

Families and Communities:  
A Social Organization Theory of Action and Change

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## Families and Communities:

### A Social Organization Theory of Action and Change

Families are embedded in multiple contexts that reflect community structure and process. Though families influence those contexts to some degree, in the main families are the recipients of events, values, and norms that comprise community collective life. Families are rarely isolated, and their boundaries are permeable, whether by the media, neighbors, confidants, or social institutions. Community *social organization* is a comprehensive descriptor of the contexts in which families live. “Social organization is how people in a community interrelate, cooperative, and provide mutual support; it includes social support norms, social controls that regulate behavior and interaction patterns, and networks that operate in a community” (Mancini, Martin, & Bowen, 2003; Mancini and Bowen, 2005; Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2004). From a social action and change perspective, social organization supports building community capacity, in effect, shared responsibility and collective competence as primary situations and processes that enable communities to provide desired supports to families (Bowen, Martin, Mancini, & Nelson, 2000; Mancini & Bowen, 2009).

Our focus in this expansive chapter on families and communities locates families as the pivot-point in the discussion, and assembles community structures and processes around them, mirroring what occurs in everyday life. Our discussion seeks to answer several primary questions. First, to what extent have family social scientists included aspects of community structure and process in their analysis of family-related processes and outcomes? Second, in what ways does our work inform efforts to conceptualize ways in which communities influence families? Our aim is to offer a conceptual model as a heuristic for theory development and future research efforts. Although community can be defined from multiple perspectives (Coulton, 1995;

Mogey, 1964), we focus primarily on community as providing a geographic context in which families function and interrelate.

Our discussion is informed by two sources of data. First, we look back in the family science literature at key discussions of families and communities, and in particular, we retrieve ideas from early theories and discussions about families. We assume that to move the discipline forward toward a more nuanced examination of families and communities, it is instructive to revisit important ideas and approaches from the past. Second, we analyze certain characteristics of the family science discipline through a focus on three pivotal professional journals and their contents from 2000 to 2009: *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Family Relations*, and the *Journal of Family Issues*. As explained in detail later, we chart the use of theory and the dominant research approaches used in qualitative and quantitative investigations. Along the way we critique theory and method, and ultimately suggest a roadmap for understanding the relationships between families and their communities.

### **Summary Reviews and Theoretical Volumes in Family Studies**

The family studies discipline has benefitted from major works designed to efficiently capture the nature of scientific thinking and study of family structure, systems, and dynamics. In this current chapter we are treating these works as data that speak to how the discipline has examined families and communities, and as complementary to our later review of major family studies journals for the period of 2000-2009. They include three earlier handbooks on marriages and families (Christensen, 1964; Sussman & Steinmetz, 1987; Sussman, Steinmetz, & Peterson, 1999), five comprehensive books on family theories and methods (Nye & Berardo, 1966; Burr, Hill, Nye, & Reiss, 1979a, 1979b; Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993; Bengtson, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein, 2005), and five decade reviews of the

literature as published in *Journal of Marriage and Family* (decades of the 1960's, 1970's, 1980's, 1990's, as well as 2000-2009. ). These reference materials constitute reviews broad in nature, rather than having much focus on the details of individual theoretical or research articles. These data provide a sense of how much interest was shown in examining the relationships between families and their communities, as well as what family scientists were examining and what they were discovering.

### **Handbook of Marriage and the Family**

**Handbook of Marriage and the Family (1964).** Christensen's (1964) handbook was the first major compilation on what was known about families, and gave broad coverage to family science theories, methods, and substantive content areas. Explicit discussions of community appeared in several chapters, most particularly in Moge's (1964) chapter on family and community in urban-industrial societies. Sirjamaki's (1964) chapter on the institutional theoretical approach invoked the term community, as did Pitts' (1964) discussion of social class and neighborhoods, in the course of outlining the structural-functional theoretical approach. Dager (1964) discussed how systems external to families play into socialization and personality development in the child. However, it is only the Moge chapter that gave full treatment to families and communities, and so the following extraction from this handbook is only from that chapter. As an aside, though we review several other handbooks and sourcebooks, we found no other chapter so focused on families and communities.

Moge's chapter begins with a discussion on family and kin relations (parenthetically, for many years it seems that discussions of networks that surrounded the nuclear family were limited to kin, rather than neighbors and other network components). In part, this reflected the significant influence of the work of Eugene Litwak on the family field in the early 1960s

(Litwak, 1960a, b). Mogey speaks about social norms and their role in regulating internal family dynamics and decisions, such as that governing marriage and sexual behavior. At that time, over 100 definitions of community were documented and common elements across definitions included culture and social interaction. Of note is the separation of community from society, the former considered a subculture, and consistent with how we view community (that is, community with a lower case “c”, and focused on social interaction and neighborhood structures and processes). There was a substantial focus on the structural aspects of community rather than on the interactional (neighborhood relations and friendship cliques). The association that individuals and families had with formal organizations was a greater focus, principally because functions of the family in the society were a primary concern. Mogey’s discussion often went along anthropological lines, where lineage was discussed in the context of Western and non-Western societies and cultures. The chapter is rich in comparative culture information and research findings.

Several concepts are presented in the chapter to facilitate capturing the essence and character of a community. *Closed community* describes collections of families centered on common beliefs and traditions, homogeneous in culture values, and said to be closed against nonmembers. Members of an *open community* have a much broader range of associations and attachments to other groups of people. Research in that day indicated that when comparing closed and open communities, the former had a greater impact on childhood socialization, parental roles, and marital roles.

Three hypotheses were suggested to explain what Mogey called neighboring relations among families. The *phase hypothesis* states there is considerable initial interaction between newly-settled families but that interaction declines as families learn more about their neighbors’

values and practices. The *status hypothesis* is especially centered on United Kingdom working class families, using the terms “respectables” and “roughs,” the former seemingly desiring to keep distance between them and their neighbors and focusing their attention within the family, and the latter developing more expansive and intense relationships with other families; when asked to identify a friend, respectables chose each other, whereas roughs chose a neighbor as a friend. The *siteing hypothesis* involves propinquity as an explanation for how neighbors interact, particularly in homogeneous communities. Community and neighborhood cohesion is also addressed, with research indicating that satisfaction with housing and community is largely influenced by having a sense of cohesion with neighbors. Neighbors are identified as alternative kin, being available for practical support. The strain of being close to neighbors but not too close is also discussed. It is pointed out that the similarities and differences between neighbor, kindred, and friend roles were not then adequately explored by researchers. Some attention is given to the idea of neighborhood and its meaning, it being a “place” and a social system where neighboring occurs. When discussing families and mobility, Mogey notes that “since family mobility is an essential consequence of the social structure of industrial societies, the sociology of neighbor relations offers virtually untrodden ground for the testing of propositions about family roles, behavior, and belief” (p. 522).

Toward the end of this chapter, Mogey presents a community typology. The first dimension was called closed or open (somewhat synonymous with isolated or non-isolated, and corporate or non-corporate). The second was homogeneous or heterogeneous regarding values, and the third element was social structure, either based on hierarchy of statuses or on collective action. Much of the discussion in that day about families seemed to be about comparing extended families vs. nuclear families. When discussing family well-being, Mogey concluded unstable

families were more likely to be where community structures, other than family and peer groups, are absent. In many respects, Moge's handbook chapter parallels contemporary research and theorizing, which is often focused on either community structures or processes, and seeking to demonstrate effects on families. Though he did not use the term social organization, a great deal of his discussion was consonant with that umbrella for describing the multiple layers that comprise collective life.

**Handbook of Marriage and the Family (1987).** The first edition of the current *Handbook of Marriage and the Family* series contained a greater number of chapters in which either community or neighborhood was explicitly discussed. However, unlike the 1964 handbook no chapter was dedicated to linking families and communities, although invoking the term community appeared in various forms. For example, Withers-Osmond (1987), in her chapter on radical-critical theories as applied to families, stated “if survey methods were designed to provide data not only on individuals but also on their family and community contexts, the data could be linked with macrosociological information (on organizations, classes, ethnic groups and societies) in an effort to understand the reciprocal influences between behavior in families and behavior in the larger contexts” (p. 121). Settles (1987), in discussing the future of families, stated that, “Shaping life around an industry (such as high tech), an enterprise (like farming), or a service (like government or education) gives a common meaning and destiny to the families in a community” (p. 170), and Wilkinson (1987), as part of a larger focus on ethnicity and families, discussed micro communities of immigrants that inhabit blocks within communities. Boss (1987) presents a contextual model of family stress, which includes forces external to families, such as historical (when the event takes place), economic (state of the overall economy), developmental (stage of the life cycle of the family), constitutional (health of family members), religious (role

of God in family) and cultural (provides the mores and canons by which families define events of stress and their coping resources). She notes the larger culture provides the rules by which families operate on a micro level. Peterson and Rollins (1987) discuss the multidimensional nature of socialization, noting it occurs through indirect as well as face-to-face relationships (therefore including what occurs in neighborhoods). Gongla and Thompson (1987), discuss single-parent families, noting that the community redefines its response to a family when it becomes a single parent family, including the changes in informal networks of friends and even with relatives. These authors question whether there are cultural norms that would reduce this ambiguity and help to determine the nature of relationships after a person becomes a single parent. Little research information at that time addressed how informal networks affect the single parent family.

Settles (1987, p. 175) presented a very interesting and in-depth discussion of linkages between families and society (social institutions) within the context of change. She offered four mechanisms of change: brokerage, participation, isolation and/or privacy, and incentives and disincentives. As an example pertaining to *brokerage*, she said, "Family representatives may form interest groups to deal with institutions, e. g. , PTA, Parents without Partners, Parents Anonymous. " "Institutions may attempt to bring families or individuals together as populations to be handled as groups, e. g. , community organizations. " As an example pertaining to *participation*, "Individuals from the family may become involved in other institutions, e. g. , go to school or out to work. " "Institutions may become involved with family, e. g. , family therapy, parent support groups. " Throughout her discussion and examples, formal organization relationships with families are the focus, rather than extra-family informal network relationships.



**Handbook of Marriage and the Family (1999).** Sussman, Steinmetz, and Peterson (1999) organized the second edition of the handbook series, a comprehensive book elucidating theories and substantive areas of family research. In this book no particular focus is included on families and communities, and fewer chapter authors, compared to those in the 1987 handbook, discussed family-community connections. Settles (1999), in her chapter on the future of families, states a community is “defined as an interactive process, and whether or not a locality is considered a community may vary as different actors see it” (p. 148). Miller and Knudsen (1999), in their discussion of family abuse and violence, stated this premise: “Cultural and societal norms define, legitimate or invalidate, and encourage or punish the many forms of control, including the use of force, that family members use in their social relationships and interactions” (p. 712). Peterson and Hann (1999) are more intentional about exploring relationships between families and communities, as they discuss extra-familial elements that affect socialization. Provided is an extensive example of social contexts that surround parenting, and parent-child relationships. They include neighbors and friends as part of these immediate social networks, using the example of information that parents receive from neighbors and friends that helps them in their parenting roles and responsibilities. Other social contexts these authors discuss include the workplace, school, peer groups, churches, and neighborhoods.

### **Theoretical Volumes in Family Studies**

**Emerging Conceptual Frameworks in Family Analysis (1966).** Nye and Berardo’s (1966) book was the first comprehensive volume focused solely on theoretical frameworks. Eleven frameworks were delineated in this volume that addressed some aspect of family structure and dynamics. None were explicitly centered on families and communities, though throughout this volume reference was made to related aspects, including social networks, social

systems, social organization, and so on. We selectively extract material from the chapters on anthropological (Berardo), structure-functional (McIntyre), institutional (Koenig & Bayer), and situational (Rallings) theoretical approaches.

Berardo (1966) offers a vast discussion of concepts employed from an anthropological perspective. Of note is a primary definition of community, which includes recognition that it pertains to group (collective) life, and emphasizes “living together” in space and time. The idea of a collective sharing activities and connected by multiple relationships is also present, as is a very important function of community life, that is, how participation in collective life furthers individual achievement and success, which closely resembles current discussions of social capital (Bowen et al. , 2000).

McIntyre’s (1966) discussion of the structural-functional framework also has implications for understanding families and communities (though we acknowledge the problem this framework had with explaining pivotal aspects of family life, such as role differentiation, and with family diversities). According to this approach, “To the community the nuclear family gives adherence and group participation and from it receives support and identity” (McIntyre, 1966, p. 68). An important underlying aspect of this framework was the interchange between the family as an institution, and primary societal systems such as the economy and the community. Another primary idea is that the functional interchanges between the family and societal subsystems would balance out in the long run, and that change occurs when there is an imbalance.

In McIntyre’s (1966) analysis, important networks were mainly defined as kin networks. In simpler societies families were seen as more responsible for societal functions but in complex societies families are more specialized and therefore less responsible for these other functions. A

function more relevant for exploring families and communities was termed *integration*, and pertains to blending parts and activities of a system. This is said to be accomplished by creating and maintaining patterns of accepted behavior and employing social controls to lead people toward conformity. This functional sub-system is termed “community” (networks of diffuse affective relationships, see p. 68). While we do not intend to revive the structure-functional approach to families, its intentionality about how families are affected by external systems is applicable for understanding families and communities.

The institutional and situational approaches were not the theories of choice even in that day (the 1960’s), though each has a bearing on understanding families and communities. Koenig and Bayer (1966) suggested the institutional approach was one of the earliest family studies frameworks. It, too, had a strong comparative/cross-cultural element. This framework is rich in locating families in an historical perspective. Mainly families were viewed in terms of their reproductive and socialization functions, and this framework was often concerned with whether the family was losing its essential functions. The lesson from this framework is found in its examples of capturing historical events and trends in order to understand contemporary family experiences. A value attributed to the institutional approach is that society and social institutions are of greater importance than the individual (therefore valuing family stability over happiness of the individual).

As the name implies, the situational approach examined situations in which individuals find themselves, and that lead to overt behavior. According to our friend and mentor Bud Rallings (1966, p. 132), “A social situation is made up of stimuli which are external to the organism, which have a special relatedness to each other, and which operate as a unit.” Note that very often this approach went no further than family situations which impacted individual

behavior, rather than broader situations that impacted families as a group. However, scholars began to expand the framework to account for more collective influences on individual behavior, if not on family behavior (for example, Rallings notes that W. I. Thomas maintained that situational studies should be discovering how relationships with others affect individual behavior). A basic assumption of the situational approach was that “each social situation is the result of the interaction of social, physical, and cultural elements” (Rallings, 1966, p. 140). At best, these early theoretical references to community represented mere footings from which to build a more intentional discussion of the interface of families and communities.

**Contemporary Theories about the Family, Volumes 1 and 2 (1979).** Burr, Hill, Nye, and Reiss (1979a and 1979b) embarked on an ambitious analysis of family theories, with volume one focused on research-based theories, and volume two on general theories and theoretical orientations. Lee’s (1979) chapter in volume one on effects of social networks on the family contains the preponderance of information related to families and communities, though much of what is included in that chapter is focused on kin networks rather than broader networks. Lewis and Spanier (1979) discuss marital relations in a community context but otherwise this volume does not elevate the relationships between families and communities.

Our colleague, Gary Lee (1979) points out a number of propositions supported by the literature on social networks. Within several models that Lee presents, the following network concepts are cited: strength of network ties, integration into monosex networks, participation in voluntary associations, participation in kin and friend networks, interaction with friends, connectedness of friendship network, and service assistance from neighbors. Socioeconomic status appears in all the models, reflecting its prominence in research on social networks, whether the criterion variable is conjugal power, marital solidarity, migration, or assistance from

kin and neighbors. Lee has a substantial discussion grounded in the work of Bott (1957), that examines strength and intensity of connectedness and effects on marriage; these data on marital relations suggest how values in the larger social system, as reflected in closer associations, have some play. Lee suggests further work be done on how monosex groups influence marital roles, including values that approve of sex role segregation, and moreover how this varies according to socioeconomic status. Lee's comprehensive chapter includes these research findings that also reflect the relationships between families and communities: how couples make decisions is related to participation in extra-family networks and associations; in lower socioeconomic status groups primary participation is the informal neighborhood and friendships, where in middle socioeconomic status groups a primary avenue for time spent outside of the family is the voluntary association. Lee also reports that marital solidarity is enhanced when the social networks of spouses are conjunctive or overlapping (the homogeneity of networks), and that friends and neighbors are especially important for short term problems families may face but less so for long term problems.

In Lewis and Spanier's (1979) chapter on the stability and quality of marriage, the relationship between social and economic characteristics, marital quality, and community embeddedness is explored. From their perspective, the research literature suggests that marital quality is higher the more that friends (and relatives) approve of the marriage, the larger the network of a couple's friends, the more that a couple participates in the community and the less dense the residential population. Their general proposition is that the more a couple is embedded in a community, the higher the marital quality. These authors also offer a caveat, noting that strong networks external to the couple relationship can also undermine the relationship.

The second volume of Burr, et al, (1979b) applies five conceptual frameworks to family life: exchange, symbolic interaction, general systems, conflict, and phenomenological . Community or neighborhood are not terms explicitly used in these theory discussions, though social network is prominent in the discussion of symbolic interaction (Burr, Leigh, Day, & Constantine, 1979). They base their discussion on Lee's review of the social network research in volume one, and contend that the study of external social networks and families has less relevance to symbolic interaction (as compared to other theories) but then proceed to provide examples where the framework does have some importance. For example, they note that how situations are defined can serve as an important intervening variable between family outcomes and external network phenomena. These authors also delineate assumptions of symbolic interaction, one of which is that society precedes individuals (p. 48). From this perspective society and culture are rich in meaning and values, and into this milieu all of us are born. They further state that a dynamic social context influences individual learning, and consequently how learners respond is partly due to what they encounter in the social milieu.

Nye (1979) presents choice and exchange theory, and uses the term social life when describing how individuals are located in their surroundings. Among the assumptions he attributes to choice and exchange theory are that social life requires reciprocity, and that "Humans are capable of conceptualizing a generalized reciprocity between themselves and society and its social institutions. Without investments in social organization, social life with its rewards would cease" (p. 7). There are many touch-points between choice and exchange theory, and more contemporary presentations of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Nye does speak to exchange at a societal level, invoking the term norm. Generally, however, his discussion does not explicitly involve immediate contexts that include neighborhoods and communities, and their

social organization. The discussion is directed more at a broad, societal level (Big “C”). Nye also applies choice and exchange principles to the Lee (1979) chapter on social networks, in particular to family recreation and the costs a couple may encounter by being part of external networks.

In the Broderick and Smith (1979) chapter on general systems theory, the term social organization is used (a primary term in our own conceptualization of understanding families and communities) but these authors do not provide detailed descriptors of it and which of its elements affects families. This is surprising given that systems theory provides ready concepts for conceptualizing a dynamic interface between families and the broader context in which they are embedded. By inference the reader can see where systems and social organization touch, for example, with regard to family boundaries; a perfect lead toward discussions of how community forces impact families.

These theory chapters can accommodate discussions of families in the contexts of communities; however, like Nye and Berardo’s (1966) earlier volume, an intentional extension in that direction is mainly absent. In a sense this is not surprising because general theories are just that, however, most use “instances” to inform the theorizing. Those instances have not typically included the intersection of families and communities, or how collective entities may influence family processes and dynamics. What we have done in this section is to interject along the way several logical connections between general theorizing and the families/communities interface.

## **Sourcebooks**

### **Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods: A Contextual Approach (1993).**

Although this 1993 publication by Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz does not include community or neighborhood in its index, some of the chapter contributions included in it

enlighten our understanding of the multiple levels of relationships between families and communities. Note that the term contextual in this volume mainly pertains to researchers and theorists recognizing the contexts in which they are doing their work, rather than families and community contexts (though a few authors do explicitly discuss those relationships).

Schvaneveldt, Pickett, and Young (1993), when discussing historical methods in family research, offer that, “one of the most productive sources of contemporary work in family history has been the so-called community study. ” They are referring to studies of 19<sup>th</sup> century families in the contexts in which they lived and worked. Bretherton’s (1993) discussion of developmental psychology theory invokes ecological theory of human development to discuss research on attachment, and cites several studies that account for contexts outside of the family, such as social support and social networks. McAdoo (1993), in a chapter focused on social cultural contexts of ecological developmental family models, speaks to the importance of considering the mesosystem-the concept that captures what occurs when families interact with other important societal systems, such as schools and communities. Whitchurch and Constantine’s (1993) chapter on systems theory, discusses the suprasystem, that is, how family systems interact with other systems, such as community; this is especially important from their perspective for understanding changes in families. Bengtson and Allen (1993) presented a comprehensive exploration of a life course perspective, and state that the life course approach accounts for social context or social ecology as essential for understanding individual lives and development. The life course perspective accounts for context but less so at the small “c” community level, but rather seems to look more at large societal waves that influence all families in some way (e. g. , historical and economic shifts). The contexts Bengtson and Allen discuss really seem more individual, such as gender and socioeconomic status, though by extrapolation we can see where



research from this perspective can account for community structure and processes because it places a premium on “history,” and also accounts for process over time.

In this same volume Bubolz and Sontag (1993) discuss human ecology theory that focuses on how individuals interact with their environments. Human ecology theory recognizes the significance of interdependence that families have with the environment, defined broadly. From this approach, the quality of human life and quality of the environment are interdependent. One assumption is that families are semi-open, goal directed, dynamic and adaptive systems. Environments are said to pose limitations and constraints, as well as possibilities and opportunities for families. Included in the social-cultural environment are other human beings, such as neighbors, semi-formal groups that neighbors might form, norms and cultural values and patterns, and social institutions.

**Sourcebook of Family Theory and Research (2005).** The most recent sourcebook (Bengtson, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein, 2005) also gives limited attention to intentionally exploring relationships between families and communities. A methods chapter by Sayer and Klute (2005) focused on analyzing couple data, our own brief discussion of families in community contexts that accompanies that chapter, and a brief discussion of the Sayer and Klute chapter by White and Teachman (2005) provide the most intentionality. White and Teachman (2005) discuss the role of multilevel methods in family research noting that micro and macro level variables are often not independent (for example, individual socioeconomic status determines where a person lives or can live). They also raise the important issue of how we define a neighborhood. For example, we might use census data to define a neighborhood but our definition may not be one to which people actually think about or respond or that has any conceptual meaning, such as census tract boundaries. They note two companion fallacies in

conducting research, the individualistic fallacy, in which observations of individuals are generalized to the group level, and the ecological fallacy, in which observations at a group level are generalized to individuals. White and Teachman ask, “Do communities think and form opinions”? They conclude by calling for better multi-level theory—theories that account for variations in individual outcomes by calling attention to variables at the individual level and to larger group-level processes, including those at the collective family and community levels.

Chatters and Taylor’s (2005) chapter on religion and families discussed the role of social networks, and provide their view of networks as they relate to religion. Social networks are the collections of relationships that surround people and seem to matter with regard to their size, whether they are diverse or not, their proximity to an individual or a family, and what they provide and require. The chapter on stepfamilies by Crosbie-Burnett, Lewis, Sullivan, Podolsky, Mantilla de Souza, and Mitrani (2005) is focused on extrusion, which pertains to a person being pushed from their household earlier than what is considered typical. What is relevant to our review is their discussion of adolescent extrusion from the family and community responses. In this discussion they identify these community elements: community center, mental health professionals, peer culture, citizens, police, and extended family. Our discussion on families in community contexts (Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005) uses *social organization* as the pivotal concept for understanding family transactions with its surroundings. We also discuss an important related concept, community capacity (shared responsibility and collective competence) as a key process in promoting positive change in communities. We outline a research agenda that relates family structures and processes with community structures and processes.

## **Decade Reviews of the Journal of Marriage and Family**

As a supplement to our review of family studies handbooks and sourcebooks, we also reviewed the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* decade reviews; these reviews focus on the decades of the 1960's, 1970's, 1980's, 1990's, and the most recent review of the period 2000-2009. Across the reviews only one article had an intentional focus on families and communities (Burton & Jarrett, 2000). Other reviews may have had some material pointing towards relationships between families and communities but the focus was so slight it did not warrant inclusion. More surprising in the context of the increasing attention in the behavioral and social sciences to community context, articles in the most recent decade review generally neglect the connections between families and communities, although the topic areas clearly lend themselves to such a review focus (e. g. critical race, poverty, immigrant families, war and terrorism, marriage, socioeconomic status, and biosocial influences on families). However, in no instance did articles in the more recent decade review address the range of community contexts and processes have a bearing on various family situations, dynamics, and processes. Although the absence in these articles of such a focus on community context and process may reflect the state of literature in these topic areas (these were review articles), it is more likely that the focus on families in the context of communities did not make priority in the chapter outline. In honesty, we just don't know the answer to this question but we do find it worthy of further consideration.

The exceptional article by Burton and Jarrett is instructive for how family researchers could intentionally account for community influences, mediators, and moderators. Burton and Jarrett (2000) reviewed the literature between 1990 and 1999 with regard to linkages between neighborhoods, families, and outcomes for children and youth. Much of their focus was on the place of families in how neighborhoods affected children and youth, thereby placing families as

mediating or moderating those effects. They include quantitative and qualitative studies in building their review. Their work is especially instructive because their critique encompasses issues of theorizing and of research designs. Of particular note is their conclusion, at least for that decade of research, that family-related variables often were vaguely specified and researched. They note the preponderance of studies using family structure and socioeconomic indicators, to the exclusion of more nuanced indicators of family processes (an argument aligned with our own discussion of community structure rather than social organizational processes in communities). The significance of the Burton and Jarrett review lies in its attention to marking how theory was accessed in the decade, how research was conducted, and what was learned as a result. Our view is they gave average marks to all of them, in effect, exposing how that most important of social groups, families, were at the margins of theoretical development and research advances as they involved the multiple contexts that influence families.

### **A Review of Three Principal Journals in Family Studies**

The second component of our data analysis included an identification of peer-review journal articles in family studies addressing aspects of the influence of communities on families. Although the boundaries of the family studies field are not fixed, the review included three core family studies journals which included basic and applied research journals: *Journal of Marriage and Family* (JMF), *Family Relations* (FR), and *Journal of Family Issues* (JFI). Two additional journals were considered for inclusion: the *Journal of Family Psychology* (JFP) and *Family Process* (FP). However, in the first stage of review, these journals were found to have fewer articles than the ones selected for review that addressed the community and family interface, especially the *Journal of Family Psychology*. This review focused on articles published between 2000 and 2009 and the review sought to identify empirical articles as well as theoretical and

conceptual articles that addressed some aspect of the interface between families and communities. Empirical articles were defined as articles that included results based on the manipulation of data (see Taylor & Bagd, 1993), including those using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method methodologies.

We focused our attention on articles addressing community as a single construct or articles in which some aspect of community was used as a primary independent construct in examining variation in family behavior. As discussed by Lee (1979) 30 years ago, the decision to focus on families as the dependent construct does not imply that we do not appreciate that families and family members may also exert an influence on larger social processes at the community level. However, reviews require explicit boundaries, and our interest centered on the effects of communities on families.

As a starting framework for the review, we defined community from a little “c” perspective as the proximal setting in which families live and work, which may be in the form of blocks, neighborhoods, communities, census tracks, zip codes, towns, cities, and counties. However, we attempted to identify all community-related articles, including those that addressed the nature of the family-community interface in the context of larger, nonlocal, institutional contexts that include federal and state policies—the big “C” perspective (Arum, 2000).

We developed two data extraction forms for purposes of the review: one for review/theoretical articles, one for quantitative or qualitative empirical articles. The forms included a category to identify the use of an explicit theory or theories to frame and inform the authors’ perspective or approach, the specification of an empirical model for testing, the formulation of research hypotheses or expectations, the identification of relevant concepts for measurement, the method for analyzing data, or to explain results. The forms also included a

category to identify the level at which community was discussed or captured: little “c” (e. g. , zip code, census tract, block) or big “C”.

For empirical articles, we identified the research design (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods), the source(s) of data, and the approach for measuring community context and/or community process. The analysis included extracting which community-level independent variables, control variables and dependent family-level variables were used in the quantitative empirical articles. Themes from the qualitative articles were included instead of variables. Articles using a mixed methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) were included and both quantitative and qualitative methods were cataloged (themes and variables).

On the basis of earlier work by Mancini, Bowen, & Martin (2005), three measurement approaches were identified for classification purposes of articles incorporating quantitative and mixed methods research designs: *microlevel* (relies on individual reports and perceptions of community characteristics, such as the perceptions of individual residents about neighborhood safety within one or across a number of different census tracts); *compositional* (attempts to account for community effects with aggregate social structural measures of the community’s social, demographic, and institutional infrastructure, such as administrative data on the violent crime rate for a defined period of time within each census tract for a number of census tracts in a geographic area); and *social organizational* (attempts to assess directly or input macrolevel processes and mechanisms from survey or administrative data at the community level, such as the average perception of individual residents about neighborhood safety within each census tract for a number of census tracts in a geographic area). These classification types are neither exhaustive nor necessarily independent. Compositional approaches may also include microlevel community-related variables. Social organizational measurement models may use a combination

of compositional and social organizational (process) macro variables. Social organizational strategies include contextual effect approaches. In addition, empirical studies may include only group-level variables or code variables at an ecological level (both independent and dependent variables), although we did not identify any studies in the three journals that used this approach, which fails to account for variance at the individual level.

These reviews were conducted in an emergent and iterative process to ensure that the articles were being analyzed reliably and that relevant articles were included in the search. Selection criteria excluded book reviews, commentaries or responses to previously published material. Despite the special care that we took in conducting this review, the likelihood that we missed an article or two or misclassified an article or two in one or more ways looms large. We offer this caution not necessarily to dismiss our review but to reflect the realities and some of the challenges we faced in conducting the review and coming to agreement about particular articles.

### **Number and Types of Articles**

In total, we identified 89 articles that addressed some aspect of community factors on various aspects of family functioning and interaction: JMF (N = 26), FR (N = 31), and JFI (N = 32). The total number of articles was increased as a consequence of a special issue of FR that was published in December 2005. This issue included eight full-length articles, including an opening article by Mancini, Bowen, and Martin entitled: “Community social organization: A conceptual linchpin in examining families in the context of communities.” In addition, the special issue contained an extensive review and annotation of key articles, books, and book chapters (Brossoie, Graham, & Lee, 2005). Three additional articles from the special issue were published in the April 2006 issue of FR, which focused on qualitative approaches to community research.

The vast majority of articles involved the manipulation of empirical data (N = 81; relatively few were summary reviews or theoretical articles (N = 8). However, the review articles were important in offering guidance in ways that community variables could be more effectively integrated into the family research and practice literature. In addition to the seminal review by Burton and Jarrett (2000), which was discussed above, Voydanoff (2005) offered a broad and heuristic conceptual framework for integrating community demands, resources and strategies into future research examining the work and family interface. Review articles by Mancini, Bowen, and Martin (2005), Scanzoni (2001), and Doherty (2000) challenged family scientists to bring a community focus to their understanding of families and to their professional practice with families.

### **Research Designs**

A greater proportion of the articles that we identified in these journals included quantitative research designs (N=57), as compared to either qualitative methodologies (N=17) or mixed methods approaches (N=7). The dominant quantitative method involved a cross-sectional survey design; experimental or quasi-experimental designs were comparably uncommon (N=5). Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn's (2005) evaluation of the "Moving to Opportunity" program is a notable example of the use of an experimental design. The MTO program is centered in five urban areas and focused on housing relocation. Families were assigned randomly to one of three situations: a treatment group that received Section 8 vouchers and other assistance to move only to a low-poverty neighborhood; a comparison group that received Section 8 vouchers but were not constrained regarding where they could relocate, and received no other assistance; and a control group that received neither vouchers nor other special assistance (called the in-place controls). The substantive focus was on family processes relative to parent-child interactions.



This study serves as an example of an intervention that accounts for multiple levels of influences on family outcomes, with particular attention on family processes.

Qualitative and mixed methods approaches most typically used open-ended interviews and focus groups as data collection strategies. Rieboldt's (2001) ethnographic investigation of two Mexican American Families living in impoverished urban neighborhoods, Letiecq and Koblinsky's (2004) focus group interviews with African American fathers of preschoolers about ways in which they protect their children in violent neighborhoods, and MacTavish and Salamon's (2006) exploration of "Pathways of Youth Development in a Rural Trailer Park" demonstrate the descriptive power of focus groups and open-ended interviews in research on community and family linkages.

### **Dependent Variables**

The quantitative and mixed-method empirical articles (N = 64 articles combined) addressed a range of dependent variables. Sixty different dependent variables were identified across these empirical investigations. The majority of articles focused on some aspect of child and adolescent behavior, including teenage sexual behavior (e. g. , timing of first intercourse, pregnancy experience), adolescent school success and failure (e. g. , high school dropout, school engagement, grades), child and adolescent well-being (e. g. , depressive symptoms, internalizing/externalizing behavior), adolescent risk taking (e. g. , problem behavior, severity of violence and conflict), and adolescent social networks and social support (e. g. , friendship networks, mentoring). Dependent variables associated with some aspect of parenting were also well-represented in these articles, including a focus on parenting warmth, discipline, harsh interactions, and support and nurturing. Other dependent variables included a focus on fathers (e. g. , psychological distress, job-role quality), marriage (e. g. , dissolution), family adaptation

(e. g. , military family adaptation), community (e. g. , family friendliness), living arrangements, and service delivery.

## **Theories**

The majority of the empirical articles appearing in the journals were theoretically informed, although we had to dig deep in some cases to identify the underlying theory or theories. Approximately 3 in 4 articles (74%) had one or more explicit theories, perspectives or models. In the context of the many theories and perspectives used to anchor these empirical articles, this body of literature reflects a theoretical pluralism rather than the domination of any single theory or perspective.

More than 25 different theories were identified, although in most cases the theory was cited in only one or two of the articles. The two theories used with greatest frequency included some form or version of ecological theory and social disorganization theory. Social capital theory, the life course perspective, and family stress theory were used less frequently, followed by social control theory, symbolic interaction, and a risk and resilience perspective. A brief overview of ecological theory and social disorganization theory is provided below in the context of their importance as frameworks in studies on the influence of communities on family-related outcomes. Both theories have their historical roots in the Chicago School, which is sometimes described as the Chicago school of human ecology (White & Klein, 2002). The Chicago School included, but was not limited, to the University of Chicago's sociology department. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Chicago School conducted a number of research projects focused on the urban environment in the city of Chicago.

**Ecological Theory.** The conceptual foundation of ecological theory can be traced back to the early work of Robert Ezra Park and Ernest Burgess of the Chicago Ecological School in the

early 1920s, including the concept of the “natural area” (ecological niches where people of similar history, situation or circumstance group geographically) (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993). Kurt Lewin’s field theory, which focused on person and environment interactions, was also an important forerunner to current ecological approaches, including Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework (White & Klein, 2002).

Although journal authors used a variety of labels to reflect their particular ecological perspective (ecological-transactional, ecological developmental, eco-interactional development model, ecological systems theory, social ecology model), the discussion of ecological theory in the articles reviewed was anchored in some aspect of the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner. Sample articles from our review included Bowen, Rose, Powers, and Glennie (2008), Pinderhughes, Nix, Foster, Jones, et. al. (2001), and Bamaca, Umana-Taylor, Shin, and Alfaro (2005). This ranged from his earlier ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to his more recent bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), which includes attention to biological influences and to the role of proximal processes in development (see Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009, for an excellent overview of the history and development of Bronfenbrenner’s theory, which informed our current review).

Bronfenbrenner’s earlier work drew particular attention to the reciprocal process between individuals and their social environments over time, including the neighborhood, the school, the family, and the peer group. These primary social contexts or microsystems overlap and are nested within each other and are encompassed and influenced by a larger social and cultural context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Strong, positive, and complementary connections both within (e. g. , neighborhood) and between (e. g. , neighborhood and family) these social environments increase the probability that individuals will experience positive outcomes over time.

Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory of human development directs primary attention to *proximal processes* in the social environment. Bronfenbrenner defined proximal processes as "progressively more complex reciprocal interaction[s] between an active, evolving biopsychosocial human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in [the child's] immediate environment . . . over extended periods of time " (p. 6). These processes may either promote or constrain individuals' goodness of fit and their ability to achieve desired results. According to Bowen, Rose, Powers, and Glennie (2008), "these proximal processes may include people, in the form of interpersonal relationships and social support, or places, in the form of safety, satisfaction, and opportunity" (p. 505). At any one time, individuals both influence and are influenced by multiple proximal processes within and between social environments.

In the articles we reviewed, the community or neighborhood was most often captured as a microsystem of interest. For the most part, the research that cited Bronfenbrenner's theory was informed more by his earlier theoretical work, which focused more on context, than by his more recent theorizing, which includes the central concept of proximal processes and his more nuanced attention to time (see Tudge et al. , 2009, for a similar conclusion on a more general review of empirical work in family studies). In some cases, a life course perspective (e. g. , Sweet, Swisher, & Moen, 2005) or a risk and resilience perspective (e. g. , Woolley & Grogan-Kaylor, 2006) was used in conjunction with ecological theory. Bronfenbrenner's inclusion of the micro- and meso-time in this theory brings attention to the timing and patterning of events in the lives of individuals. His attention to macro-time (or what he referred to earlier as the chronosystem) captures the importance of sociohistorical context and makes the fit between ecological theory and the life course perspective relatively seamless. A risk and resilience

perspective was used to specify the operation of risk and protective factors largely within the setting in which individuals interact and function.

**Social Disorganization Theory.** Social disorganization theory or a derivative from this theory (e. g. , collective efficacy theory, Wilson’s model of neighborhood decline) was used next most frequently as a guiding framework in these articles. Sample articles from our review included Roche, Ensminger, and Cherlin (2007), Browning and Olinger-Wilbon (2003), and Knoester and Haynie (2005).

A criminological theory, social disorganization is linked with the seminal work of Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1969, revised edition) in their studies of juvenile delinquency in Chicago neighborhoods in the 1930s and 1940s. Forerunners of this theory can be traced to the work of Robert Ezra Park and Ernest Burgess of the Chicago Ecological School in the 1920s on the concept of concentric zones in the American city, which they called “natural areas” (Park & Burgess, 1925). The concept of social disorganization, according to Bursik & Grasmick (1993, p. 33), was derived from the classic sociological work by Thomas and Znaniecki (1920): *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, and the concept was used to describe situations in neighborhoods where residents had difficulty solving problems of common interest. As stated by Shaw and McKay:

Thomas and Znaniecki have analyzed the effectively organized community in terms of the presence of social opinion with regard to problems of common interest, identical or at least consistent attitudes with reference to these problems, the ability to reach approximate unanimity on the question on how a problem should be dealt with, and the ability to carry this solution into action through harmonious co-operation (p. 184).

Ernest W. Burgess, in summarizing Shaw and McKay's findings in his introduction to the first edition of the book, also linked the concept of social disorganization to the community's inability to organize itself to deal with conditions that increase delinquency (cited in Short, 1969).

From the perspective of social disorganization theory, structural deficits in urban neighborhoods create the conditions for the breakdown of positive social organizational processes between neighbors, which increase the probability of problem behavior among youth. Shaw and McKay focused on three structural conditions: low economic status, ethnic heterogeneity, and residential mobility. In chapter VII of their book, "Differences in Social Values and Organization among Local Communities," Shaw & McKay discussed some of the mechanisms and problems that link structure (community characteristics and conditions) and action (differential rates of delinquency) in the context of the literature and through case studies of youths living in areas with high rates of delinquency.

The publication of William Julius Wilson's book, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, in 1987, in combination with a number of highly influential publications by Robert Sampson and colleagues using social disorganization theory as their foundation (e. g. , Sampson & Groves, 1989; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997), has led to a significant resurgence of social disorganization theory in the behavioral and social sciences since the early 1990s, including its use in family studies. Sampson and colleagues' (1997) concept of collective efficacy, which involves components of both social cohesion and informal social control, has added clarity to the concept of social disorganization, and Wilson's concept of social isolation provides a conceptual bridge between ecological theory as advanced by Park and Burgess and social disorganization theory. The development of multilevel analysis also has made it possible to disentangle effects

due to the clustering of individuals within areas from effects at the individual level (Teachman & Crowder, 2002).

For the most part researchers have pursued community problems (social disorganization) to the partial exclusion of a broader focus on social organization, an approach that elevates a more complex array of elements involved with understanding families and the community contexts that influence them, an approach that leads itself to comprehensive studies of processes. Earlier we have argued for this social organization approach, stating, “We support the emancipation of social organization thinking from social disorganization and from research on delinquency and community disadvantage, and contend social organization has a fundamental role in explaining broader family phenomena” (Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005, p. 573). Our concluding section to this chapter elaborates this social organization approach.

### **Measurement Approach**

Three measurement strategies had been used to capture the community as an independent variable in the quantitative and mixed method articles reviewed. By measurement approach we include measures and instrumentation, the concepts that are behind them, and also how studies are designed to get at, for example, macro level processes. As we discussed earlier in this chapter, the first strategy, a microlevel approach, relies on individual reports and perceptions of community characteristics; the second strategy, a compositional approach, attempts to account for community effects with aggregate social structural measures of the community’s social, demographic, and institutional infrastructure; the third strategy, a social organizational approach, attempts to directly assess macrolevel processes and mechanisms at the community level. By far, the majority of the quantitative and mixed methods articles in the three journals used either a microlevel approach or a compositional approach in the specification of community variables;

relatively few articles incorporated a social organization approach to measurement and instrumentation of community variables. Each of these strategies is reviewed below, which draws from an earlier summary by Mancini et al. (2005) and prior work by Bowen and Pittman (1995) in discussing the merits of contextual effects models in family science.

**A Microlevel Approach.** The most common approach in these studies was to rely on the individual as the unit of analysis—a microlevel approach. Any grouping or clustering of these individuals within communities or other units is neglected. Mancini, Bowen, and Martin (2005), in an earlier article, referred to a microlevel approach as the contextual approach. However, the use of this descriptor may be confusing given that all three approaches have an orientation to context. Consequently, we have chosen to relabel this approach.

These investigations were often framed by an ecological perspective, which addresses the microsystems in which individuals and families are embedded (e. g. , neighborhood). Individual reports or perceptions about these environments were used as independent variables to examine variation in individual and family outcomes and often were analyzed in the context of other influences at the individual level, such as background characteristics, attitudes, and experiences. In such cases, respondents report on their own situation (e. g. , self-reported personal friendship networks in the neighborhood); the situation of significant others (e. g. , parents' views of children's friendship networks in the neighborhood); or more general perceptions of the situation (e. g. , the nature of relationships among residents in the neighborhood).

A recent article by Bowen, Rose, Powers, and Glennie (2008) appearing in *Family Relations* is a case in point. Using an eco-interactional developmental model of school success, the authors assessed various neighborhood, school, peer, and family variables on the basis of the self reports of adolescent respondents. In the analysis, Time 2 school success measures were



regressed on the same Time 1 school success measures, demographics, and social environment scores. Although such studies makes a contribution to our understanding of the relationship between families and the communities in which they are embedded, they do not contribute to our understanding of how communities as synergetic clusters of individuals and families in interaction influence individual and family outcomes beyond respondents' perceptions.

**A Compositional Approach.** A second approach used in these articles to capture community was what Mancini et al. (2005) described as a compositional approach. This approach uses proxy variables to reflect the community's physical and demographic infrastructure—an approach that is strong on predictive validity but weak on explanatory potential.

Community-level markers (e. g. , neighborhood poverty rate or joblessness) are used as estimates of potential social organizational (actually social dis-organizational) processes. These “omnibus variables,” in the words of Burton and Jarrett (2000, p. 1119), typically are captured at the zip code, census tract, or block-group level and are entered into analyses as a summary index (e. g. , Baumer & South, 2001). These “omnibus variables” function in models as proxies for social (dis)organizational processes that are associated with the particular variable or index and related to variation in the dependent variable of interest (cf. Firebaugh, 1979). Multilevel analysis typically is used to account for clustering effects, which allows sources of error to be disaggregated into two components: individual (level one) and cluster (level two). An intraclass correlation (ICC) can be calculated to estimate the proportion of variance explained in a dependent outcome at the community level. The ICC reflects the variance in the dependent variable at the community level (between clusters) relative to the sum total of variance between

communities and the variance between people within communities (Merlo, Chaix, Yang, Lynch, & Rastam, 2005).

An article by South & Baumer (2001), which appeared in the *Journal of Family Issues*, is a case in point. Using the longitudinal National Survey of Children, the authors examined both the risk of premarital pregnancy and the outcome of the pregnancy in the context of an aggregate measure of neighborhood disadvantage that was comprised of variables from the 1980 census data and assigned to respondents at the zip code level. Although the use of such structural variables may uncover contextual noise, their influence on dependent outcomes often is indirect and mediated by social process variables that account for the link between the structural variables and dependent outcomes.

In this approach, social organizational processes are left unexamined and researchers attach meaning to contextual effects largely by conjecture rather than by examination (Bowen & Pittman, 1995). Investigators are left searching for the process mechanisms linking community structure with outcomes. Billy, Brewster, and Grady (1994), in their examination of contextual effects on the sexual behavior of adolescent women, drew the following conclusion about a use of nonmetric group effects:

Although many researchers continue to use crude measures such as urban-rural or metropolitan-nonmetropolitan residence as indicators of social context, the present study demonstrates that communities affect early sexual behavior along a number of separate structural dimensions, measured at multiple levels of aggregation. Our findings suggest, then, not only the importance of the community context in shaping adolescent sexual behavior, but also the

inadequacy of simple categorical distinctions for capturing the complexity of a community's social context. (p. 402)

Nevertheless, studies, such as the one by South & Baumer, have heuristic implications in the process of identifying social organizational mechanisms that may account for the link between structure and action. Thus, the use of “omnibus variables” may be useful in the process of identifying potentially important social organizational processes that require further specification and testing (cf. Blalock, 1985).

**A Social Organizational Approach.** The third approach used in these articles to capture community reflects a social organizational approach. In our earlier work (Mancini et al. , 2005), we referred to this measurement strategy as a *contextual effects* approach, which remains a descriptive label for this approach and is considered synonymous by us with a social organizational approach. However, in an attempt to align our theoretical perspective with our measurement perspective, we have evolved to this new label for this measurement approach.

As described by Blalock (1984), “the essential feature of all contextual-effects models is an allowance for macro processes that are presumed to have an impact on the individual actor over and above the effects of any individual-level variables that may be operating” (Blalock, 1984, p. 354). Consequently, a hierarchical data structure is used to order variables, including those that describe individuals and those that capture the properties and social organizational features of groups in which they are located (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). These group-level variables may be aggregates of data collected at the individual level (e. g. , average attributes) or may be information that is not wholly dependent on individual reports—what Blalock (1984) refers to conceptually as “global variables” (e. g. , ratio of formal child care slots to children under the age of 4 within counties across all counties in a specified state). Unlike the

compositional approach, one or more of these aggregate variables capture social organizational processes.

For example, using social disorganization and social control perspectives as theoretical anchors, Wickrama and Bryant (2003) examined the joint effects of community- and family-level processes on adolescent depression. Their model included two blocks of variables at the community level: structural community adversity (concentration of poverty and ethnic heterogeneity) and community social resources (social integration and collective socialization). Aggregate, higher-order measures of social integration and collective socialization were captured across census tract areas by averaging survey responses from parent sample members.

Using adolescent depressive symptoms as the dependent variable, Wickrama and Bryant (2003) examined the direct effects of community-level factors, the indirect effects of community-level factors via family-level factors (called cross-level mediation), and the interactive effects of community-level and family-level effects (called cross-level moderation). The data were examined in the context of statistical controls and using multilevel regression models (individual, family, and community characteristics). The results support the importance of accounting for community effects in research examining the relationship between family-level factors and adolescent outcomes. Equally important, the study represents the increasing sophistication of research that examines the influence of community context on individual and family outcomes, and it serves as a model for other researchers who are interested in assessing the effects of social organizational processes on families and individuals.

### **Families and Communities: Representative Findings (2000-2009)**

In this section we organize representative findings from the 89 articles from *Family Relations*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, and *Journal of Family Issues* in order to indicate

overall themes portrayed in this literature. As is often the case in the social and behavioral sciences, there is no lack of approaches, definitions, methods, and so on in this literature. A primary limitation is the few agreed-upon definitions in the literature focused on families and communities. In fact it seems from our review of these articles that very little has changed since the 1950's and 1960's regarding the multiple ways communities are conceptualized and defined, and then investigated (see Moge, 1964).

### **Neighborhood Risk**

Very often research has attended to neighborhood risk as a primary influence on how well families experience their surroundings. For example, Henry, Merten, Plunkett and Sands (2008) reported that perceptions of neighborhood risk negatively affect student grades, more than structural neighborhood adversity (poverty measures). When Casper and Smith (2002) examined self-care arrangements of children, they discovered that children were less likely to care for themselves when parents viewed the neighborhood as less safe. Roche, Ensminger and Cherlin (2007) reported that in higher risk neighborhoods, there are more negative outcomes for youth from families where parents are either uninvolved or permissive. Bowen, Rose, Powers, and Glennie (2008) reported that perceptions of neighborhood safety has a positive influence on grades, as well as on trouble-avoidance.

The exposure of children to neighborhood violence has been found to be associated with their symptoms of psychological distress (Ceballo, Dahl, Aretakis, & Ramirez, 2001). Kotchick, Dorsey and Heller (2005), for example, reported a path involving neighborhood risk and stress which indicates that exposure to neighborhood problems leads to greater psychological distress among mothers, which in turn leads to being less engaged with their children. Another study by Roosa et al. (2005) also focused on how mothers mediate children's experiences and reported

that when mothers perceive neighborhoods as high risk, children report more stress. Finally, Luster and Oh (2001) reported on an exceptionally dangerous outcome from exposure to neighborhood risk and violence; youth who were frequently exposed to hearing gunshots, those exposed to neighborhood violence, and those who perceive their surroundings as dangerous, are more likely to carry a handgun.

How parents respond in “bad” neighborhoods has also been examined. Hofferth (2003) reported, for example, that in higher risk neighborhoods, where Black families are more likely to reside, fathers demonstrate more responsibility for the welfare and well-being of their children. Letiecq and Koblinsky (2004) reported that father’s strategies for protecting their young children included careful monitoring of the child’s activities, and restricting child’s involvement with neighborhood life. Father’s also reported directly confronting neighborhood troublemakers. Another angle on external factors that influence family processes is reported by Simons, Lin, Gordon, Brody, and Conger (2002), who report that children in high crime neighborhoods may accept greater physical types of discipline as necessary or legitimate, compared with those in low crime neighborhoods, who in turn are more likely to be antisocial as a result.

### **Community Connections**

Community connections and how well families are embedded in the community have also been on the radar of investigators. The idea is that families with more substantial ties to their neighbors and neighborhoods are strengthened and supported (but note that this assumption implies much about the nature of the surrounding community, as well as the willingness of families to be permeable). Terms invoked in these studies include social capital, social capacity, civic engagement, social isolation, and social ties. Houseknecht and Lewis (2005) reported that social capital produced from ties with the community is related to reduced teen births and

reduced cohabitation incidence. McBride, Sherraden and Pritzker (2006 ) examined civic engagement among low-income families, finding that, while these families are engaged, there are substantial obstacles to that engagement. These impediments include a lack of community groups, problem neighbors, or isolation because of moving or inadequate transportation.

Social isolation not only pertains to informal networks but extends to formal support services. McGuigan, Katzev, and Pratt (2003) reported that overall isolation of mothers also precluded them from participating in important home visitation services. The extent to which a family feels that their community is “friendly” has been found to be associated with the social capital of communities, including community events and the willingness of neighbors to interact, or in effect, to be friendly (Sweet, Swisher, & Moen, 2005). This research team also reports that when residents report a higher number of neighbors are also their friends, their view of the neighborhood as friendly increases (Swisher, Sweet, & Moen, 2004).

Marshall, Noonan, McCartner, Marx, and Keefe (2001) studied the strength of parental neighborhood social ties, finding relationships with greater social competence and fewer depression indicators among their children; these children were also reported to be more successful in school. The approach taken by Bowen, Mancini, Martin, Ware, and Nelson (2003) examined informal networks, formal systems, and sense of community as primary modes of supporting family adaptation, finding that sense of community played a major part in mediating how networks influenced family well-being.

### **Formal Systems**

Several studies bring in more formal system variables into discussing families and communities (by formal system we mean agencies, organizations, and the education, prevention, and intervention activities they develop and implement). For example, Anderson, Sabatelli, and

Kosutic (2007) reported that adolescent adjustment was related to neighborhood youth center involvement, and particularly significant was the degree of youth participation in activities. Doherty, Jacob, and Cutting's (2009) discussion argues the importance of community engagement as a modality for teaching parent education. Mancini and Marek (2004), in developing a multi-factor assessment of program sustainability, isolated several elements related to community contexts and involvement as important for successful prevention and intervention. Birch, Weed, and Olsen (2004) reported that divorce rates appear to decline more rapidly following the signing of a community marriage policy than would be expected (a community marriage policy reflects a commitment on the part of helping professionals to intentionally enact programs and policies that revitalize marriages).

### **Moderators**

Several important moderators are also found in this literature, including gender, ethnicity and culture. Bamaca, Umana-Taylor, Shin, and Alfaro (2005) found that the positive relationship between parental support and self-esteem among boys, were stronger for boys who perceived their neighborhood as lower in risks. However, there were no comparable relationships found among girls, nor was neighborhood risk an independent predictor of self-esteem among the girls like it was among boys in the study. Brisson and Usher (2005) reported that women compared to men experience lower levels of bonding social capital (the capital that exists within a neighborhood, that is, what Putnam calls a sociological superglue; bonding social capital promotes in-group cohesion and loyalty). However, they also noted that as the wealth of a neighborhood increases, women experience higher levels of bonding social capital (thus showing the role poverty has among oppressed groups). White, Roosa, Weaver, and Nair (2009) found



that perceptions of living in a dangerous neighborhood were associated with higher levels of depression and less positive parenting for fathers but not for mothers.

Even as gender is associated with different social organization process experiences, so is culture and ethnicity. Gingrich and Lightman (2006) studied a Mennonite community, noting that, for this particular sub-culture mutual aid groups mitigate mobility and rootlessness, and provide balance in an age of narcissism. Another study on a different sort of sub-cultural group, residents in trailer parks, MacTavish and Salamon (2006) found how little the limited control and influence that parents could exercise had on neighborhood conditions and their ability to improve the lives of their youth. Ornelas, Perreira, Beeber and Maxwell (2009) studied the adjustment of Mexican immigrant mothers and reported the positive significance of their reliance on social networks and on community resources.

Sub-culture is defined in diverse ways. For example, Reibolt (2001) found that youth gangs offer family-like ties to adolescents and also offer protection of the new immigrant youth and his family. Rural life and its characteristics is also a focus. Ames, Brosi, and Damiano-Teixeira (2006) examined the costs and reward of rural living, noting that viewing the rural environment as a safe place is a primary positive factor in how life is viewed. However, rurality represents other processes as well. For example, Pinderhughes, Nix, Foster, Jones and others (2001) found that rural families engage in harsher parental practices.

Though we have erred on the side of highlighting findings showing important relationships between families and communities, the literature remains equivocal. For example, South & Baumer (2001) addressed the question of how neighborhoods affected marital disruption, focusing on SES disadvantage, and concluded that effects are due to the low incomes of husbands in distressed neighborhoods rather than to neighborhood SES per se. He adds rather

that neighborhood SES seems to increase the prevalence of single-parent families via out-of-wedlock childbearing, and tends not to disrupt extant marriage relationships. There is still much to be accomplished to establish the relationships between families and communities that is not due to other factors, many of them unrecognized.

The recent literature found in the three pivotal family science research and practice journals reflect diverse approaches to the examination of families and communities, as noted earlier. Equally diverse are the substantive areas that investigators are focused upon. While this diversity demonstrates the various ways that families and communities intersect, there are few areas in which multiple investigators are conducting research in the same or very similar areas; therefore it becomes more difficult to assert particular relationships between families and communities with confidence. What the past decade of research has shown are the multiple layers of individual, family and community life that intersect, which sets the stage for improved theorizing that captures these layers. Our own approach is to invoke the ideas of social organization theorizing.

### **Toward an Action Theory of Families and Communities**

We present social organization as a framework that not only helps make sense of existing theorizing and research but also provides a way to frame advances in theorizing and in research. Of particular importance of a social organization theory is how easily it lends itself to an action theory, one not only about describing what is but also about touch-points with community and family change.

We began our discussion of families and communities by introducing elements of social organization theory, and by using structure and process as two categories for conceptualizing elements of communities that have importance for understanding families. We have conducted a

comprehensive review of theoretical and empirical articles and book chapters, as contained in the major family studies handbooks and sourcebooks published since 1964, and in the front-line family studies empirical journal that began with the decade of the 1960's. Social organization is the operating framework that assists us in categorizing and conceptualizing families and communities. Some years ago we gravitated to this theory due to our work targeted at building community capacity (Bowen, Martin, Mancini, & Nelson, 2000). We are in debt to our colleagues who apply social organization thinking in their work (Cantillon, Davidson, & Schweitzer, 2003; Freisthler, 2004; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1997; Janowitz, 1991; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Kornhauser, 1978; Sampson, 1991; Sampson, 1992; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002; Shaw & McKay, 1969; Small, 2002).

### **Social Organization and the Community Capacity Model**

In the later 1990's we began formulating a model designed to elevate community capacity, which we defined as a sentiment of shared responsibility and behaviors indicating collective competence (Bowen, Martin, Mancini, & Nelson, 2000). Importantly, the initial model was developed in the context of our policy and practice work with the United States Air Force (USAF) (Bowen, Martin, & Mancini, 1999; Bowen, Orthner, Martin, & Mancini, 2001; Bowen, Martin, & Nelson, 2002). The AF requested assistance with developing a model to conceptualize the ways in which its formal support agencies for members and families could work together in a more integrative and collaborative fashion and in concert with the informal system of care. Primary assumptions, concepts, and pathways in the model were predicated on a resilience approach, in the tradition of Kretzmann and McKnight (1993). This approach is not solely anchored on deficits that communities and families may have but rather brings into the quality of

life equation the assets that are already present, though often unrecognized. As such, this approach is consonant with a well-accepted perspective in the family studies discipline.

The recalibration and reconfiguration we present in this current chapter has its origins in earlier versions of our social organization model. The initial model did not invoke social organization as an organizing concept but rather focused more narrowly on community capacity (Bowen, Martin, Mancini, & Nelson, 2000, p. 6). There were five primary concepts: formal networks, informal networks, social capital, community capacity, and community results. These concepts are all reflected as social organizational processes in Figure 1, which appeared in a subsequent publication (Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005). The actions of informal (friends, neighbors, and associates, for example) and formal (agencies, organizations, institutions, and those who represent them) networks were seen as developing social capital (information exchange between individuals, reciprocity between people who interact, and resulting levels of trust that may result from those interactions), which then becomes the engine for developing community capacity (defined as sense of shared responsibility and collective competence to act on behalf of the community), and this in turn supports desired community results (for example, safety in neighborhoods). We also incorporated the work of Small and Supple (2001) and their discussion of network effects levels (in brief, the idea that disparate networks focused on the same issue increase the odds of change). The model as first described was non-recursive, with little attempt at determining directionality. At that time we directed more attention to formal networks because we were studying military systems, personnel, and their families, and the military unit holds considerable sway in the ecology of the military experience.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

Our second iteration of a community capacity approach to understanding communities and families reflected our broadened thinking, and was represented by invoking the social organization term as a primary organizing concept (Mancini, Martin, & Bowen, 2003; Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005; see p. 574). At that time we discussed individual and family results (outcomes) within the contexts of social structure and social organizational processes (see Figure 1). We positioned network structures, social capital, and community capacity as examples of social organizational processes. Networks were considered to have both formal characteristics that could be described beyond the individuals involved (e. g. , effects levels) and more dynamic and fluid features (e. g. , evolving types and forms of interaction). We still viewed social structure, social organizational processes, and individual/family results as dynamically and reciprocally related but stated that social structure and individual/family results were mediated by social organizational processes. And within the social organizational black box we viewed all its elements as more associational rather than causal. Network structures, for example, influence community capacity, even as community capacity influences the nature of formal and informal networks. At that time, we did not elaborate social organizational processes beyond network structures, social capital, and community capacity, which was consistent with our earlier work (Bowen et al., 2000).

The next major iteration in our thinking is found in a chapter on community resilience (Mancini & Bowen, 2009).<sup>1</sup> We invoked community antecedents, social action processes, and community consequences as major categories of interest in a social organizational model

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<sup>1</sup> In the interim, we had deviated from our 2005 model in an article on preventing intimate partner violence (Mancini, Nelson, Bowen, & Martin, 2006). In this article, we spoke of three intermediate results between community capacity (shared responsibility and collective competence) and community results (safety, health and well-being, sense of community, and family adjustment). These intermediate results were (1) shared norms and values oriented toward reducing social isolation, (2) individual protective factors to reduce risk and to buffer stressors, and (3) mobilization for collective action.

(Mancini & Bowen, 2009; see p. 250). In some sense, although we added new rubrics (e.g., community antecedents), we returned to our earlier thinking about how our primary concepts were positioned and sequenced, with network structures as comprising the community antecedents base of the pyramid, with social action processes in the middle social action processes layer (social capital and community capacity), and community consequences (resilience) at the top.

Insert Figure 2 About Here

This 2009 iteration draws attention to introducing how structural characteristics (community as a physical and geographical place) have an influence on family-oriented results (for example, family adjustment and well-being, and relationships with other families in a community or neighborhood). In this 2009 discussion we explicitly uncovered what this community capacity, social organizational model suggested about the nature of change, and marked how each part of the model possessed a leverage point for prevention and intervention. For example, we contend that the “most likely leverage points in communities are associated with networks, both formal and informal. This is so because networks are visible, vibrant, and where most people connect with each other and with formal systems” (p. 259). We then state, “change is also associated with community capacity itself, if capacity is seen as requisite to community members coming together around shared goals and making decisions to take action” (p. 260). Throughout these phases of theorizing, the need to further explore social organizational processes persisted, as did the need to more fully understand the contexts in which these processes occurred and to uncover other intermediate results between social organizational processes and distal results.

### **Empirical Testing of the Model**

Our preliminary research work to date provides support for our expectations from the model. As an example, in an analysis focusing on the link between formal and informal community-based social networks and family adaptation and including a sample of more than 20,000 married Air Force members across 82 bases, we found that informal community support had both a direct influence on self-reported family adaptation, as well as an indirect influence via perceived sense of community (Bowen, Mancini, Martin, Ware, & Nelson, 2003). In an investigation with 10,102 married active-duty AF members, positive perceptions of community capacity (shared responsibility and collective competence) had a strong and direct effect on self-reported symptoms of depression. These perceptions were also a significant mediator of the effects of formal and informal networks on depression, including perceptions of agency support, unit leader support, and neighbor support (Bowen, Martin, & Ware, 2004).

### **A Work in Progress**

Each aspect of our work, model development, application of the model to address practice situations and challenges, and empirical testing of key linkages, has informed the other two. The synergy that has been created, including our ongoing collaboration with colleagues in the field of family studies and community intervention, has resulted in a model that continues to be elaborated. In this process, we have been reminded by our experiences on more than one occasion that theory development is a challenging undertaking. This process includes the occasional break through where the elements of the theory come together to form turrets of conceptual integration and distinction. More often, however, frustration is experienced when confronting conceptual nuances and ambiguities, feeling like the King's architect in the *Far Side* cartoon who suddenly realizes that the moat has been built inside the castle!

In the sections below, we attempt to address two additional components that we believe require our attention. The first involves giving more attention to potential intermediate results between social organizational processes and individual and family results. The second is to give more explicit attention to the physical structure of communities in our model or what in the literature is labeled, the “built” community. In our most recent work (Mancini & Bowen, 2009), we discussed communities as places but we failed to elaborate on this idea. As we extend our thinking we also sharpen the differentiation between informal networks and formal networks, in fact re-labeling the latter as formal systems, on the basis of work by Litwak (1985). While this change adds no additional conceptual meaning, it does recognize a core difference between what is considered informal and what is considered formal; the informal being mainly about friends, neighbors, and other people we come in contact throughout everyday life, and the formal being mainly about agencies and organizations that are established and maintained to support individuals and families in need (in effect, our labels have caught up with our conceptualizations).

### **Extending Social Organization and a Theory of Action**

#### **Sense of Community**

In our earlier attempts to conceptualize the ways in which communities influence individuals and families, we have been more implicit than explicit in specifying the intermediate results that links the exogenous (external and contextual) features of community structure and the endogenous (internal) social organizational processes associated with these structure features with outcomes for individuals and families. In our current model, we propose to open up the social psychological (broadly defined as the relationships between individuals and their social groups) “black box” between our macro-level social organizational processes and micro-level



individual and family outcomes. In doing so, we draw on a particularly provocative and informing metatheoretical analysis by Zelditch (1991) of William Julius Wilson's, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987). Zelditch discusses the "situational social psychology" that mediates the link in Wilson's theory between macro-level structure and individual behavior. From this perspective, the social psychological orientations of individuals, which are situationally-specific and fluid across different contexts, provide the link between the social organizational opportunities and constraints on individuals and their behavior.

In our proposed theory of community action and change (see Figure 3) we have four elements, including individual and family results, which are necessary to have an actual action theory. We have discussed each of them earlier in the chapter, except sense of community. We propose sense of community as an intermediate result that mediates between these distal results and social organizational processes. Our core social organizational processes are network structures, social capital, and community capacity. These three aspects of social organization are important drivers for change, especially informal networks and formal systems. We recognize the social infrastructure and the physical infrastructure of the community as two key community antecedents that are foundational to understanding processes because they provide a context for interaction and transaction (discussed in the following section).

Insert Figure 3 About Here

As a new construct in our theory of community and action, we define sense of community as a social psychological variable that reflects the degree to which individuals and families feel a sense of identification, esprit de corps, and attachment with their community (Bowen, Martin, Mancini, & Nelson, 2001; Van Laar, 1999). Earlier we reported that sense of community was affected by degree of community participation (collective events and activities),

the ease of making connections with others in the community, and increased levels of a sense of responsibility for others in the community (Bowen, Martin, Mancini, & Nelson, 2001). Empirically, sense of community is evidenced by reports of feelings of belonging in the community, feeling close to other community members, a feeling that one's own circumstances are similar to others in the community, as well as more behavioral indicators including making new friends, spending time with others, and showing concern for others (Mancini, Bowen, Martin, & Ware, 2003). Importantly, we see the operation of formal systems and informal networks as correlates, rather than an indicators, of sense of community, which is consistent with research by Pretty, Conroy, Dugay, Fowler, and Williams (1996). Our research in the military sector provides additional support to Pretty et al. 's findings and suggests a direct influence of formal systems and informal networks on sense of community. In turn, sense of community had a positive influence on the family adaptation of married Air Force members (Bowen, Mancini, Martin, Ware, & Nelson, 2003). In an earlier study with 180 married Air Force members, we found an indirect effect of informal networks on sense of community via community capacity, which included dimensions of shared responsibility and collective competence (Bowen, Martin, Mancini, & Nelson, 2001). Cantillon, Davidson, and Schweitzer (2003) have also recently discussed the significance of sense of community in understanding social organization, also viewing it as an important mediator for understanding community life and effects on individuals and families.

In the context of this review, we propose one's sense of community as a result that partially mediates the link between social organizational processes and the ultimate results that individuals and families achieve. Although our model directs attention at this particular construct, we do not propose it as the only potential intermediate result in our model. However,

in the context of high sense of community, we propose that individuals and families have a greater probability of achieving desired individual and family results. In effect, one's sense of community helps to explain the motivation to act and to participate in change. As we continue to apply our theory to the world of practice, we anticipate that additional intermediate results will be identified. In general, the application of theories to practice results in more versus fewer concepts and more complexity in the nature of proposed linkages.

### **Community Antecedents**

In our more recent work (Mancini & Bowen, 2009), we identified community antecedents as an exogenous component in our model, which included community conditions and characteristics and network structures (formal and informal). Remember we make a distinction between the “structure” of these network connections and the “nature of the relationships” that are contained in these structures. In an earlier work (Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005), we placed network structures under social organizational processes and identified social structure as the exogenous component in the model, which was defined in a most general way as the organization, configuration, and composition of community members within a geographic area. Our struggle has been about whether to consider formal systems and informal networks as an aspect of social structure or as an aspect of social action processes. In reality, networks are a component of both community structure and community process—structural in form and dynamic in function. Although, at any one time, networks have relatively stable patterns (structure), we focus our attention on the more dynamic and fluid nature of formal systems and informal networks (process). From an action model perspective, we see formal systems and informal networks as targets for community intervention. Consequently, in our

current model, we have shifted formal systems and informal networks back under social organizational processes.

We have also given consideration to the influence of physical infrastructure of the community on the functioning and operation of the community. Consequently, we now focus our attention on the both the social infrastructure and the physical infrastructure of the community. Both are considered under the broader label of community antecedents, and we are indebted to the work of Furstenberg and Hughes (1997) in specifying these two community-level features, which will be discussed below.

**The Social Infrastructure.** Communities vary in their social and demographic composition, which inform the nature of sociocultural risks and opportunities in community settings (Bowen, Richman, & Bowen, 2000). The social infrastructure is an important component of social disorganization theory, and Shaw and McKay (1969, revised edition) identified three such structural conditions of the community in their examination of differential rates of juvenile delinquency in Chicago: economic status, ethnic heterogeneity, and residential mobility. Both Wilson (1987) and Sampson et al. (1997) identified the pernicious influence of concentrated disadvantage in communities (poverty, welfare dependency, joblessness, segregation, crime, and oppression) on supportive social organizational processes. In Sampson et al. 's work, high levels of residential stability were related to supportive patterns of interaction among residents and more effective social control, which they labeled as collective efficacy. Rosenbaum and Harris (2001) have used the term “chaotic” in describing neighborhoods that are disorganized, suggesting confused and disordered structures and processes. If we see infrastructure as a collection of supports within an area, such as a neighborhood or a central part of the city, then the social infrastructure is mainly about people and their interactions. In neighborhoods where

there is more fluidity than stability, more uncertainty than predictability, and more ambiguity than clarity, the odds of chaos increase. If you do not know your neighbors because your neighbors are always turning over, then it is more difficult to achieve to establish connections. In very pragmatic terms, knowing who to go to for assistance is very difficult because you do not know who is there.

**The Physical Infrastructure.** Communities also vary by the design of their physical infrastructure or what is more descriptively termed in the literature as the community's built environment (Dannenberg et al., 2003). We began our consideration of physical infrastructure as we discussed prevention of intimate partner violence (Mancini, Nelson, Bowen, & Martin, 2006). The built environment refers to the man-made design of communities that serve as settings for human behavior and interaction, including land use, the size and spacing of homes, the presence and condition of sidewalks and parks, traffic flow, availability of public transit, lighting, and scenery. On the basis of our review of articles in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Family Relations*, and the *Journal of Family Issues* addressing linkages between families and communities in the three journals, little attention has been paid to the physical nature of place and its influence on either community process or the health and well-being of community individuals and families.

For a number of years human ecologists have focused on "humans as both biological organisms and social beings in interaction with their environment" (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). Human ecology theory, as practiced by professionals in the family and consumer sciences discipline (home economics in an earlier incarnation), has included a focus on elements that occupy physical space, including the near environment of home and household, to the more distant environments that are man-made and natural. An emerging literature in the public health

field suggests a dynamic association between the physical and social infrastructure of communities and the importance of the built community on social organizational processes, including the nature of social interaction, the development of social capital and community capacity, as well as on health and disease outcomes (Cohen, Inagami, & Finch, 2008; Leyden, 2003; Renalds, Smith, & Hale, 2010; Srinivasan, O’Fallon, & Dearry, 2003). For example, living in walkable neighborhoods has been associated with increased social capital (e. g. knowing neighbors, trust) as compared to living in the suburbs that depend heavily on car usage (Leyden, 2003). In addition, Cohen et al. (2008) found a positive association between neighborhood collective efficacy (i. e. combined measure of social cohesion and informal social control) and the number of parks when controlling for both individual demographic characteristics and neighborhood socioeconomic status. Self-rated health, mental health status, obesity, heavy alcohol use, and risky sexual behavior have all been linked to the nature of the built environment (Cohen et al., 2008; Renalds et al., 2010).

In the context of this literature, we propose that the physical features of communities in which individual and families reside have a reciprocal relationship with the social infrastructure of the community. Physical features of communities also have a direct influence on social organizational processes in the community, and an indirect influence on individual and family results via both social organizational processes and one’s sense of community. In future iterations of our model, we also hope to give attention to the natural environment (e. g. , proximity to lakes and rivers), which we believe operate in a dynamic synergy with both the social and physical infrastructure of the community.

### **Current Status**

We see our model as a work in progress. Although with each iteration we tend to extend or revise some aspect of the model, many nuances of the interface between communities and families remain to be integrated in our theory of community action and change. For example, in a recent discussion of skilled support within intimate relationships, Rafaeli and Gleason (2009) propose that misguided or unskilled support may lead to more problems than solutions in the ways in which couples respond to external stressors. This important caveat in the dyadic support literature can be easily extended to the relationship between community support and individual and family results, and raises important questions about the timing (e. g. , when is it delivered), the nature (e. g. , instrumental versus expressive), the delivery (e. g. , person-focused or situation–focused), and the reciprocation of community support and whether it is viewed as a cost or as a benefit (Rafaeli & Gleason). In another recent article, Fingerman (2009) discusses the important role that peripheral ties, as compared to core ties, may play as support systems for individuals. As a broad-based framework, our theory of community action and change is fully capable of incorporating such refinements. A social organization approach accounts for the multiple permutations and nuances of those processes that surround families, as well as those structures that provide the framing for interaction and transaction.

### **Conclusions: Intersections of Families and Communities**

In this chapter we have covered an expansive literature that links families and communities, beginning with a review of how the family studies field has intentionally examined the family-community touchpoints. We feel our review of the earlier pivotal treatments of family studies is instructive for understanding where more contemporary theorizing and research might profitably focus. Hopefully we have interested family scholars in pursuing research that is more intentional about community influences on families. We have also attempted to provide a set of

handles for not only understanding this literature but also for moving the study of families and communities toward more intentional theorizing and research. This is not to suggest the existing research and theorizing is that deficient, but rather to argue that much more refinement is needed in order to position the literature to effectively inform social action, those processes that actually help families and the communities in which they live.

The intersections of families and communities have not been high on the radar of family scholars as a group, though several among us have called attention to the importance of this focus to accounting for variations in individual and family outcomes. We do wonder what would have happened if the excellent work summarized by Moge (1964) had become a mainstay of family research and of family researchers. Very many years ago this study of community contexts was eclipsed by a far greater preoccupation with looking inside the family, to the exclusion of looking outside the family. We believe that these two perspectives are complementary and that community contexts, whether studied or not, persist in the lives of all families and their individual members. It is not always clear how the collective influences the familial, yet we know some families struggle with their surroundings, both physical and social, whereas others flourish because of their surroundings, both physical and social.

Toward the end of this chapter we have presented our own trail of examining the intersections between families and communities. If this part of the chapter seems somewhat disjointed, it does because it is—we have struggled with more fully recognizing the complexity and nuances of the relationship between families and communities with providing a simpler but perhaps more testable model. This is the yin and the yang of theory building, and we appreciate the opportunity to expose the “underbelly” of our efforts. We owe a substantial debt to many of



our colleagues, past and present, who both encourage us to go further and who shake their heads when we don't leave well enough alone.

We have proposed and elaborated a social organizational approach to understanding families and communities; this elaboration has occurred in several ways, including our critique of the published theoretical and empirical literature. In the course of that analysis we proposed a way of understanding measurement approaches, arguing for a social organizational schema and providing the indicators of such an approach. The theorizing we have conducted, substantially informed by earlier theory and research, has set out to provide an umbrella for understanding structure and process, and for parsing interdependent aspects of processes. We hope that the discussion will stimulate a call to action in what we consider to be potentially fruitful area of theory development and scholarship.

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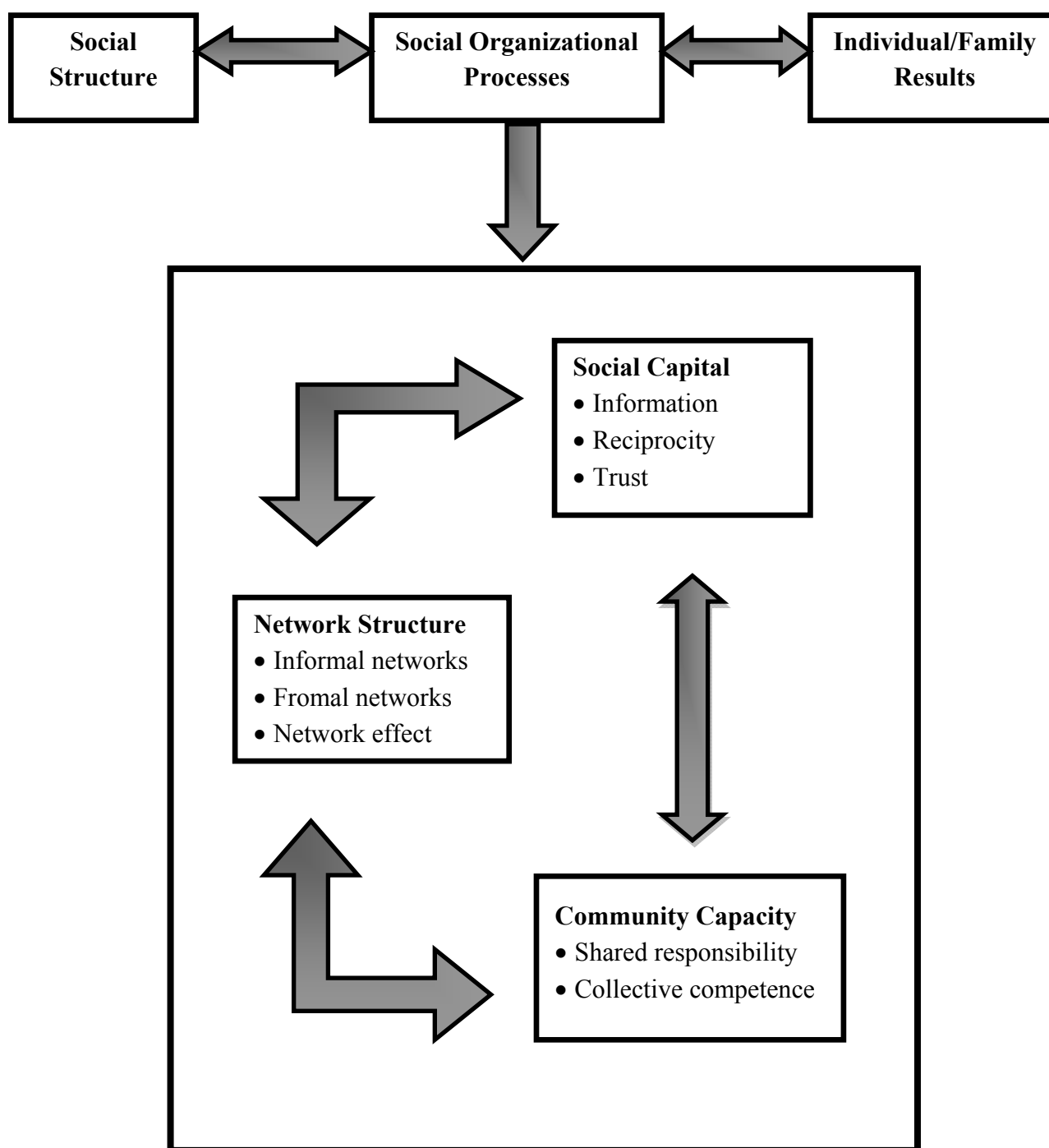


Figure 1. Social organization processes, social structure, and individual family results. Reprinted with permission from Mancini, Bowen, & Martin (2005).

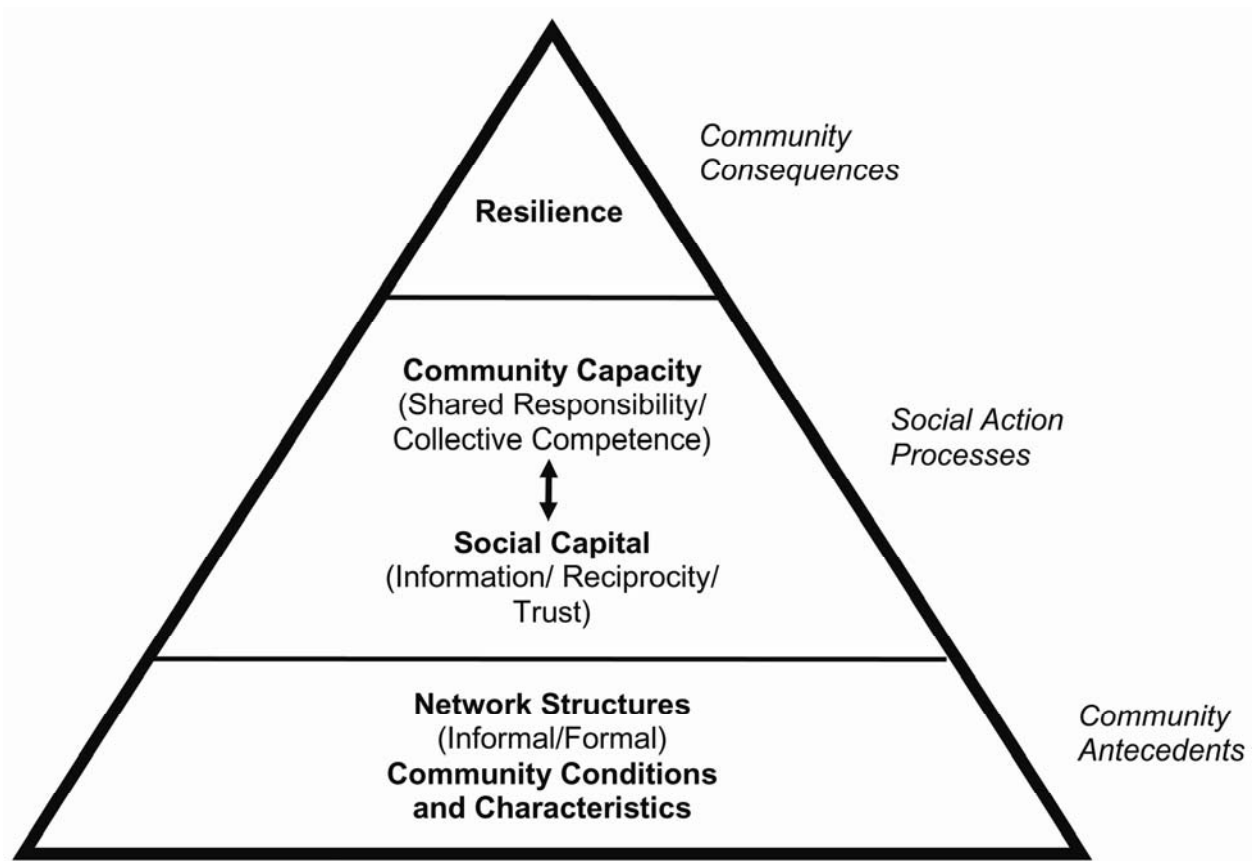


Figure 2. Model of Social Organization and Change. Reprinted with permission from Mancini & Bowen (2009).

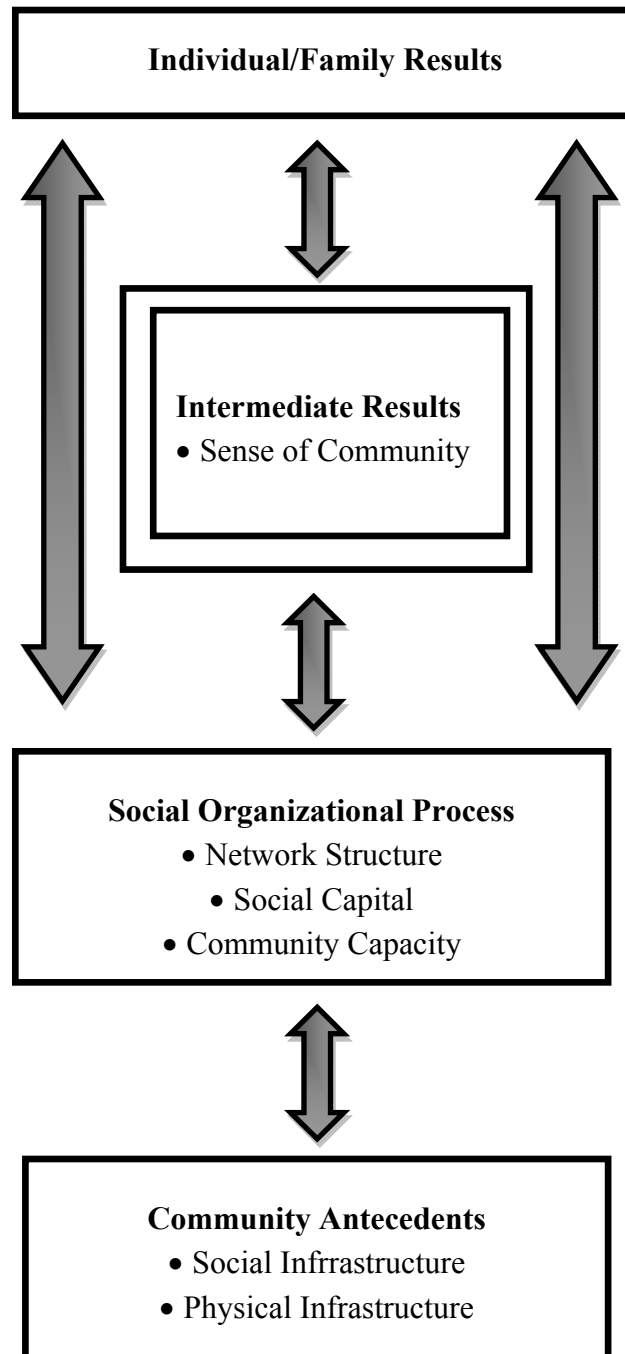


Figure 3. Theory of Community Action and Change