with Jefferson that we should have nothing vague or private in mind in our pursuit of happiness. While not concerned with the "measurement" of family well-being, I believe that we must be clear about the meaning of this complex concept and that this should be reflected in professional practice oriented toward the common good.

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**Balancing Work and Family: Response to  
Technical Action and Material Dimension of Family Well-Being**

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In June 1996 in Nashville, I presented a response paper to a section of Edith Baldwin's paper on well-being. As a resource management specialist, my area of expertise is the economic well-being of families and the problems they have balancing work and family demands (Goldsmith, 1996). I thank Drs. Baldwin and Smith for inviting me to participate in the Nashville meeting and Dorothy Mitstifer, editor, for the invitation to submit the response to this publication so that it may reach a broader audience. Although the following remarks suggest several changes to the Baldwin paper, my overwhelming response is one of awe and respect for the theoretical task it tries to tackle.

Sigmund Freud's definition of happiness was "to work and to love." So, in order to be happy one needs to work and feel productive (this can be accomplished inside or outside the home, for pay or not) as well as have friends and family. Because of the realities of today's economy, more and more women are working outside the home. Probably one of the greatest economic and social movements of the twentieth century has been the record number of women joining the labor force.

When home economics was founded, less than 10 percent of adult women worked outside the home. Today the national figure is over 50 percent, with the greatest increases in women with children. In my state of Florida, according to the Department of Commerce, 75 percent of women with children under age 18 work. So, we can no longer talk about family well-being without addressing the impact of paid work on the family and all the subsequent issues. This a weakness of the Baldwin paper. Work is relegated to one section when it really is a pervasive issue penetrating nearly every aspect of individual and family life and, thus, deserves more coverage. For example, a classic study by Blood and Wolfe (1960) revealed that the more economic resources one has, the more power one has in family decision-making. Consider this finding in light of the fact that, today in one-third of U.S. marriages, wives outlearn husbands. This is up from only twenty percent in the 1980s.

According to the Small Business Administration, women-owned businesses contribute \$2.3 trillion per year to the U.S. economy and employ 18 million people. **So, it is important to point out that women not only receive wages, they also dole them out.**

Although the increase in women's economic power is very exciting, it is not without its problems in terms of time and stress. According to opinion polls, the greatest problem American women face is not having enough time.

A positive aspect of women's labor force participation has been the emancipative qualities of work. In this regard, one can only think of the book that started the women's movement: Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. Work can represent autonomy, freedom, and power. Work can also be practical. What could be more practical than earning money? So, to add to the criticism stated earlier about the paper (and the theories on which it is based) is the categorization of work as technical and work/labor as a social medium. Work does fall under these categories, but it means so much more and could be used successfully throughout the paper.

Also, I'd add the "sticky floor" to the discussion of the glass ceiling because many more women experience the "sticky floor" (meaning they are stuck at the bottom and can't get going upward) than experience the "glass ceiling." Labor statistics reveal that many more women are relegated to part-time, low paying service jobs in retail, health care, and office work than are fighting for the CEO slots in organizations.

Regarding household activity, Baldwin says, "Under stressful circumstances, work in the home may well be reduced to technical activity and a strategic attitude toward relationships may persist." The truth is that most housework is repetitive, technical, and time-consuming even under the best of conditions. Let's not make household activity too lofty. For the most part, it simply needs to be done and can be a source of conflict in families since the adult woman does

the bulk of the work. For further discussion, see Arlie Hochschild's (1989) *Second Shift*.

In fact, much of Baldwin's paper really speaks to ideals (perhaps this is the nature of theoretical papers). I agree with her that "people need to feel that the home as well as the work place really belongs to them and that they contribute to the good of all." Wouldn't this be great? In reality, a middle-aged male respondent to one of my work and family research surveys wrote that "going home is just exchanging one set of problems for another." Clearly, neither his home nor his workplace was a haven.

I also agree with Baldwin that there needs to be more coordination between job and family cultures. Flextime, family and medical leave policies, and job sharing are all examples of this.

Companies are still learning a lot about what is effective and what isn't. A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* says that preventing an employee's heart attack could save a company \$60,000, so companies are motivated not only by good will but also by the practical dollars and cents benefits of offering wellness programs (Jeffrey, 1996). In the same article, it was reported that Johnson and Johnson found that 96 percent of their employees participated in having their blood pressure, cholesterol, and body fat checked and filled out a health-risk questionnaire if they offered a \$500 discount on employee's insurance premiums. Only 40 percent participated when there was no cash incentive. Another company, Applied Materials, found that broadening the definition of exercise to include housework and gardening got more employees to participate in their wellness program.

I would encourage Baldwin to add more comments on workplace policies such as those described that encourage individual as well as family health, as the one surely impacts the other. Another idea would be to discuss well-being from a life cycle point of view. Young, beginning families have different social and economic needs than mid-career or retired couples.

As a final note, once the theory is down pat, Baldwin should move on to another phase that

includes more examples, statistics, and applications to make the theory practical. With the pressures individuals and families are now experiencing it behooves all of us to find ways to reach out to them and the organizations they work for to make theories of well-being as useful as possible.

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**FAMILY WELL-BEING:  
INSIGHTS GAINED THROUGH THE PROCESS OF  
CRITICAL REFLECTION**

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Thank you for the opportunity of sharing with you some of my thoughts on the meaning of the concept of well-being. Perhaps I should start by placing this study in context.

When I was working on my Masters thesis, I kept coming across writers who were claiming that **well-being** was the focus of Home Economics, or, more particularly, **the well-being of individuals and families**.

For example, Marjorie Brown says:

Throughout its history, Home Economics has claimed to be concerned for the well-being of the individual and the family (Brown, 1993:49).

As I read these words, two questions kept coming to mind:

Is well-being the focus of Home Economics?

What does well-being mean?

Eventually, these became the two questions that formed the basis of my Ph.D.

### **THE REFLECTIVE PROCESS:**

Writing my Ph.D. was a reflective process for me. It seemed to progress in stages:

- Firstly: I conducted a review of the literature to find out what writers in the field had to say about the meaning of the term;
- Secondly: I collected and analyzed my own data to find out what Australian Home Economists had to say about well-being;
- Thirdly: to try to make sense of what I had found, I applied two theoretical approaches to the data:

critical theory

feminist theory

I was trying to find the answer to the question: What does well-being mean?

He wanted to find another way . . . a new direction for society . . . one that would provide greater equality between all members of society.

I have tried to represent this process visually. For

me, the process was like being on a spiral. I seemed to be going back over the same ideas, and yet, I always seemed to end up in a different place—at a different level. This is a reflective process—a dialectic process—a process of philosophising.

### **Philosophising**

I used to be terrified by the concept of *philosophy* until one day a colleague (who is himself a philosopher—in the real sense of the word) said to me that philosophy is something that we all engage in. “Philosophy,” he said, “was the art of wondering.”

So, from this perspective, philosophy is not something to be taken as a *given*, something to be accepted without question. Rather, it is something that we all do; it is a process—a process of reflection.

Philosophy involves:

- wondering about,
- theorizing (i.e., generating explanations about),
- trying to develop an understanding of,
- questioning/challenging our own beliefs and practices.

Such an enterprise does not come up with solutions, instead this approach:

- often creates more questions than answers,
- challenges our understanding of the world,
- can be threatening/uncomfortable,
- can create greater conflict.

This is the approach I have adopted in this study.

My hope for today is that, rather than coming up with answers to the questions I posed at the outset of this paper, you will go away asking yourself: **What does well-being mean?**

## **Critical Theory as a Conceptual Framework for Examining the Concept of Well-being**

The conceptual/theoretical framework I am using today is based on the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas.

I chose Habermas because his work has been used by other home economics writers, particularly Marjorie Brown (1993, 1988a, 1988b) whose work I have already refereed to, and Edith Baldwin (1990, 1989, 1986), an Australian who has worked closely with Dr. Brown.

I also find that Habermas provides a framework that, for me, helps to make meaning of the many conflicting points of view in home economics, not only in Australia but throughout the world (Henry, 1995, 1989).

Habermas is a German philosopher and a member of the Frankfurt School. He grew up in Nazi Germany and was horrified by the atrocities perpetrated at Nuremberg.

He wanted to find another way—a new direction for society—one that would provide greater equality between all members of society.

He read the work of Aristotle and was greatly impressed with the Aristotelian idea of the *City State*:

- one in which social life centered around the process of dialogue;
- where all participants were treated as equal;
- where argumentation and debate formed the basis of true democracy (Holub, 1991; Rundell, 1991).

Habermas is a prolific writer, but perhaps his two most significant works are:

- *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Habermas, 1989); published in 1968; based on his inaugural lecture at the University of Frankfurt; in which he develops his theory of knowledge.

- *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1987, 1981); published in 1981; in which he develops his theory of society.

In his first book, Habermas examined ways in which knowledge and action are organized. Based on the Aristotelian idea of the 'good' society, Habermas came up with the idea that knowledge was also hierarchically organized:

- **technical** knowledge (hypothetico-deductive or scientific knowledge);
- **practical** knowledge (hermeneutic knowledge);
- **emancipatory** knowledge (critique/critical reflection).

In his later work, Habermas applied this same theory to a theory of society. In this he said that society can be conceptualized in two ways:

- as **lifeworld** (the intercommunicative world of intersubjectivity), and
- as **system** (the increasingly complex and structurally differentiated organization of society).

These two exist in tension with each other, each informing and critiquing the other. In the process of challenging and questioning the other, the emancipatory potential of each is released.

Using these three ways of viewing knowledge and society, I began to consider:

### **What do these approaches tell us about the possible meanings of well-being?**

## **A TECHNICAL PERSPECTIVE ON WELL-BEING:**

**Technical Rationality** - According to Habermas, a technical view of the world is grounded in the need of human kind to survive and reproduce itself. It is oriented towards controlling and managing the environment (whether this is a physical or a social environment).

**Knowledge** that this approach generates is observable, verifiable, precise. It is objective and disinterested. It is immutable truth. It produces laws and rules that direct and control what people do and think.

**The Meaning of Well-Being: A Practical (Moral-Political) Stance:** A practical (moral-political) view of well-being would comprise the following:

- understanding of the world in which we live;
- an openness to new ways of understanding the world and making meaning of it;
- being communicatively competent (i.e., being able to participate fully in the process of argumentation and debate, being able to argue rationally);
- being able to participate in the process of reflection;
- having a concern for the good of society (i.e., not only a concern for one's own good/well-being);
- being treated and treating others, as equals.

N.B. need to be aware of coercive practices (i.e. being overly persuasive, distorting the truth, denying others the right to speak).

### ***An emancipatory perspective of well-being***

**Emancipatory Rationality** - According to Habermas, *the emancipatory view of the world* is concerned with questioning the taken-for-granted views of society that are often accepted unthinkingly. According to this view, we need to challenge not only the unquestioned beliefs and practices of society, but our own unquestioned beliefs and practices also. This gives rise to what Habermas refers to as *the highest form of knowledge*.

**Emancipatory knowledge** is the knowledge of reflection or critique. Critical reflection enables us to stand outside of our own experience and question our own understandings and meanings of the world, on the one hand, and the *rules* of society that are externally imposed, on the other. In Habermasian terms, we are freed from:

- externally imposed constraints; and
- internally imposed constraints.

This occurs through a dialectic process that involves a *to-ing* and *fro-ing* between alternative viewpoints (one informing and, at the same time, challenging the other).

Thus, issues of control and domination are confronted with and by communicative rationality. And issues of coercion and distortion are confronted with and by empirical evidence. The resolution of the resulting conflict is a new form of knowledge, one that is authentic, empowering, and liberating.

**Emancipatory Action** is the process of critical reflection, the ability to question and to challenge those previously taken-for-granted beliefs and practices of society.

When individuals and groups are able to challenge and confront the beliefs and practices of society, they are freed from dogmatic domination and coercive practices. This leads to what Habermas refers to as, autonomy. But autonomy is not self-interested. It is concerned for the “good” of society as a whole (i.e. the “collective” good). It encapsulates the ideal of justice for all. It promotes a state of collective freedom.

So, emancipation, in the Habermasian sense, is for the collective, not for the individual. Similarly, concepts such as 'empowerment are achieved for the collective, not simply for the individual.

### ***The Meaning of Well-Being: An Emancipatory Stance***

An emancipatory view of well-being therefore, would encompass the following:

- freedom from dogmatic domination, coercion and self deception;
- insight into one's beliefs and practices and also the beliefs and practices of society;
- the ability to participate in the processes of critical reflection/dialectic reasoning (being able to challenge previously unquestioned theory and practice);

- a concern for the good of society as a whole (i.e., collective well-being);
- autonomy/empowerment/emancipation - synonymous with well-being.

From the Habermasian perspective then, well-being equates with concepts of autonomy, empowerment, and emancipation. But these are not oriented towards the good of the individual, but towards the good of society as a whole. An individual in isolation from the collective (be it the family, the work group, or the wider society) cannot experience well-being in the terms discussed here. It can only be experienced when the well-being of others with who he/she lives is also achieved.

### ***Implications for Family Well-being***

How then, do these three approaches to understanding the meaning of well-being impact on families?

According to this approach, each suggests a different way of describing well-being.

**A Technical View of Family Well-Being** would suggest that the family is a system (a cybernetic system) each part of the family (or individual) *cog-wheeling* with other parts of the family. If one part is not functioning properly, the rest of the system breaks down. Hence the family becomes dysfunctional.

Similarly, the family is one part of the social system, So, if families are dysfunctional, so too is society. And when other aspects of society are dysfunctional, this also impacts on the family.

From this systems view of the family, and of society, the steering mechanisms of money and power also impact on the family life. One of the concerns raised by Habermas is that the system (i.e., the bureaucracy, government agencies, multinational corporations) has infiltrated the family, usurping many of its roles and responsibilities to the extent that the contemporary family is often under the control of the State. Take, for example, the role of social welfare and its impact on the family. Government handouts to families actually provide one means by which the autonomy of the family is eroded. The family ultimately

becomes dependent on the State. Similarly, the increasing role of the State in health and education testifies to the increasing intervention of the State into the lives of families, taking over many of the responsibilities that were once considered the responsibility of the family.

Individuals and families must conform to the demands of the State if they are to be duly rewarded (usually in economic terms).

This approach encourages individuals and family groups to be self-seeking, looking after their own interests and concerns with little concern for the welfare/well-being of others.

From another perspective, a technical (or systems) view of family well-being also recognizes the extent to which individuals and families seek to dominate and control the environment of the home (be it the physical environment or the social environment). Thus management (of time, money, resources, people) is emphasized so that family is run more efficiently and the household is well organized.

Within the Habermasian framework, the question remains to be asked: **Is this what we mean by family well-being?**

**A Practical View to Family Well-Being** would be more concerned with families living and working in society, understanding the social processes, making meaning of the world in which they live.

A practical view of family well-being centers around the Habermasian concept of *lifeworld*, the shared understandings and meanings of the world in which we live which are generated through interaction with each other and through the act of speech.

The moral-political dimension of family well-being would be illustrated in equality between all members of the family, each person having a say in what happens, each person contributing to the decision making. In this way, families would seek to reach agreement, to arrive at consensus in their decision making.

A practical view of family well-being would also address what is for the good of the whole. It would ask:

- what is for the good of the family?
- what is for the good of society?

It would also ask the questions:

- Is this **right** action?
- How does this action contribute to the good of society?

From this perspective, the family would be seen to be making an important contribution to society. Thus, the opinions of families would also be considered in decision making that affected the welfare of society as a whole.

Just as there are potential drawbacks in the technical understanding of family well-being, so too, there are potential drawbacks in the practical understanding of family well-being.

There is the potential, for example, for individuals and families to distort the truth in seeking their own ends; there is the potential for individuals and families to be coercive or overly persuasive in seeking agreement amongst its members; and there is the potential for individuals and families to deny some members the right to speak or the right to be heard.

The question then must again be asked: **Is this what we mean by family well-being?**

**An Emancipatory View of Family Well-Being** would suggest that family well-being exists only when there is truth, justice, and freedom for all its members.

This view of family well-being originates in the unquestioned acceptance of keeping things as they are—a blind acceptance of our own beliefs and practices and the beliefs and practices of society.

Well-being in this context, refers to the ability of individuals and families to question the accepted beliefs and practices of society. Asking the questions:

- Why is this so?
- How could it be otherwise?
- Whose interests are being served?

Family well-being is based on the idea of rational argumentation and debate, being able to challenge our own and other people's thinking and seeking to gain a new understanding of ourselves and each other.

But this view of well-being is not self-seeking. It is concerned for the well-being of all members of the family/society. It seeks to break down the chains of irrational thought.

## Summary

This paper has examined three ways of conceptualizing well-being, based on Habermas' social theory. Of the three approaches, Habermas would argue that the technical and practical approaches provide an inadequate description of well-being. Only the emancipatory view, which aims for truth, justice, and freedom provides the ultimate understanding of well-being, not only for the individual or the family but for all members of society and for society as a whole.

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***Power, and the Emancipative Dimension of Family Well-being***

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I have to say that I don't have any disagreement with Edith Baldwin's approach, but I do think there's lots to do before we engage in a political struggle at the level of a Family Rights Movement. The political struggle in the interest of family well-being must begin at home, at work, in the neighborhood, one by one. And yes, we need a contemporary theory for family well-being. I hope that my exploration of the concept of power and emancipation will contribute in some way. I'm not sure well-being is much different whether it is in family, work place, or neighborhood, except perhaps at the level of intimacy. The immediacy of effect on the individual may differ as well.

The traditional definitions of power include position power, information and expertise, control of rewards, coercive power, alliances and networks, access to and control of agendas, control of meaning and symbols, and personal power (Bolman & Deal, 1991). This explanation, although reality, has a limiting perspective—some components are clearly positive and others have negative connotations. How can power be described in a more beneficial way? How can power help in building a viable human future? Terry's (1993) definition of power as *energy expenditure* is helpful in identifying authentic uses of power. From this perspective, expressions of power include creating/interpreting, aligning (i.e., developing consensus on values and goals), collective volition (i.e., pursuing and claiming legitimate interests), growing/developing systems, personal volition (i.e., giving, receiving, exchanging resources), and physical force (i.e., voluntary and non-voluntary compliance).

Then, too, we must learn about power from the effect of being disempowered.

I am reduced, disempowered. I am a number or a type or a stage in the process of production. My meanings are deprived of their meaning. Nowhere can I see them reflected in or responded to by the system. When this system is my place of work, I feel alienated as a worker. When the system is the political system that runs my country, I feel alienated as a citizen. I cannot feel a personal relationship with nor personal

involvement in a distant and bureaucratized political system that has nothing to do with the things that I care about. This is particularly true when the political system is embodied in professional politicians who are distant and who seem to have their own agenda. (Zohar & Marshall, 1994, p. 259)

Paulo Freire (1993) refers to oppressed and oppressors in discussing this same phenomenon. He cautions: "Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea that becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion. . . . the oppressor, who is himself dehumanized because he dehumanizes others, is unable to lead this struggle" (p. 29). An obstacle to humanization is false charity that creates dependence instead of freedom. Freire warns that the oppressed often seek the model of humanity they have experienced instead of striving for liberation. In so doing they become oppressors themselves.

A good many people have lost the "view of human life as ordered to a given end" (Macintyre, 1987). And a minimalist social contract has led to the view that relationships are simply legal contracts. Concern for individuals or family or honesty or ethics is reduced to what is legally permissible.

People cannot live for long without meaning, nor can they suffer forever a system that denies them identity. Both meaning and identity . . . are built into the very physics of consciousness. They are built into the way the brain takes disparate bits of sensory data from the environment and binds them into a perceptual whole. At higher levels they are built into the way that the self-organizing system of consciousness weaves disparate bits of information into a worldview and into the way that essentially relational selves gather themselves into meaningful community. (Zohar & Marshall, 1994, p. 261).

Nelson Mandela's life is testament to the importance of meaning and community. His commitment to freedom was not based on any singular moment of truth, just a steady accumulation of experiences. His recent autobiography states, "There was no particular day on which I said, From henceforth I will devote myself to the liberation of my people; instead, I simply found myself doing so, and could not do otherwise" (1994, p. 95). His book describes how he developed his value system, gained self-confidence, and was liberated from being overwhelmed by power. He learned that the difficulty of creating community and shared meanings did not diminish their necessity. The apartheid movement succeeded through sacrifice and community.

When the quest for meaning and identity is frustrated or denied, the natural reaction is to rush into materialism—a vain quest for meaning in the acquisition of things as symbols of self or identity or power. This pathology is also at work in nostalgic longing for earlier times and in polarized groups (often referred to as tribalism) where there is intense loyalty to one's own group and hostility toward other groups. Although not limited to a crisis of meaning and identity, nationalism is also representative of self-protective resistance to loss, to being cut off from original meanings and group identity—where the "natural sense of group meaning and group identity has been threatened or shattered or made to feel of no consequence" (Zohar & Marshall, 1994, p. 263).

The other "isms" are caught up in this same lack of group meaning and group identity. "All this banding together of like-minded people is natural and, where people are oppressed, even healthy and necessary. But what makes this fragmentation into 'tribes' or 'isms' so destructive is the definition of one's own group *in opposition to the Other* and the casting of others in the role of *necessary enemies*" (Zohar & Marshall, 1994, p. 266).

The net result of all this modern crisis of meaning and the negative, tribalist quest for meaning that tries to fill the vacuum is that . . . [significant numbers of people] are

alienated from the political process altogether and the rest are caught up in the sterile and all too predictable politics of conflict and confrontation. My group, my interests, my meanings, my way are what must be fought for on the political stage. My advantage must be pursued, against the Other or despite the Other. . . . the politics of fighting [in] my own corner has replaced a broader politics that seeks the common good of the whole. (Zohar & Marshall, 1994, p. 266-267)

The question of *whose rights* will be a critical one in the Family Rights Movement proposed by Baldwin. The current political milieu suggests that it will be no easy task to transcend from *them vs. me and mine* to *us*. No consensus can arise in the context of alienation or fighting for one's own corner. When all meanings are private or exclusive, shared meaning has difficulty in emerging. To get beyond this situation, I believe we need to start the dialogue by recognizing the wisdom and truth, the value and meaning of older, traditional social groupings. Recognition must be given, too, to the fact that there is no going back and that there were some limitations. Then a new form of socio-political organization needs to incorporate what is good of the past but within the context of the present reality.

Shared understanding of common meaning and identity can form a covenant that transcends all differences between people concerned. Covenants, unlike contracts, have meaning for the agreeing parties and their relationship to each other and to some higher reality. Shared values, shared assumptions, shared practices, common purposes—all these are elements of a covenant.

A quote from Zohar and Marshall (1994) describes a central problem of covenant making:

To find real and lasting solutions to conflicts between different interest groups we need general principles that at once reflect the local meanings of small groups and at the same time provide some overarching meaning acceptable to all. Yet this overarching meaning is precisely what the

privatization and pluralization of life—worlds makes inaccessible. Thus we have what [we] would call the *paradox of pluralism: Our need to accommodate pluralism has strengthened the privatization (and relativization) of meaning. Yet, it is only through discovering some collective, public meaning that we can learn to accommodate our pluralism.* (p. 273)

This dilemma recognizes the problem of dealing with individualism and difference and with the need for an overarching “canopy of meaning.” Neither homogeneity or conflict/confrontation is acceptable. A broader meaning of difference is needed. Perhaps it is that *difference is the rationale for existence of society itself.* Although this sacred dimension, the ultimate meaning of our existence, cannot be found in any one of the organized religions, a broader spirituality is possible if the common roots can be found.

The quest for meaning must come from true dialogue, a form of communication contrasted to discussion and debate. Bohm (1990) described dialogue as related to the process used by the brain to integrate diverse perceptual data. Through the processes of deconstruction and resynthesis, new ways of being will arise. Deconstruction is letting go and suspending one’s own point of view. Then it is compared, contrasted, and considered alongside others’ points of view. When genuine listening occurs, the person stops making sense of data in the old terms and is free to create new concepts and categories of information. Resynthesis begins when some common ground is beginning to be discovered. Senge (1990) defines dialogue as the ability of members to suspend assumptions and to engage in genuine thinking together. He contrasts dialogue to discussion that has a winner-take-all modality. Zohar and Marshall describe dialogue as “dancers exploring (and creatively discovering) our common score” (1994, p. 285). Thus, meeting in dialogue is a continuing process of discovery, lifelong in nature. Freire adds to the meaning of dialogue

when he describes it as an “encounter among men to ‘name’ the world, . . . a fundamental precondition for their true humanization” (1993, p. 118). This encounter unites *reflection* and *action* as the dialoguers address the world which is to be transformed and humanized. Dialogue seeks the confirmation or correction of the human condition.

It seems to me that from a power and emancipation perspective, there are at least two dimensions to family well-being: moral foundations of the relationships within the family and structure of the family. The moral foundations relate to the meanings and spiritual foundation of the relationships between and among the adults and children. The family’s structure refers to “how the daily matters of cooperation, commitment, power, and authority are organized or enacted” (Zohar & Marshall, 1994, p. 300). Zohar and Marshall suggest a model for the kind of individual needed to redefine our communities, recapture the meaning of our freedom, transform our politics, and reinvent our families. I propose that it is an emancipation model, the components of which include: This model helps each of us, and the societies in which we live, to develop the kind of consensus in which many voices are heard and in which those voices remain distinct, yet all voices in the same choir—all dancers in the same dance. The goal of the good society (Bellah, et al., 1991) is to respond to nothing less than a universal community—human beings and the natural world without boundaries as to “space, or time, or extent of interaction, [nothing] short of a whole in which we live and move and have our being” (Niebuhr, 1978, p. 88). Fritjof Capra (1982, p. 411) refers to *deep ecology* to describe this foundation for cultural transformation. Parenthetically, his book, *The Turning Point*, is a useful resource for emancipation activities.

**Emancipation Model** (adapted from Zohar and Marshall, 1994, 324-332)

1. The need for new thinking	1. new and fresh, even radical, ideas are needed lest thoughts and imagination run dry.
2. Recognition that individuals are both self and other	2. an individual is distinct and unique and at the same time a member of a wider group (with a further identity).
3. Living at the edge	3. open to new experience, open in attitude, open to the many possibilities, ready to reinvent.
4. Celebration of diversity	4. the larger and richer the range of possibilities the greater the opportunity for understanding, for growth.
5. Commitment to dialogue	5. differences must meet and be integrated if they are to lead to a new creative reality.
6. Commitment to the future	6. by committing ourselves to the unfolding process of nature as fully as possible we commit ourselves to the future.
7. Commitment to common ground	7. the meanings (values) that are fundamental to all in the universe, some might call it spirituality or “the God within.”

Emancipation, or the acceptance of power or authority, is not easy. People who’ve never had it have difficulty in accepting power, especially the responsibility and autonomy. One who is used to power and authority finds it easier to just do it—it’s so time-consuming to give others opportunities. It is easier and faster for Mom or the boss to do it, so it must be recognized that efficiency is a concept that must have diminished value. I’ll say it again—efficiency must have diminished value. Helgesen (1995) has a set of questions that help to facilitate emancipation: “Whose decision should this be? Who is in the position to make it? And what preparation, training, and information might that person need in order to make it? How can I help to provide that? And if no one else is in a position to make this decision, what am I doing wrong?” (p. 157). Now that’s novel—a mother

or boss asking what am I doing wrong. There is obviously a need for change and for introspection on both sides of the equation.

One of the problems with the word *power* is that it is commonly perceived as having a negative connotation. A new definition of power is proposed to change its context within emancipation: ***power means being drawn into the larger social context.***

In conclusion, these ideas, though incomplete, are intended to encourage further thought and study. I’d like to return to the metaphor—***All dancers in the same dance.*** It seems to me that this metaphor describes a family whose well-being is assured. Family well-being depends in part on the ability of the individuals within to form a community—that “capacity for relatedness within individuals, relatedness not only to people but to events in history, to nature,

to the world of ideas, and yes, to things of the spirit” (Conger, 1994, p. 105).

One last word. I may be a bit brazen and perhaps naïve, but I think that the work that Kappa Omicron Nu has been doing with *reflective human action* (Andrews et al., 1995) is about emancipation—it is about well-being in the setting wherever you find yourself. I recommend this theory to you for your consideration.

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**Summary of Discussion Held in Session II**

**Continuing the Dialogue:**  
**Family Well Being as A controversial Concept**

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Two sessions regarding the concept of family well-being were held during the 1996 AAFCS Annual Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. The first session included the presentation of a theory paper by Edith Baldwin. The second session included responses by Elizabeth Goldsmith, Margaret Henry, and Dorothy Mitstifer. An open dialogue was facilitated after the three response papers. Due to technical difficulties experienced by National Cassette Services, no tape of the recorded dialogue is available. Thus this summary was gleaned from the presenters and audience through telephone conversations, e-mail, fax, and the author's own notes.

About one-half of the audience received copies of the paper, *Family Well-Being: A Conceptualization to Guide Professional Practice*, presented by Edith Baldwin the preceding day. The response papers and the discussion at this session were based on this paper.

Some discussion of the term *work* from the first response paper and its relation to family well-being was discussed. The common definition of what constitutes work (paid work) was questioned.

One participant commented that theory is great, but she needed practical help. "Next week, she said, "I have to defend my family and consumer sciences program (in the high school curriculum) to the legislature and county officials. I cannot wait years for something useful to come from the well-being definition and examination."

The overall framework, a Habermasian one, was questioned: "Why don't we, as family and consumer scientists develop our own framework?" The Hestian/Hermian paradigm was suggested.

The question of the inclusiveness of the framework was discussed. Is consensus inclusive? Or exclusive? Ideally it may be inclusive; but in the real world of implementing a theory, it is often exclusive. Some time was spent in the telling of stories related to inclusiveness and exclusiveness. Feminists have criticized Habermas' theory as excluding

women.

The idea of pluralism in the context of Giroux's Theory of Difference was introduced. How to reconcile this within a coherent framework is still not clear.

The concept of developing a community of inquirers who are eager to participate in rational discussion, open to new ideas, but at the same time able to defend and to contest their own ideas and the ideas of others was an underlying covert theme throughout the discussion. It was agreed that further dialogue is required.

As a reflective thought one respondent observed that she had been aware of Marjorie Brown's desire that family and consumer scientists (home economists) form a communicative community—a community of critical inquirers engaging in rational argument. "I saw this meeting as beginning this process; we have a long way to go before we reach rational consensus as Brown envisioned."

In commenting on the overall discussion, one respondent said that even though everyone seemed to agree that the family well-being is essential for the profession of family and consumer sciences, this concept is a nebulous, controversial topic in this session. Another stated that as a professional community we need to come together and identify values that are necessary for a family to have well-being and that there is research already done in this area that could prove useful to us. One participant commented that well-being was a three-part construct involving health, happiness, and prosperity. Yet another commented that we need to do more research on family well-being using the alternative paradigms suggested and to continue the dialogue so the concept can continue to emerge for the benefit of families.

Another participant observed that three layers of objectives seemed to appear: using Habermas's human interests paradigm for the development of a framework; creating a public sphere where Brown's concept of dialogical methodology could occur; and developing a common understanding of family well-being. The groups readiness, I believe, for these layered objectives was thwarted at two levels. There was

disagreement and confusion about the paradigm itself and the group had some difficulty in the use of the dialogical process. Future sessions could begin with a clear description of the paradigm and give major emphasis to the process (of facilitating a dialogue). The planners might want to combine these ideas into an overall session objective.

Some ideas for further work were generated by the audience:

1. Form an Action Group as a part of or separate from AAFCS.
2. Distribute Edith's paper, the three response papers and a summary of the dialogue of Session 2 as a publication. Kappa Omicron Nu volunteered as publisher.
3. Submit a **stories** theme issue for *Kappa Omicron Nu FORUM*.
4. Submit a follow-up program session at AAFCS in Washington, DC in June, 1997.
5. Work with a graduate student who is willing to consider family well-being as a subject of doctoral research.