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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a conceptual framework for studying the family environment that (1) incorporates recent advances in understanding multiple social influences on behavior; (2) recognizes common and idiosyncratic characteristics of families as social units; (3) identifies research strategies that can be used to assess families; and (4) generates hypotheses about the reasons families function differently. The discussion begins with an exploration of basic issues used to conceptualize the family and its behavior as a unit. Subsequent discussion identifies major domains of family functioning, with the purpose of underscoring the importance of assessing the family environment in terms of its potential contribution to diverse aspects of development. Presented next is a conceptual framework designed to account for variation in the ways in which families function across domains. Four major elements relevant to family functioning are considered: goals, strategies for attaining goals, resources, and individual life experiences. The elements of the conceptual framework are referred to by the acronym, GSRI. After a description of the GSRI model, discussion focuses on the types of variables needed to apply the GSRI framework to a contextual analysis of family functioning, and considers other related methodological issues. The GSRI model is compared to three other approaches: the confluence and circumplex models and dimensional analyses of parenting behavior. (RH)

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The Family Environment: The Combined Influence of Family Behavior, Goals, Strategies, Resources, and Individual Experiences

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Considerable research has been conducted on families -- how families create, experience, and respond to the world in which they live. The purpose of this chapter is to describe a conceptual framework for studying the family environment which (1) incorporates recent advances in understanding multiple social influences on behavior, (2) recognizes both common and idiosyncratic characteristics of families as social units, (3) identifies research strategies to assess families, and (4) generates hypotheses about the reasons families vary in their functioning. The framework derives from theories and research in psychology, ethology, sociology, anthropology, and demography. We rely most heavily on empirical work in social ecology and in decision making, incorporating elements from existing theories and combining them operationally in our formulation of the family environment.

Studies of social influences on young children have tended to focus on a selected dyadic relationship (usually between a parent and child, sometimes between siblings or parents), a single aspect of family behavior (e.g., communication patterns, parental teaching style, allocation of responsibilities), or parental attributions and subjective ratings (e.g., understanding of normative development, ratings of parenting self-esteem, perceived family stress, adequacy of social support, satisfaction with the family). The results of these studies, especially those that are longitudinal, are relevant to understanding the social influences that operate within families and, in turn, that contribute to differential child outcomes. Organizing the numerous and diverse findings into a cohesive view of the family environment and family effects, however, is difficult, because the central theme or level of analysis is rarely the family unit per se. Although developmental psychologists share many implicit assumptions about the family

environment, seldom do they provide an explicit framework that defines the family unit, addresses the mission and commitment of families, considers how families are organized (from their inception through various life stages, including possible dissolution), and offers hypotheses about the combined influence of family environment variables on the young child.

Several recent trends in developmental psychology have yielded useful insights into the nature of the family environment. Investigators increasingly recognize that social relationships within the family are complex and can be described in terms of their bidirectionality, reciprocity, complementarity, situational sensitivity, indirect or second order influences, and integration within larger social-ecological contexts (e.g., Belsky, 1981; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Dunn, 1983; Feinman & Lewis, 1984; Lewis, 1984; Lewis & Rosenblum, 1974, 1978, 1979; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Parke, Power, & Gottman, 1979). The fervent period of microanalytic observation of mother-infant relationships has evolved to accomodate a broader conceptualization of the child's social network, one that recognizes the role of fathers, siblings, grandparents, and peers (e.g., Brody & Stoneman, 1986; Dunn & Kendrick, 1981; Lewis & Feiring, 1979, 1981; Lewis & Weinraub, 1976; MacDonald & Parke, 1984; Tinsley & Parke, 1984). Developmental psychologists often write about the family as a "system," borrowing heavily from the basic concepts of general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1975; Miller, 1965, 1978). For discussions and selected applications of a systems or multidimensional perspective to the family environment, see Belsky (1981), Bronfenbrenner (1979), Lewis (1982), Lewis and Feiring (1984), Parke (1986), Ramey, MacPhee, and Yates (1983), Sameroff (1983), Sigel (1982), and Turnbull, Summers, and Brotherson (1986), among others. A systems framework also appears in the literature on clinical assessment and treatment of families (e.g., Bateson,

Jackson, Haley, & Weakland, 1956; Epstein & Bishop, 1981; Guerin & Kniskern, 1981; Minunchin, 1974; Patterson & Reid, 1986; Reiss, 1971a; Terkelsen, 1980). The theme "beyond the dyad" (Feinman & Lewis, 1984; Lewis, 1984) captures the spirit of present inquiry about social influences on young children.

Sociologists, in contrast to developmental psychologists, tend to approach the family as a social unit. Sociological literature is replete with theories about the nature of families and their role in societies (e.g., Beavers & Voeller, 1983; Epstein, Bishop, & Baldwin, 1982; Holman & Burr, 1980; Nye & Berardo, 1966; Olson, 1985; Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983; Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979). Such large scale theories have contributed valuable concepts about the missions of families (e.g., intergenerational transmission of cultural information, efficient distribution of workload and management of resource) and the dimensions along which families may differ (e.g., family cohesion and adaptability, control orientation, expressive style, affective involvement, structural arrangement). Rarely, however, do sociologists study how the development of individual family members relates to variations in the family unit, even when within-family differences are studied (e.g., discrepancy in family members' perceptions, satisfaction, or behavior).

After reviewing the recent literature on families, we realized the potential value of proposing a system that would help facilitate the integration of principles and findings across disciplines. In this chapter, we begin by discussing basic issues in conceptualizing the family and its behavior as a unit. We then identify major domains of family functioning to underscore the importance of assessing the family environment in terms of its potential contribution to diverse aspects of development. Next, we present our conceptual framework designed to account for variation in the ways that families function across these domains. Four major elements relevant to

family functioning are central in our thinking: goals, strategies for attaining goals, resources, and individual life experiences. We refer to this conceptual framework as GSRI, an acronym for the four elements. After describing the model, we consider the types of variables needed to apply the GSRI framework to a contextual analysis of family functioning and mention some related methodological issues. Finally, we compare GSRI to three other approaches -- the confluence model (Zajonc, 1976; Zajonc & Markus, 1975, 1977), the circumplex model (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983), and dimensional analyses of parenting behavior (e.g., Baumrind, 1966).

We recognize that in proposing such a conceptual framework, psychologists may criticize us for being too broad and ambitious, while sociologists and anthropologists may view us as too narrow. We hope nonetheless that a framework linking major family concepts and research from these diverse disciplines will further our ability to understand the effects of families on children. Many concepts in our model are similar to those in other frameworks, but we have tried to use general words (rather than technical or theory-specific terminology) to describe these. If a single theme underlying our conceptual framework must be stated, it would be a rather obvious one -- that the family environment is multivariate in nature in which a host of variables operate in a complex fashion to influence family behavior and development. However, rather than waving the magic wand of "this is a complex multivariate phenomena" and then proceeding to focus on one or two variables, we shall describe the multivariate complexity of the issues directly.

The Family: A Unit or a Collection of Subunits?

One dilemma investigators encounter when studying an individual's development within the family context is how to treat the concept of family. Is the family somehow more than the sum of its parts? Can the family be

studied as a unit without negating the significance of specific dyadic relacionships within the family? Do family members, including young children, have a concept of "family" or a collective "we" that is distinct from their independent relationships with individual family members? If so, to what extent do family members' notions of "family" and their subjective experiences of their family influence actual family behavior and individual child outcomes?

In a scholarly review of anthropological attempts to derive a "scientific, correct, and useful definition of the family," Yanagisako (1979) concludes that we should abandon efforts to discover "the irreducible core of the family and its universal definition" and instead "seek out the functions of the family in each society" (p. 200). Accordingly, in our conceptual framework, we define the family as: a collection of individuals who have a commitment to the general well-being of one another and who label themselves a "family." This definition is sensitive to the many structural and demographic changes in American families and implicitly recognizes that criteria such as biological relatedness, a common place of residence, anticipated stability of the unit, and focus on childrearing activities are inadequate for purposes of identifying the diversity of families today. Because our primary interest is how families function and what aspects of the family environment have significant and pervasive effects on children, we have settled for a non-restrictive definition of the family. In fact, this definition permits the possibility that individuals may belong to more than one family at a time. (Landesman, 1986)

Level of analysis. Within a family, three levels of analysis are inherent: (1) analysis at the level of individuals, (2) analysis at the level of social subunits (all combinations of two or more individuals), and (3) analysis at the level of the group as a whole. Ideally, an analysis of how a

family functions would incorporate all three levels. In this conceptual framework, a family is described at the individual level by examining all family members' behavior, as well as their individual goals, strategies, resources, and experiences that pertain to family functioning. At the individual level of analysis, the family is equated with the composite obtained by considering each family member separately (i.e., the family equals the sum of its parts).

At the social subunit level, the nature of each dyad, triad, etc. is considered, including quantitative and qualitative descriptions of the similarities and differences of family members in each subunit. ~~including~~ The subunits are viewed as having a valid existence that is distinct from, and not entirely predicted by, ~~that of the~~ data concerning individuals. For example, when considering the parental dyad, a mother may have different goals or aspirations for her children than does the father. Or both parents may share the same goals, but may favor alternative strategies for acheiving those goals. For a given subunit, when family members have differing goals, strategies, resources, and/or individual experiences, these can be characterized as "conflicting" (e.g., the attainment of one person's goals would prevent the attainment of the other person's goals), "non-implicative" (e.g., one person's goals, if realized, would not affect the achievement of another's goals), or "complementary" (e.g., success in reaching one person's goals fosters the attainment of the other person's goals). We hypothesize that social subunits have effects on how the family actually behaves, above and beyond those attributable to the individuals within these subunits. These effects represent relativistic or relational properties that theoretically have significant social influences in their own right. The mothers, for example, in two different families may have identical goals, similar strategies for

attaining goals, comparable resources, and equivalent individual life experiences relevant to their functioning as mothers. From the standpoint of influencing child development, these maternal variables will have different meanings and consequences in the two families depending on whether the subunit anlysis reveals other family members' goals are similar, conflicting, non-implicative, or complementary to the mothers'.

At the level of the family as a whole, the objective is to describe the family as a single unit. To achieve this, one approach involves a contextual analysis that simultaneously considers the GSRI profiles of all family members. This then yields a single characterization of the entire family unit. A second approach treats the family as a single subject. For instance, an investigator might observe the activities of family members, which then are converted to a single code to characterize the entire family. Similarly, judgements can be made about a family's overall or collective strategies to achieve goals. Finally, a third approach is to use "family" as an entity. This approach recognizes that most family members have and use a concept of the collective unit (i.e., "we are a family") which may mediate aspects of their behavior. (For an excellent discussion of this topic, see Reiss, 1971a, 1971b). Theoretically, the collected statements and ratings by family members about their perceptions of their family "as a whole" may not be a simple function of component analyses at the individual and subunit levels. In essence, an abstracted conception of "family" can be created, by a variety of empirical methods, and used to study changes over time and effects of the "family" on children's outcomes. (Note: Effects of family member's notions of "our family" may be studied at the individual and the social subunit levels as well as the collective level.)

In our opinion, investigators tend to overlook the context-dependent

nature of a family member's goals, strategies, resources, and individual life experiences or characteristics. Empirical studies frequently measure such variables for only one family member at a time, with the data analysis relating such measures to child outcome variables. Even when measures for multiple family members are obtained, the data rarely are treated in a contextual manner. Rather, the relative contributions of each set of variables tend to be explored in a main effects regression model. In contrast, we propose that how a family functions and, in turn, how the family environment contributes to child outcomes, will be influenced not only by the content of each family member's behavior, goals, strategies for attaining goals, resources, and experiences, but also by the context in which these are expressed. The functional consequences of the GSRI elements and behavior will be relativistic rather than absolute. For example, the consequences of parental punishment of a child will be influenced, in part, by contextual variables such as the frequency of punishment, the meaning family members attach to the punishment, the responses of other family members to the child's punishment, and the extent to which other family members are treated similarly for their transgressions.

Although we emphasize the importance of assessing each family member's goals, strategies, resources, and individual life experiences, we do not assume that the GSRI profiles of family members are independent of one another. For example, the goals of individual family members frequently emerge through discussions and interactions with other family members. The elements of GSRI (described below) are viewed as dynamic and interdependent.

Family Behavior and Functional Domains

In our model, family behavior is defined as: the overt behavior of family members, generally enacted so as to realize the goals for the family unit.

The behavior of family members outside the family realm is not included in this definition, although this can affect family functioning. For instance, a child's school adjustment is not considered part of family behavior, even though this may influence the family. Similarly, a parent's activities at work are not viewed as family behavior, but these may influence the parent's behavior toward other family members or may change the parent's goals or resources related to the family.

We categorize family behavior into six major functional domains: (1) physical development and health, (2) emotional development, (3) social development, (4) cognitive development, (5) moral and spiritual development, and (6) cultural and aesthetic development. Table 1 describes these goal-related domains. Each corresponds to a major area of research in child development and represents a realm in which the family environment theoretically can influence a child. However, we do not limit social influence analysis to children. physical development and health, emotional development, social development, cognitive development, moral development, and cultural and aesthetic development are ongoing enterprises at all ages. Most families consider these domains important for all family members throughout the family's lifetime.

Insert Table 1 About Here

For a given family or family member, the relative emphasis on different goal-related domains is determined, in part, by variables such as the ages of family members (e.g., relatively more emphasis may be placed by the parent on physical devlopment and health when children are infants than when they are adolescents), the family's value system (e.g., parents who value formal education highly are likely to spend more time and resources related to

Table 1

Six Major Goal-Related Domains of Family Functioning

Domain 1: Physical Development and Health: concerns meeting basic needs for survival, such as providing food, housing, and clothing; promoting good health (medical and dental care, good nutrition, personal hygiene); arranging for child care (responsible adult supervision when children do not have minimal self care skills); and insuring safety (protection from potential physical or social harm, procedures for handling emergencies).

Domain 2: Emotional development and Well-being: refers to acquiring emotional self-regulation, fostering positive expression of emotional states, encouraging constructive ways to deal with emotions (especially negative states), developing the capacity to give and receive love (both within and outside the family context), learning to assess the emotional needs of other people, and maintaining good mental health.

Domain 3: Social development: refers to developing positive interaction skills to initiate and maintain relationships, acquiring the ability to avoid and/or resolve social conflict, and recognizing the role of the individual in group contexts, both within and outside the family unit.

Domain 4: Cognitive development: encompasses activities that foster intelligence and academic skills (e.g., formal education), daily living skills (e.g., money management, transportation use), and future vocational competence; learning to think critically and creatively, and understanding how to evaluate one's own thought processes.

Domain 5: Moral and Spiritual Development: includes efforts to help family members acquire beliefs and values about ethical behavior and a philosophy of life. Examples of activities that foster the acquisition of such beliefs and values are religious education and practices, discussion of basic values, and reasoning about moral dilemmas.

Domain 6: Cultural and Aesthetic Development: includes activities that foster an appreciation of one's own and others' cultural heritage, folklore, and traditions, as well as help one develop a personal sense of beauty and art.

cognitive development than parents who do not), and the society in which the family lives (e.g., a family in a communal or cooperative society may be more concerned about social and moral development than is a typical family in an individually competitive society). Families also differ in how much family members agree with one another regarding the relative priorities for these broad developmental domains.

Because families are hypothesized to show uneveness in how skillfully they function across the six domains, we view any attempt to generate a global or unidimensional assessment of a family (e.g., as more or less "successful," "supportive," "normal," or "cohesive") as limited in value and likely to be misleading. Multidimensional study, in contrast, permits identifying a family's domain-specific strengths and weaknesses and yields a family profile suitable for making precise predictions about the effects of family environments on selected aspects of development. Different combinations of environmental variables will facilitate or hinder "success" (i.e., achievement of goals) in the various functional domains. Family behavior is expected to change over time and across situations, as a direct result of shifts in the family's goals, strategies and plans, resources, and individual experiences relative to the six functional domains. We further recognize the potential for cross-domain conflicts or cross-domain enhancement in family functioning. That is, a family's behavior at a given time may serve multiple functions: an activity that enhances functioning in one domain may also advance, or restrict, functioning in other domains. Similarly, individuals or sub-units within the family may benefit from certain behavioral decisions or activities, while others within the same family may be adversely affected.

The Family Environment

We define the family environment as: the family's behavior (see above)

and the combined goals, strategies, resources, and individual life experiences of family members. This definition includes physical and behavioral features of the environment, as well as the subjective experiences and emotions of family members. The family environment is not thought of as something that influences family behavior, rather, family behavior is part of the environment. What is important to study is how different aspects of the family environment relate to one another (e.g., how goals relate to family behavior; how family behavior affects a family member's emotions or moods) and, in turn, how these jointly contribute to child and family outcome variables.

The characterization of the family environment is expected to vary depending on the level of analysis — individual, subunit, or the "family as a whole" -- and the perspective of the informants and the investigator. These different views of the family environment can be powerful tools in studying the impact of the family environment on children.

The GSRI Elements

We view the behavior of families in each of the functional domains as the product of four primary elements: (1) their goals, (2) their strategies or plans to attain those goals, (3) their resources, and (4) their individual life experiences. These GSRI elements are related, but distinct. We define each separately, then suggest ways that the elements influence one another and combine to affect family functioning and child outcomes. When discussing each element, we usually will characterize it from the perspective of an individual family member, typically the parent. However, consistent with our previous comments, the analysis of each element should be undertaken at all three levels within the context of the family unit.

Element 1: Goals

Goals are central to understanding family functioning. Goals reflect a family's ambitions, hopes, and values. A goal is a desired end state (e.g., good health, happiness, educational achievement) or a desired mode of conduct (e.g., honest, respectful of others, creative). Families are goal-oriented in that they function to achieve desired end states and desired modes of conduct for family members and for the family unit as a whole. Goals of family members may be grouped according to the functional domains listed in Table 1.

Goals may be characterized in a variety of ways. Here, we mention some characteristics of family goals that we posit are important to consider when studying differences across families. First, goals may be classified as those that are (a) universal (i.e., shared by almost all families across cultures and over time), (b) culture-specific (i.e., prevalent in a given culture), and (c) family-specific (i.e., operative for a particular family unit). An example of a universal family goal is providing adequate food and protection; a culture-specific goal in the United States is schooling for children until 16 years of age; and a family-specific goal may be having children who are athletic or musical. Second, goals may be explicit or implicit (i.e., more or less recognized by family members). A family member may think consciously about the best way to attain a goal and, hence, explicitly consider that goal when deciding how to behave. By contrast, implicit goals sometimes reflect societal values which are so fundamental that family members consider them only when the goals are blocked or others question them. Third, goals differ in their importance or centrality to a family. The importance assigned to family goals may be influenced by available resources, current needs of family members, prior experiences, and individuals' basic values and preferences. Fourth, goals are developmental and not static. Families often assess and

modify their goals. As families progress in their life courses, both chronologically and experientially, re-evaluation of goals and their priorities is expected. Fifth, goals may be either short term or long term. Short term goals are frequently "steps" toward attaining long term goals. Sixth, many family goals are interrelated or mutually dependent, although some may be independent. This means that choices related to a given family goal may have implications for other goals. Seventh and finally, goals may differ for family members. A family's goals thus may be characterized by the extent to which they are shared by family members and whether there are conflicts among the family goals of individuals. Careful delineation of the interdependence among a family's implicit and explicit goals is important for evaluating how effectively a family functions in each domain and for understanding why certain aspects of family behavior are associated with differential success in meeting goals.

To understand differences in family or child outcomes, it is useful to study family members' goals. A comprehensive profile for a family would include goals relevant to each functional domain (see Table 1). After listing domain-specific goals, their relative importance, stability, etc. may be considered. For example, one family's goals for moral development may include having the children adopt the parents' religious practices wholeheartedly, encouraging compassion and helpfulness towards those whose lives are less fortunate, and adopting high standards for self-performance in all aspects of their lives. This family's goals might be characterized further as follows: highly conventional within their community, only moderately explicit, judged of very high importance by the family, relatively stable over the years, highly compatible with this family's goals in other domains, and agreed upon by the parents but not necessarily by the children. A second family, in

contrast, may hold moral development goals that are the same in content, but which are less normative within this family's community. Further, compared to the first family, the second family's goals may be far less explicit, judged by the family as less important than are goals in other domains, more fluctuating and vulnerable to external influences, somewhat at odds with other family goals, and less agreed upon by individual family members. In sum, goals need to be described in terms of their actual content, their form (e.g., the characteristics identified above), and their contextual aspects.

Element 2: Strategies and Plans

Family members need to devise strategies and plans that will enable them to attain their goals. A family, in general, is hypothesized to function better if good decision making and problem solving strategies are present. Thus, decision making skills are hypothesized to be an important mediator of the effects of external variables on family functioning. Families in which members are better decision makers or problem solvers, and are able to follow through behaviorally, are predicted to be more likely to achieve their goals and to be more satisfied with their families.

We define a family problem as the failure to realize a goal or to make satsifactory progress toward goal attainment. How well a family functions is determined partially by family members' abilities to solve problems as well as to make decisions that maximize achieving family goals. In some cases, goal conflict itself can create problems for a family. In this section, we discuss a range of activities individuals can engage in during decision making and problem solving, and factors that characterize "good" decisions and "effective" solutions. Our primary focus is on decisions that the individual actively thinks about, in which the individual considers such issues as the alternative courses of action available and their probable consequences. We

recognize that many behavioral decisions related to a family's everyday life are not of this character. However, when family members perceive that an issue or problem is important, they are likely to reflect on the matter. Their future behavior then may be affected by these reflections, even though the individual may not be engaged in active thought or evaluation each time the behavior is performed.

Activities in Behavioral Decision Making and problem Solving. Research concerning decision making and problem solving has identified multiple activities that an individual can engage in during decision making or problem solving (e.g., Jaccard & Wood, 1986; Abelson & Levi, 1985). Table 2 describes eight primary activities. Not all of these activities necessarily are performed by an individual in making a given decision or solving a particular problem. Nor must the activities be performed in the sequence described. Each activity, however, is important to consider when evaluating the decision making or problem solving strategies operative within a family.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Optimal Strategies for Decision Making and problem Solving. The identification of good decision makers/problem solvers is difficult and requires value judgments. Decision theorists typically distinguish between "good" decisions in terms of outcome or process. From an outcome perspective, an optimal decision is one in which the "best" option is chosen, where "best" is defined on the basis of external criteria (e.g., successfully attaining a goal with no detrimental effects). From a process perspective, the focus is not on the option that is chosen, but rather, on the process that the individual engages in. Certain decision making activities usually yield better decisions or solutions. An optimal decision from a process perspective

Table 2

Strategic Activities in Family Decision Making/Problem Solving

1. Recognizing the need for active decision making or problem solving: the individual determines that a decision is needed or a problem state exists, therefore a strategy or plan to correct the situation must be considered. Families vary considerably in how sensitive they are in detecting certain family problems and in recognizing that a thoughtful choice at a given time may foster achievement of their own family goals.

2. Defining the desired outcomes: the individual specifies a priori what an ideal solution or decision would be, making explicit his or her goals and values as well as the criteria for "success."

3. Generating options: the individual thinks of multiple ways that potentially could solve the issue or help realize the goal.

4. Gathering information: the individual seeks information, either about what additional strategies or solutions might be available (e.g., approaches other families have used or professionals recommend) or about properties of one or more of the options (e.g., how time consuming, expensive, or difficult a given strategy might be to enact) under consideration.

5. Assessing relevant option information: the individual consciously considers the information he or she has about the different strategies and their probable outcomes. The term "information" is used in a general sense and refers to any anticipated consequences or characteristics subjectively associated with a given behavioral option or strategy. Based on this information, the individual forms preferences for some options or alternative solutions, relative to others.

6. Selecting a strategy or making a choice: the individual selects one of the decision options or problem solutions for purposes of future behavioral enactment.

7. Behavioral translation: the individual transforms the decision choice or proposed solution into overt behavior.

8. Post-decision evaluation: the individual reflects on the decision after the strategy option has been enacted, then evaluates the choice (and the decision making process) in light of the outcomes that have resulted. The individual's subjective feelings are often as important as are objective criteria in this evaluative stage.

is one that follows these prescribed activities. Theoretically, an individual can make a good decision in terms of outcome without engaging good decision making processes. Conversely, good strategies do not guarantee good outcomes.

Good planning strategies, decision making orientations, and problem solving methods can be elaborated for the eight activities in Table 2. For (1) problem recognition, good decision makers show sensitivity to cues in their environment which suggest a decision needs to be made. Additionally, they anticipate and try to prevent problems from developing, and confront problems directly, when appropriate. For (2) goal identification, good strategizers explicitly identify the criteria and goals that they want to use to evaluate their decision options. Concerning (3) option identification, good decision makers initially consider a wide range of solutions or plans, and are able to generate creative strategies to the problem or situation. For (4) information assessment and search, good strategies depend on an individual's recognition of the limits of the information he/she has initially and his/her ability to identify expert and reliable sources for gathering additional information. Understanding how much information is necessary is important as well, because excessive information gathering can be as problematic as an inadequate search. Regarding (5) option evaluation, effective problem solvers base their preferences on careful consideration of all relevant information, including short term and long term consequences and anticipated effects on others. Decision making frequently requires that a person "trade-off" advantages and disadvantages. Good decision makers recognize the trade-offs they make, and judge these in terms of the variables they deem important. For (6) the choice process per se, individuals ideally should choose options they feel most positively towards, all things considered. For (7) behavioral translation, good problem solvers explicitly

consider conditions that may interfere with effective behavioral performance (e.g., their own emotional reactions, responses of other family members, adequacy of resources) and develop strategies to deal with these. Finally, (8) good decision makers and problem solvers continue reflecting on their decisions and solutions after they have enacted them. These individuals evaluate new information that becomes available, both from firsthand and vicarious experience, and modify their behavior when appropriate.

Strategies within the Family Context. Family members may differ in their decision making and problem solving skills. One family member might be adept at one decision making or problem solving activity (e.g., recognition of the need for a decision or problem solution), but poor with respect to another activity (e.g., information gathering). Furthermore, the individual's ability to make a good decision, either in terms of process or outcome, can vary across functional domains. A parent may be good in deciding how to foster a child's cognitive development but not as competent in solving interpersonal conflicts that arise within the family. Similarly, a young child may be able to participate in some types of family planning activities, but may lack the minimal skills needed to contribute in other areas. Families thus may be described in terms of the decision making abilities or problem solving strategies of individual family members relative to each functional domain. When considering analysis of the family at the social subunit level or the family as a whole, in some situations, decision skills will be compensatory, such that one family member's weaknesses can be offset by another family member's strengths. In other situations, a family's ability to cope with a problem will be non-compensatory, with performance either a function of the level of the "best" decision maker or the "worst" decision maker, depending on the roles they play in the family. Thus, overall family functioning will be

influenced not only by the independent decision making abilities of individual family members, but also by such variables as who has primary responsibility for decision making related to particular goals, how family members resolve conflict, and who monitors the consequences of particular decisions. Finally, the decision making abilities of family members may be influenced by current family goals and their priorities, by the available social and financial resources, and by changes in the individuals' life experiences. For example, emotional states (such as anger or depression) and personality orientations (e.g., impulsiveness) may adversely affect the decision making process.

Element 3: Resources

Family resources consist of the social, physical, and financial means available to achieve family goals. Social resources include immediate family members, the extended family, friends, neighbors, and local groups (e.g., church, community mental health center, cooperative nursery). Physical resources consist of the family's residence and its contents, as well as outside objects and services related to family functioning (e.g., means of transportation, telecommunication, recreation, education, home maintenance). Financial resources include cash, savings, and assets that are available to (or will become available to) the family. The family's resource inventory may be characterized in part by the number, arrangement, accessibility, and functional use of resources. These resources are integrally related to many aspects of family functioning. Family members clearly help shape their social and physical environments. At the same time, the resources available to families influence their activities. Environmental variables outside the family unit also may exert indirect effects on family functioning (e.g., economic climate, availability of housing, quality of public schools).

Regarding social support, we adopt a fourfold dimensionalization that

derives from extensive empirical research (e.g., Brownell & Shumaker, 1984; Gottlieb, 1981). Specifically, the four major types of social support are (1) instrumental (i.e., direct help), (2) informational, (3) emotional/personal, and (4) companionship/recreational. To obtain an overview of a family's social resources, an inventory can be compiled of the individuals whom each family member perceives to be available to provide different types of social support, how often the family member seeks such support from each person, how satisfied he or she is with the support provided, and whether there are any problems associated with receiving such support (independent of level of satisfaction).

In our framework, resources do not have absolute or inherent value; rather, they must be evaluated in a contextual manner. To judge the adequacy of a family's resources, each resource must be considered in terms of its potential to facilitate achieving specific family goals. Resources may be characterized by their type (e.g., social, physical, financial), their relevance to each domain of family functioning (Table 1), their frequency of use by different family members, and their perceived adequacy by family members. Like behavior, a single resource may serve multiple purposes. Furthermore, both social and non-social resources can be used in different ways by different family members, and may be judged as more or less adequate at different times or in different situations.

Element 4: Individual Life Experiences

For each family, the life experiences of its members contribute in diverse -- and obviously complex -- ways to family functioning. Although the concept of life experiences is broad and theoretically could encompass a person's entire developmental history, we use the concept more restrictively to study family functioning. Generally, an individual's life experiences,

coupled with genetic and biological factors, manifest themselves in the form of cognitive, affective, and behavioral orientations to one's current environment. The GSRI framework focuses on those select aspects of past and/or present life experiences that are hypothesized to affect family functioning. We group these individual variables into four categories (1) personality-based orientations, (2) emotional and affective reactions, (3) cognitive and intellectual abilities, and (4) beliefs and attitudes pertaining to the family, family behavior, and family roles. Each category consists of some features that remain relatively stable over time and others that are more transitory or related to immediate environmental stresses and opportunities.

Personality-based Orientations. Useful taxonomies of personality-based orientations have been presented by Cattell (1965), Eysenck (1953), Jackson (1967), and Norman (1963), among others, and include such constructs as extroversion, empathy, impulsiveness, conscientiousness, and locus of control. Such variables may relate to family behavior, goals, strategies, and resources, as well as to child and family outcome variables. For example, locus of control may affect goal setting: individuals who perceive having little control over their lives may set fewer goals and engage in less purposive achievement strategies than do those who sense having more influence. Eysenck and Eysenck (1977) have identified impulsiveness, risk-taking, planfulness, and decision ease as personality dimensions that affect decision making. Numerous personality-like variables also may impinge on joint decision making in families and on the interaction that occurs when making such decisions. Examples include emotional expressiveness, the sex role orientation of the participants, dominance, flexibility, and social and empathic skills. Finally, given equal resources, families may vary in their use of those resources as a function of individual difference variables and

their previous experiences. For example, individuals who are extroverted may be more willing to seek out certain types of social support than are comparatively introverted individuals. See Hamilton (1984) for a useful discussion of personality variables in a cognitive context.

Emotional and Affective Reactions. Emotional and affective variables can range from feelings about one's self worth and satisfaction with one's life situation to emotional responses triggered by other family members and general mood stability. This category also includes the more traditional conceptualizations of emotional states. Useful taxonomies of adult emotions have been presented by Daly, Lancee, and Polivy (1983) and Buck (1985). Lewis and Michalson (1983) have provided valuable speculations about the development of children's moods and emotions. Hamilton (1984) describes the concept of emotions from a cognitive perspective. Recently, Gottman and Levinson (1986) have reported on long term consequences associated with couples' patterns of emotional interaction.

Emotional states and degree of satisfaction with others or oneself clearly can affect a family member's goals, strategies, and resources as well as their everyday behavior. For example, a parent who is emotionally distressed in his or her marriage may be less likely to make the effort required to confront certain family problems. He or she also may be less inclined to consider the implications of his or her decisions for others or may be less sensitive to family problems when they occur. This may make matters worse, thereby leading to greater dissatisfaction and a situation of reciprocal causality.

Cognitive and Intellectual Abilities. Cognitive and intellectual abilities refer to both general intelligence and more specialized cognitive abilities of the individual (e.g., Guilford, 1978; Horn, 1983; Gardner, 1984;

Sternberg, 1986).[1] Such variables are relevant in our framework. For example, one variable that affects goal setting and goal orientations is the extent to which an individual can engage in both concrete and abstract thinking. To reflect on long term goals, or those that cannot be realized until much later, requires a certain degree of abstract thought. A person who tends to think only in "here and now" terms generally will have a different goal structure (e.g., more short term goals) than will someone who thinks more futuristically. An individual's intelligence also may contribute to how thoroughly and effectively decision making or problem solving activities are conducted. A child's characteristics, such as reasoning ability and interest in learning, may influence the availability of certain types of resources (e.g., quantity and developmental level of games and educational materials, extracurricular lessons, and time invested by parents in joint learning activities).

Beliefs and Attitudes Pertaining to the Family. This category encompasses perceptions of the family as a unit, beliefs about the different roles that family members should have, and interpretations of family members' behavior (including one's own behavior) in the context of the family. The beliefs that a family member holds about the proper functioning of the family and why family members behave as they do can have a powerful influence on the family's behavior, goals, strategies for attaining goals, and use of resources. Such belief systems will shape one's interpretation of family problems and family successes. Thus, we posit that parents' beliefs may exert an influence on children both directly (e.g., creating an interpretative framework for children) and indirectly, via parental behavior (e.g., providing models, setting limits on the children). For interesting approaches to the analysis of parental belief systems, see Mancuso and Handin (1983) and Sigel and Laosa

(1983).

Family belief systems derive, in part, from one's own family of origin. Many aspects of family functioning show an almost routine pattern. To the extent that parents select strategies based on their own childhood experiences -- re-enacting positive behavioral solutions and correcting or eliminating negative ones -- then parents' prior life experiences mediate an intergenerational effect on their children. Similarly, older siblings may display behavior that is the result of their personal history of interaction with their parents, which in turn creates an altered behavioral environment for the younger siblings.

The above four categories of individual variables are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. They are interrelated and operate interactively. As emphasized earlier, when life experience variables are analyzed in relation to the family environment, it is important to keep in mind their context-dependent nature. Two mothers may be equally high in intelligence, for example, but the level of intelligence will take on quite different meaning in the context of the family if one is a single parent whereas the other is married to a spouse of much lower intelligence.[2]

In sum, within any given family, there is a context of personalities, emotions, cognitive and intellectual abilities, and family belief systems within which family behavior is enacted. This aspect of the family environment is a critical element to include in the analysis of family functioning and family success.

Family Outcomes and Successful Families

Family success may be measured in terms of how well a family functions relative to achieving family goals. The family goals used in judging success may be identified either by family members (i.e., self-defined) or by external

sources (e.g., community, investigator). In this framework, the merit of particular parenting beliefs, values, and practices or the effects of different family resources are evaluated by measuring the degree to which these foster or hinder achieving particular family goals. We do not endorse an a priori notion of what constitutes optimal family functioning or an ideal family environment, except to state generally that "good" families will engage in activities that will maximize realizing specified family goals or child outcomes. Conclusions about how successfully a family functions in particular domains may differ depending on whether a family's own criteria or external standards are used. Further, simple measures, such as the number of achieved goals or the number of important unmet goals, convey only limited information, because families differ in the number of goals they set, how explicit their goals are, the proportion of goals shared or recognized by family members, and whether their goals are long- versus short-term.

The definition of family "success" as the achievement of (or satisfactory progress towards) family goals places the concept of "optimal family functioning" within a relativistic framework. For one family member, the family might be highly "successful," whereas for another family member, it may not be. If a father places high priority on the goal that his child be religious, and if the child is not, then from the father's perspective, a "problem" exists (in this case, in the moral and spiritual development domain). In contrast, the mother may be indifferent about the religiosity of her child, and the fact that the child is not religious does not constitute a family failure from her perspective.

Relationship of GSRI Profiles to Family Behavior and Family Outcomes

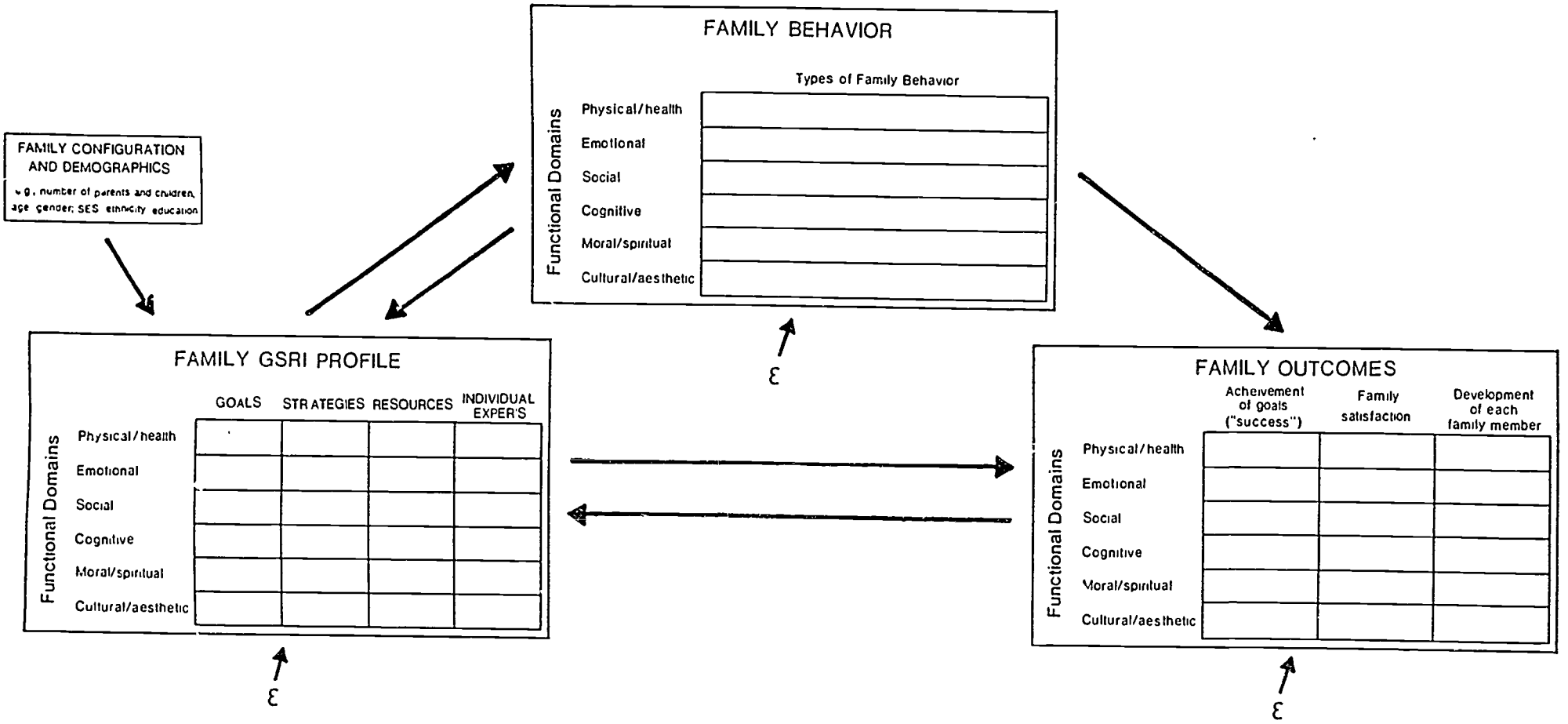
Figure 1 depicts postulated relationships among GSRI, family behavior, and outcome variables. Outcomes are conceptualized as being a direct result of

the family environment, including the elements of GSRI and family behavior. In addition, GSRI and family behavior have reciprocal causal relations: family behavior is influenced by the goals, strategies, resources, and individual life experiences of family members. Conversely, the GSRI elements can be modified in light of the behavior of family members. Family outcomes at any given point in time are hypothesized to influence GSRI at later times vis-a-vis its reciprocal (but lagged) influence on the GSRI elements. Thus, the GSRI framework explicitly recognizes the importance of feedback mechanisms within the family cycle. By using the GSRI framework to assess families longitudinally, developmental processes can be studied. Consistent with the relativistic perspective, a family's cumulative GSRI history is predicted to influence later outcomes (i.e., both present and past GSRIs contribute to child and family outcomes). Further, a child's age and individual characteristis are hypothesized to interact with the family environment, such that what comprises an optimal environment will vary with a child's stage of development and temperament.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

External and Demographic Influences on the Family Environment

Sociologists and psychologists have studied extensively the impact on child development of such variables as social class, family size, birth order, parental age and education, religion, and life transitions. Although this research has yielded interesting findings, it can be criticized for failing to identify important variables that mediate the influence of these variables on child development. In our view, it is not sufficient to say, for example, that birth order "influences" the intelligence of the child. Rather we want to obtain a better understanding of <u>why</u> these two variables are related and



note: ε indicates exogenous influences

Figure 1: Schematic representation of the GSRI conceptual framework for studying family behavior and outcomes.

the processes that account for the relationship. The GSRI framework is designed to identify combinations of variables that may mediate the effects of "static" or "distal" variables. Thus, differences in children's intelligence[3] associated with the above "static" variables must be related to identifiable differences in family behavior and in the goals, strategies for attaining goals, resources, and individual life experiences for differing types of families. By applying GSRI, a more comprehensive picture of how such external variables combine to affect children's development can be obtained. This is especially important from the standpoint of social interventions. For example, if the objective is to improve children's academic motivation and performance, variables such as social class, birth order, and parental age are not amenable to ready change. In contrast, selected elements within the GSRI framework which vary with such external variables may be suitable for change (e.g., encouraging parents to modify their goals or adopt more effective problem solving strategies).

In this section, we briefly consider two major classes of variables that are external to the GSRI model, but whose effects on child development are hypothesized to be mediated, in large part, by the GSRI elements.

Historical, Structural, and Intergenerational Variables. Numerous variables will affect the components of GSRI. One class of such variables is that related to historical, structural, and intergenerational phenomena. Consider a person's family of origin. We posit that the type of family (configuration) in which an individual grew up will influence his or her later behavior as a parent, as well as feelings about the type of family he or she creates. A single mother, for example, who grew up in a single parent home may be more satisfied with this type of family and is more likely to have a wide range of experiences relevant to functioning as a single parent than does

a woman who grew up in a traditional 2-parent family. In 2-parent families, similarities and differences between a mother's and father's family of origin experiences may be important influences on how their present family functions. Other important classes of external variables considered here are cohort effects and family structural features.

Environmental and Psychological Demands on the Family. A second class of variables for which GSRI analysis might prove fruitful are those concerning environmental and psychological demands on the family. For example, if a child is identified as a "slow learner" and "highly inattentive" pupil in school, the parents might experience additional external demands related to having the child (and perhaps the entire family) evaluated, participating in the development and conduct of behavioral programs to help the child, and cooperating with the school in more frequent monitoring of their child's progress. Such a situation may create changes that affect many other aspects of that family's functioning, based on increased demands related to parents' time with the target child and the school, emotional involvement (or withdrawal) from the child and/or other family members, the cost of diagnostic and treatment services, etc. Other examples of environmental and psychological demands include change in parental employment status, parental needs to assume caretaking responsibility for their elderly parents, or the onset of physical or mental health problems in a family member. In a longitudinal framework, the adaptation strategies used by families when under such external constraints can be identified and evaluated in terms of their relative effectiveness.

Using GSRI to Profile Families: Variables and Methods

Variables. A family profile may be generated by evaluating a family's goals, strategies and plans for attaining goals, resources, and individual

life experiences across different functional domains. Table 3 suggests some of the variables that might be assessed for each aspect of GSRI. The focus in this table is on variables that could apply to all six functional domains. Domain-specific variables have been excluded, but may need to be added, depending on the topic of the research. In addition, some of the variables listed will serve as outcome varibles for some researchers (e.g., family satisfaction, children's intelligence), in which case, these obviously would not be treated as independent variables. The variables listed are intended to guide researchers in considering the kinds of measures that may be informative when investigating the relationship of family functioning to outcomes, such as the behavioral development of individual children.

Insert Table 3 About Here

Methods. Application of the GSRI framework is usefully conceptualized in the context of etic versus emic distinctions in cross cultural psychology (Jaccard and Choi, 1986). Etic constructs or measures are those which hold across different cultures or groups of individuals. For example, the concept of a "goal" or "family role" is meaningful in many cultures. Emic constructs or measures, in contrast, are culture or group specific. GSRI combines both etic and emic features. First, GSRI delineates a set of variables that are assumed to be etic in character (goals, plans for attaining goals, resources, and individual life experiences). The content of these etic constructs, however, will be emic in character. For example, although families in different cultures or ethnic groups may have goals that vary on some of the dimensions discussed in Table 3 (e.g., number of goals, interelatedness of the goals), the content of the goals may be quite different. Similarly, even though the concepts may be identical in diverse cultures, different

Table 3

Examples of Variables Relevant to Generating Family Profiles[a]

Goals

Number of goals; qualitative content of goals; relative importance of goals; relationships between goals; long term and short term goals; stability of goals; communality of each of the above among family members, including the delineation of conflicting goals and different points of emphasis

Strategies and Plans

Ability to perceive and anticipate problems; acceptance of responsibility for making decisions; awareness of the criteria or goals that are to be considered when making a choice; ability to generate a range of options to consider when approaching a problem or decision, and to do so in a creative fashion; ability to recognize limited information and to gather necessary information in an efficient fashion; awareness of the trade-offs made in choosing an option; ability to consider a wide array of information when evaluating options; logical consistency in preference formation; anticipation and the ability to circumvent obstacles to carrying out the decision; evaluating one's decision, especially in light of new information and self-knowledge (e.g., recognizing emotional or irrational factors that will influence decision choice or ability to implement a decision); receptivity to feedback; dynamics of joint decision making, including interaction patterns with others during the decision making process and how conflicting preferences and beliefs are resolved.

Resources

Within each of the following major categories, resources can be distinguished in terms of their nature, frequency of use, and the family members' satisfaction with the resource, as derived from different sources: Social support (e.g., types = emotional, instrumental, informational, and companionship support; sources = extended family, friends, spouse/partner, etc.); economic resources; features of the home environment (e.g., number of books, presence of television, toys, safety); features of the community (e.g., daycare alternatives, public transportation, quality of public schools, health care); availability of each of the above resources to individual family members (e.g., some members may have access to certain types of social support, while other members do not)

Individual Life Experiences

Personality orientations (e.g., locus of control, impulsiveness, authoritarianisn); emotional states (e.g., depression, anxiety, self-esteem, life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, family satisfaction); intelligence and cognitive abilities; parenting attitudes; communication experiences between family members, including emotional tone; attributions about the causes and meaning of others' behavior, beliefs about family roles and role expectations; perceptions about the family as a unit

[a] The variables listed should be assessed separately for each functional domain under study.

measurement techniques may be needed to yield valid and reliable assessment of these concepts. For a discussion of etic-emic issues in measurement and theory construction, see Jaccard and Choi (1986), Poortinga (1975) and Malpass (1977).

In addition to traditional nomothetic analyses, we ultimately hope to apply GSRI at the idiographic level in which the dynamics of a given family are evaluated within the context of that family, and not with reference to other families. For example, nomothetic analyses (using means or correlations across individuals) of the relationship between paternal intelligence and child development assess the relationship using different families as a reference point. With such a strategy, it is impossible to state how a father's intelligence in a given family affects child development. One can only state that relative to families with fathers who are more or less intelligent, child development is affected in a more or less positive fashion. Such relative statements are unsatisfactory when attempting to understand the dynamics of a specific family. A useful direction for future methodological approaches is the development of scientifically acceptable methods of idiographic analysis (for an example of an idiographic based research program in the decision making area, see Jaccard & Wood, 1986).

Comparison of the GSRI Contextual Model with Other Models

The interpretations afforded by the GSRI contextual model of the family environment are interesting to compare with those offered by other theoretical frameworks. Our discussion is intended to highlight (briefly) aspects of GSRI that are complementary to other frameworks and to juxtapose some of our assumptions to those in other frameworks. The discussion is admittedly scant and is only intended to point out selected similarities and differences.

Confluence Model. Zajonc (1983; 1986; Zajonc, Markus, & Markus, 1979) has

developed the confluence model to quantify the influences upon intellectual growth that occur within the family context. The "birthorder puzzle" is pieced together in this theory by considering the following variables -- the target child's birthorder, the number of children in the family, the chronological spacing between children, and the opportunity for the target child to teach a younger sibling. Used collectively, these variables have demonstrated reasonably good efficacy in estimating children's intellectual ability, based on analysis of large data sets. The model is assumed to provide confirmation of the fundamental axiom that children's intellectual performance is a function of the general intellectual environment (i.e., the sum of the absolute levels of intelligence in the home) and the opportunity to be an intellectual resource for others (i.e., only children and last-born children show intellectual decrements consistent with this disadvantage hypothesis because they lack the opportunity to teach a younger sibling).

The confluence model does not attempt to identify the functional components of the family's "intellectual environment." Gathering data about what types of behavior and experiences occur in families with relatively higher and lower absolute levels of intelligence would be important for understanding the mediating influences within these families. Do parents of first versus later borns simply differ in the amount of time they spend with each child? Or are there important qualitative differences in the ways parents interact with first and later borns? Similarly, how much time do siblings actually spend together and what proportion of that time are they engaged in activities that theoretically could influence cognitive competencies? If differential family functioning is associated with birth order and other family configurational effects, then more precise predictions could be achieved at the individual family level rather than aggregate levels.

Once functional differences are specified, the GSRI model can be used to locate the specific reasons why parents, for example, may spend different amounts of time with children or why they engage in different types of social exchange. How much of the observed variance can be accounted for by changes in family goals and/or family resources over successive children? Thus, the GSRI framework complements the confluence model by specifying mediating variables that are otherwise unaddressed.

Circumplex Model. Olson and colleagues (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983) have developed a model of family functioning which is distinct from the confluence model. Their circumplex model originally was designed to describe marital and family dynamics in ways that would be clinically useful. The circumplex model deals with three primary family processes: cohesion ("emotional bonding of family members"), adaptability ("ability to change in response to situational and developmental stress"), and communication ("a facilitating dimension" for the other two processes). Family cohesion is characterized by four levels, from disengaged (very low), to separated, to connected, to enmeshed (very high). Family adaptability is dimensionalized into rigid (very low), structured, flexible, and chaotic (very high). For both areas, the two intermediate levels are considered good and are assumed to relate to positive family outcomes, while the extreme levels are predicted to cause problems and pathology. The model does recognize the possibility of exceptions to this rule of balanced moderation -- namely, when family members' expectations endorse extreme levels, the family may function well as long as all family members accept these expectations. The circumplex model also considers communication styles within the family. According to the model, certain communication styles foster balanced levels of cohesion and adaptability, while others mitigate against such balanced states.

Applying the circumplex model to the example of birthorder and family size effects illustrates some limitations of the approach in accounting for family and child outcome variables. One problem is that both positive and negative outcomes have been associated with particular birth positions and family sizes, depending on the domain of interest (e.g., social versus cognitive). The circumplex model treats family processes as general orientations, having trait-like qualities assumed to operate similarly across functional domains. For academic achievement, the circumplex model would predict that families of first borns show more balance in their family cohesiveness and adaptability, associated with relatively more positive communication styles than do families of later borns. However, the circumplex model then would offer little insight into the occurrence of negative child outcomes in other domains as a function of birthorder, or of being an only child. In contrast, the GSRI framework would hold that a family's communication behavior can differ in the domain of cognitive development from that in other domains, or that the cohesiveness of family members can vary from one area to another, and so on. Assessment of each GSRI component in each of the six domains of family functioning would offer considerable insight into across-domain consistencies and the different family environments experienced by first versus later-born children.

Parenting Behavior. Another popular approach to the study of families and their impact on child development has been the analysis of dimensions of parental behavior (e.g., Becker & Krug, 1965; Baumrind, 1966; Schaefer, 1965). Although theorists focus on somewhat different components (see Maccoby & Martin, 1984), two broad parenting dimensions that have been studied extensively are: (1) parental control and demands for compliance and (2) parental acceptance and warmth. Considerable research has attempted to relate

such dimensions to child outcomes, such as social interaction skills, creativity, and cognitive competence. As a conceptual approach to studying the effects of families on child outcomes, parenting styles can be interpreted in the context of GSRI as follows:

First, if alternative parenting styles relate significantly to differential patterns of child development, then the processes involved can be explored. GSRI provides some insights into what the mediating variables might be. For example, parents who are warm and permissive may have different goals for their children than do parents who are judged less affectionate and more controlling. Or when trying to solve a problem (such as motivating a child to do well in school), parents who vary in their general permissiveness toward childrearing also may differ in their decision making strategies (e.g., the types of solutions they consider and why they choose the options they do).

The GSRI framework recognizes that parents' orientations and behavior toward raising children can vary from child to child. A parent might be relatively warm and controlling for one child but less so for another child. Many (but not all) of the current measures of parenting styles do not permit such differentiation. Parents are expected to show some consistency in their behavior toward children. Yet a parent's GSRI profile relative to one child might be quite different than that for another child (e.g., for first versus later borns, for boys versus girls). A contextual analysis of parents' similarity of parenting style and each parent's effectiveness with individual children may reveal general principles about how parenting techniques (a) affect different types of children, (b) vary depending on the developmental stages of the family members, and (c) reflect reciprocal influences (i.e., are adapted to the behavior and perceived needs of individual family members).

Our framework also allows for the possibility that parenting style may

differ depending on the domain of family functioning. For cognitive, social, and emotional development, a parent may adopt one parenting style, whereas in the domain of moral development, he or she may rely on a different parenting style. Rarely do studies of parenting style differentiate the functional realms being considered. Seemingly conflicting results may indicate domain-specificity in parenting behavior. That is, certain parenting styles that may be "good" (i.e., highly effective in achieving specified goals) for some developmental outcomes may be "unsuccessful" or even detrimental relative to facilitating development in other domains.

The literature on parenting styles has tended to ignore social context effects on the outcome of parenting styles. In contrast, the GSRI framework emphasizes the importance of such perspectives. The parenting style of a given parent can have different implications and meaning in the context of a family, depending upon the GSRI profiles of other family members. For example, how a child perceives and interprets a given parental action will have important implications for how that child behaves with respect to that action. In turn, the GSRI framework posits that the collective family environment will contribute to the child's behavior and will mediate the effects of particular parenting styles.

Conclusion

The family environment is inherently multidimensional, dynamic, and complex. The responses of children to their families, and the contribution children make to the functioning of their families, have been related to many variables, ranging from microbehavioral observations of interaction patterns to broad classes of exogoneous factors. To create a cohesive picture of the role of the family environment in the development of children, from birth on, we have proposed the use of a conceptual framework that is designed to be

multipurpose. Specifically, we have defined the family as a functional unit of individuals identified by two features: their self-definition as a "family" within their culture and their commitment to the general well-being of family members. This commitment may be dimensionalized into broad domains of family functioning that operate concurrently and apply to all family members: (1) physical development and health, (2) emotional development, (3) social development, (4) cognitive development, (5) moral and spiritual development, and (6) cultural and aesthetic development. A fundamental axiom in this framework is that family environments are not inherently good or bad, but that select aspects of the environment potentially have differential effects on each domain of family functioning. Accordingly, multivariate assessment of the family environment is needed to account for the complex child outcomes observed, and to provide data relevant to understanding the processes that mediate both child and family outcomes.

Despite the logistical and statistical difficulties inherent in treating the family as a single unit (while continuing to recognize the potential contribution of individuals and dyads), we are optimistic about the merit of developing procedures to permit contextual and relativistic assessment of family environments. Abstract judgments of family "success" and family "problems" must be related to family goals and priorities. These may be defined from multiple perspectives (e.g., family members, the investigator, society). Theoretically, these different perspectives are hypothesized to lead to different conclusions about the significance of particular family environment variables.

We have presented a framework for analyzing family functioning as well as for predicting family and child outcomes. We describe the family environment as the product of four major classes of variables -- family goals, strategies

and plans for attaining goals, social and physical resources, and individual life experiences. We believe it is important to consider each class of variables when evaluating family outcome measures. At the very least, an investigator who studies a single type of variable (e.g., emotions) should recognize that its effects will operate, in natural contexts, in combination with the other classes of variables specified in our framework. To ignore these other variables may result in a failure to understand key aspects of how a single or a few variables influence family outcomes. We hope investigators will find our framework useful in that we provide a multidimensional context within which research findings can be interpreted. More importantly, potential mediating and moderating variables are identified in a manner that facilities understanding how one or two variables may impinge on child development or family functioning. Thus, our intent has been to explicate a framework that can guide data collection efforts and can serve as a useful diagnostic tool for analyzing the effects of a wide array of distal (external) and proximal (internal) variables on family and child outcomes. We believe that studying the <u>combined</u> effects of the GSRI elements, and their natural interdependence will advance our understanding of both normative and exceptional families. We (Landesman and Jaccard) are conducting a large-scale home-based study of 500 families with young children to evaluate the utility of this framework. In the process, we have developed and are gathering measures pertinent to each of the GSRI elements, based on the perspective of <u>all</u> family members, as well as direct behavioral observations of the family as a whole. Through this empirical effort, we hope to refine and extend perspectives on the influence of the family environment on child development.

Footnotes

[1] Technically, problem solving and decision making skills, discussed in the context of the second GSRI element, are largely "cognitive" and can be considered an "individual characteristic" which belongs in this fourth component of GSRI. We distinguish between decision making activities (element 2 of GSRI) and decision making skills. The former refers to the decision making process per se and how the individual enacts the eight different components of decision making (i.e., the decision making activities of the individual). In contrast, problem solving and decision making skills refer to characteristics of the individual that promote effective performance of the various decision activities. These skills obviously will have a strong impact on decison making and problem solving activities. To avoid confusion and because of its natural relation to the decision making process in the family, the notion of decision making skills is treated in the second GSRI element. This is analogous to the distinction between "intelligence" and "intelligent behavior."

[2] We recognize that the above statements are general and provide little guidance as to exactly what life experiences and orientations an investigator should focus on when applying GSRI. This is because the relevent individual characteristics and experiences will depend upon the functional domain of interest and the specific hypotheses being tested.

[3] We fully recognize that for almost every interesting child outcome, biological factors are operative, even though the model is not designed to assess their precise contribution. In the above example, we realize that intergenerational health effects could be mediated via non-genetic routes, such as a mother's nutritional status at time of puberty affecting the prenatal nutritional status of her offspring, which in turn could affect

vulnerability to certain health problems in childhood. Similarly, we do not discount the importance of heredity in determining a child's academic and intellectual performance. Rather, the GSRI model focuses on those aspects theoretically amenable to change via the social environment of the family.