

THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND HISTORY OF FAMILY THEORIZING

Matt and Sarah were arguing about why Amanda and Drew broke up. Matt argued that they never had “chemistry” from the beginning and so they lacked the “glue” to stay together. Sarah disagreed. She maintained that Amanda was very “romantic” and that Drew was simply too practical and mundane. As they both argued their perspectives, Sarah suddenly said, “Wait a minute! Matt, you think that relationships are basically driven by biological forces, whereas I think relationships are formed by compatible personalities.”

What Sarah has noticed about the argument is that our explanations of relationships, or anything else for that matter, are founded on assumptions. Behind every explanatory theory of why or how something happens is a set of assumptions about the nature of causation and the processes that produce the outcomes we wish to explain. This chapter explores the nature of some of these assumptions captured as “philosophies” and how these assumptions have been expressed over the history of theories about families.

PHILOSOPHIES OF SCIENCE

The term *philosophy* can refer two different things. On the one hand, a philosophy might refer to the values and way of thinking of a person. We might say that someone who likes to shop is a *materialist*, meaning that he or she

values material objects. The other meaning of philosophy refers to the academic discipline of philosophy. Both meanings are important in understanding the emergence and growth of family theories and frameworks, but for the moment, we focus on the importance and relevance of academic philosophy, especially the academic philosophy of science, for scientific theories.

The methods of philosophy are logic and other forms of discursive reasoning. In general, philosophers do not use the empirical methods of science to establish the credibility of their ideas. Some philosophers, known as philosophers of science, examine the principles by which scientists work through reconstructing the logic of scientific processes. Whereas sociologists of science systematically study the behaviors and thoughts of scientists and the social organization of the sciences, philosophers of science explore what science should or could be like in terms of abstract ideas. There are several ways in which this philosophical study is important.

The discipline of philosophy was historically prior to the scientific disciplines. The ancient Greek philosophers and oriental philosophers had many creative ideas about human affairs and the workings of the natural world. It was out of the Enlightenment philosophy of the 18th and 19th centuries that the modern sciences in the Western world were born. During this period, it was common for individual scholars to be both philosopher and scientist at the same time or to easily shift back and forth between the two. It was only during the 19th and 20th centuries that the various scientific disciplines branched into special fields to which a person could devote an entire career.

The historical legacy of philosophy as a precedent to the sciences has meant that philosophy, as a formal discipline, has influenced all sciences. Many of the influences have been indirect. The so-called physical sciences, such as physics and chemistry, emerged first. Between 1850 and 1900, the philosophical principles embedded in these earlier sciences spilled over into the biological sciences, such as botany and zoology, and the social sciences, such as psychology and sociology. During the 20th century, family studies emerged as a subspecialty within several of the social sciences. Now, in the early 21st century, some scholars think of family studies as a distinct field with an interdisciplinary character or even as a unique discipline in its own right.

In philosophy, as in other academic disciplines, new ideas are constantly being proposed and debated. A particular philosophy of science may be popular at a given moment, but later it may be challenged and some other philosophy may take its place at or near the top of the heap. Scientists, including

family scientists, frequently turn to the literature produced by philosophers to see what the current issues are. When scientists need to justify the basic principles guiding their search for answers to important questions, they sometimes seek guidance from philosophers of science or from other philosophers.

It is now often asserted that there are different, if not rival, philosophies of science. This is apparent in professional philosophy itself and, more important for this book, among family scholars as well. The philosophies we adopt influence the way we conduct our scientific practice, including the theories we create and our attitudes toward the theories of others. We sketch below a few of the central philosophical views that may help distinguish family theorists and other family scholars from one another.

Key elements of three philosophies of science appear in Box 2.1. We have called these *positivistic*, *interpretive*, and *critical* philosophies of science (e.g., Neuman, 1994). We do not claim that these are the only three alternatives in family science. Indeed, we discuss other alternatives, such as feminism and postmodernism, in subsequent chapters. At this juncture, we present Box 2.1 to illustrate the nature of philosophical assertions.

The divergence from positivism can be traced to two major influences. First, a group of philosophers working in Vienna in the early part of the 20th century argued that knowledge claims are either true or false, and that the job of scientists is to verify the true claims. Another philosopher, Sir Karl Popper, disputed this view. Popper (1959) argued that empirical knowledge claims could be shown to be false, but that there is no way to prove them to be true. Popper's position has become influential among not only philosophers but also practicing social scientists. Whether or not family scholars have read Popper, his ideas have indirectly influenced family theorizing, helping usher in what is sometimes called a post-positive era in the philosophy of social science (Thomas & Wilcox, 1987).

The second major influence was a work by historian and philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn (1962) titled *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn launched many important arguments (see White, 2004), and among these was the interpretation that science did not proceed on the basis of rational evidence and the elimination of competing hypotheses as much as it proceeded by the political processes similar to any other social organization. Successful theories were seen as developed by winning adherents rather than careful proof and investigation. The effect of this interpretation was to undermine the credibility of positivistic science and to put forth a relativistic position that "truth" is decided by whoever holds power.

Relativistic positions have seldom been popular in the philosophy of science because they fly in the face of facts such as the usefulness of scientific knowledge, medical science, and technology. Indeed, the major reactions against relativism have come from “pragmatists” (e.g., Peirce, Rorty, & Haack) who hold that although knowledge is social, it nonetheless is guided by principals that set standards for what we regard as acceptable evidence whether it be in a court of law or in a scientific laboratory. While the pragmatist position does not admit absolute truth, it maintains a far less relativistic position regarding scientific knowledge than many “interpretivists” and “critical theorists” (see Box 2.1). Today, most family scholars would probably fall into this perspective, which might be described as “pragmatic positivism.”

BOX 2.1 THREE PHILOSOPHIES OF SCIENCE APPLIED TO FAMILY THEORIES

Positivist View

View of knowledge: There are accepted methods that differentiate more adequate claims about families from those that are less adequate. Although the older versions of positivism would have claimed access to objectivity, most current formulations argue a less absolute position in terms of truth and objectivity (see White, 2004).

Goals of family theory: Explanation and prediction of family phenomena and events.

Interpretive View

View of knowledge: All knowledge is gained by interpreting the meanings that family members assign to an event or behavior. Truth is relative to each actor’s meanings and the context in which these meanings occur. Interpretive knowledge tends to be relativistic and reflexive.

Goals of family theory: Understanding, empathy.

Critical View

View of knowledge: Truth is imposed by those who control the power to shape knowledge. There is a plurality of theories, but the theories that acquire truth status are those that support and maintain the prevailing power system. Knowledge is always defined by those in power to serve their purposes.

Goals of family theory: Emancipation and empowerment of oppressed social groups.

Source: Adapted from Neuman, 1994.

VALUES IN SCIENCE

One of the key reasons that positivistic science emerged historically as a way of thinking and working that is somewhat different from the arts, religion, and politics was concern about the distortions in knowledge along with considerable human suffering that seem to result when reasonableness, fairness, and facts are devalued. Science is not without its faults, just as no individual human being or social organization is faultless. The “value neutrality” sometimes advocated by scientific positivists is similar in at least some ways to value tolerance or respect for value diversity. But this is a matter of degree, and the value-relevant and value-laden positions of the critical and interpretive perspectives (see Box 2.1) may push the ideals of tolerance and diversity to an extreme point of complete relativism.

Writing several decades ago about science as a vocation, sociologist Max Weber made some interesting comments:

Today one usually speaks of science as free of presuppositions. Is there such a thing? All scientific work presupposes that the rules of logic and method are valid. Science further presupposes that what is yielded by scientific work is important in the sense that it is worth being known. In this, obviously, are contained all our problems. For this presupposition cannot be proved by scientific means. It can only be interpreted with reference to its ultimate meaning, which we must reject or accept according to our ultimate position toward life. (quoted in Gerth & Mills, 1946, p. 143)

More recently, Christensen (1964) provided an analysis of the value issue in family science. His assessment was quite Weberian. Christensen advocated neither the rejection nor the espousal of nonscientific values by theorists and other scientists. Rather, he advocated the identification and separation of nonscientific values from scientific values. Indeed, the values of positivistic science are, for the most part, methodological. That is, positivism values knowledge that can be empirically replicated, knowledge that has distinct observable components, and knowledge that is more general and law-like than an individual case or instance. This may continue to be the most common view among family scientists, but it is not the only view. Those perspectives that do not distinguish methodological rules for separating more from less adequate knowledge claims end up with only a set of beliefs often called ideology.

The notion of ideology has three major meanings: (a) a set of beliefs; (b) the systematic study of a set of beliefs, their nature, and their origin; and

(c) visionary speculation, often about ideals and with an action agenda for achieving the ideals. There is no question that systems of belief about families can be part of a family theory or that carefully studying those beliefs might improve a family theory. There is also no doubt that beliefs about family science can affect family theories. Even visionary speculation has creative potential for theories. Our caution is only that ideologies among family scholars that are philosophical or political may be usefully connected with a particular family theory, but they are not within or constitutive of the theory itself. So, if a scientific theory argues that *X* causes *Y*, the truth of this does not depend on whether we like or dislike *X* or *Y*. The theory may suggest how to change *Y* if the direction of change is consistent with our values and ideology, but scientific theory should be equally useful for someone with exactly the opposite values and ideology.

As citizens and professionals, we may want to help someone or eradicate a certain type of behavior such as bullying or date rape based on our moral values. These values may motivate social scientists to study certain areas rather than others. When it comes to taking action, however, professionals are constrained by the code of ethics of their profession and the common legal understanding that professionals are not liable as long as they follow the best practices of their profession. For almost all professions, *best practices* are defined as following actions informed and justified by scientific findings. From social work to medicine, best practices entail evidence-based practice where evidence is defined scientifically. For professional interventions, therefore, the importance of relatively objective and reliable scientific findings is a critical part of helping others or changing the world. It is important to note that data that is twisted to fit particular values would not be useful for evidence-based practice and would fail to meet scientific standards of reliability and validity.

To summarize, philosophical ideas establish principles that help frame the ways that family theories and other aspects of scholarship are created and used. Philosophical ideas are themselves foundations for scholarship, but they cannot be scientifically proven true or false. In many ways, scholars either consciously or unconsciously adopt a particular philosophical stance in regard to research by the way they do their research. Those who attempt not to use their research as a vehicle for their own values, the values of their religion, or their political values would be clearly identified as positivist. Although those holding interpretive and critical philosophies have criticized this perspective, the positivist approach remains the hallmark of scientific work and scholarly accountability.

Indeed, the public expects family scientists to present their research findings independent from their religious and political beliefs. In science, it is expected that any research finding can be replicated by other researchers regardless of whether they have the same or different political and religious beliefs. This is as close as we may be able to get to scientific “objectivity.”

WHAT IS AN EXPLANATION?

We have stated that our explanations of relationships, families, or anything else for that matter are founded on assumptions. In the previous section, we argued that some of the assumptions we make are guided or misguided by the epistemologies we assume, and these were summarized as the positivist view, the interpretive view, and the critical view. In this section we take a slightly different approach to the issue about the assumptions we make. Pragmatism would suggest that the assumptions we make would be formed by the goal or purpose we have in mind. In the pragmatic tradition, we argue that family scholarship and research are trying to produce knowledge and explanation. The assumptions we make should, therefore, be useful in moving us toward our goal of producing knowledge and acquiring explanations.

Of course this raises the obvious question of what we mean by knowledge and explanation. One of us (White, 2013) has argued that historically knowledge has been characterized as being true and factual. Such a characterization of knowledge throws us into philosophical debates about the nature of truth and the nature of reality. To avoid these debates, one might focus on the nature of scientific knowledge rather than the more generic and vernacular meanings of knowledge. Scientific knowledge is knowledge that is acquired by using the scientific method.

The more specialized approach to knowledge as established by the scientific method is not without its own special problems and somewhat flies in the face of the common vernacular definition. First, science is largely based on disconfirmation of hypotheses and as such any fact or truth can only be viewed as tentative rather than everlasting. Second, the scientific method, as a criterion for scientific knowledge, is less than clear. In fact, scientific methods are diverse. Archaeology uses naturalistic field methods that are distinct from the laboratory experiments of cellular biologists yet no less scientific. Indeed, over the history of science, the appropriate methods are principally defined by

whatever criteria are accepted by the community of scientists in each field in each time period (see Kuhn, 1962; Hellemans & Bunch, 1988). So what makes scientific knowledge scientific is not completely clear.

The sociologist Robert Merton (1973) argues that there are a set of values that underlie the methods of scientists. Following Merton, Allchin (1998) and later White (2004) argue that these values are epistemic rather than teleological values. *Teleological values* focus on a final end or purpose such as the “betterment of humans.” *Epistemic values* are values about the principles that guide our acquisition of knowledge. These authors argue that scientific knowledge is knowledge that is acquired by methods that reflect values on honesty, skepticism, universalism, open communication, and evidence. All these values are represented in various historical periods, whether it be in the work of scientists such as Copernicus, Newton, Einstein, or Crick and Watson. In any one historical period the community of scientists defines scientific methods based on these values.

Although the inclusion of epistemic values might help clarify what scientific knowledge is, the questions regarding knowledge and explanation remain. White (2013) claims that given the “universalistic” values of science, knowledge is something we tentatively hold that has the capacity to generalize across time periods and contexts. For example, the theory of gravitational forces in contemporary physics is one such type of knowledge. It must be kept in mind that such knowledge is always being modified and changed depending on research and lacks the stability of other forms of knowledge such as religious truths. Religious truths require beliefs, but scientific knowledge requires evidence.

It is perhaps easier to understand the universalistic criterion in science if we briefly examine “scientific explanation.” Most of the discussions about scientific explanation focus on the argument made by Hempel and Oppenheim (1948) commonly known as the “covering law” model of scientific explanation. The covering law model supposes that an explanation of a given phenomenon is a deduction from premises composed of at least one general law-like statement and specific conditions. For example, if you were to hold this book above the ground and drop it, the explanation would be provided by the general laws of gravity plus the specific mass of the book and the mass of the earth and any other relevant conditions such as air pressure, wind velocity, and so on. Indeed in this perspective an explanation is a logical explanation of a phenomenon that has occurred and that the explanation was able to predict.

Salmon (1984) has been one of the major critics of the covering law model arguing instead for a causal model of explanation. The causal model of scientific explanation works well for some areas of science such as chemistry and physics but less well for more descriptive sciences such as natural history, biology, and archaeology. In addition, the deterministic thinking in the causal model is somewhat at odds with contemporary thinking about multiple causality and equifinality as it is with stochastic and probabilistic models. It can also be effectively argued that causal explanations are simply a specific form of the more general covering law model. The law-like statement in the covering law is simply replaced with a general causal statement. So in effect, we now have a fair degree of consensus as to what a scientific explanation entails.

Returning to the pragmatic position, what then would be the assumptions that would move us toward the goal of acquiring scientific knowledge and explanation? First, the epistemic values of honesty, skepticism, open communication, universalism, and evidence would be a foundation for our knowledge. Second, we are focused on acquiring information that is sufficiently general so as to allow us to construct explanations as either covering laws or causal models. Not all the theories we cover in this book are necessarily at the same stage of development. Some theories are very close to offering us covering law or causal models, whereas others are still progressing from using metaphors to explain phenomena. Invariably, most of the theories in this book would agree with the epistemic values that underlie scientific knowledge and increasingly secular knowledge in the 21st century.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FAMILY THEORY

Each theory in family science has its own historical legacy, as we discuss further in subsequent chapters. Our focus here is on major themes and examples of how family theory has been important to scholarship throughout history. We refer to several useful accounts of this history and recommend them for greater depth of coverage.

Adams and Steinmetz (1993) surveyed contributions of the classics, which encompass ideas up to the 20th century. Early philosophers were often interested in prescribing ways of living according to their own values. Adams and Steinmetz called attention to this infusion of ideology, and they noted that it sometimes was accompanied by efforts to describe families in more

dispassionate ways. Only scattered references to family life per se are contained in the classical works, with little resemblance to the kind of scientific explanation we have now come to expect of scholarship.

Much of the early work centered on attempts to find the origins of marriage as an institution and to trace its evolution as societies moved toward a more modern form (Adams & Steinmetz, 1993, pp. 76–78). Some scholars searched for the ultimate purposes of marriage or the family. Some saw progress or at least the adaptation of family life to changing social circumstances. Some lamented the declining importance of the family, especially as industrialization and urbanization gripped the Western world in the 19th century. Adams and Steinmetz (1993, p. 86) conclude that the closest these social philosophers came to a real theory was a model of parental socialization that resulted in positive outcomes for children and the meeting of needs for both generations when parents became elderly. For the most part, however, and whether obvious or subtle, ideology in the classics, Adams and Steinmetz (1993) found, is seldom totally absent, although its presence makes a theory neither right nor wrong (p. 93).

Howard (1981) examined the history of U.S. family sociology from 1865 to 1940. He also noted the early emphasis on evolutionary thinking, as well as the interest of “moral reformers” in doing something about the problems families seemed to be facing because of the Industrial Revolution. Howard considered the period between 1890 and 1920 a progressive era. Even as moral reformers and charity workers expanded their initiatives, the idea that families could adapt to changing environments became popular. An emphasis on the psychosocial interior of family life took hold, and educational programs to foster the socialization of children seemed promising. If families were sometimes struggling and disorganized, it was because they were caught between two conflicting value systems, one emphasizing traditional images of the family and the other based on the requirements of the modern democratic and capitalistic state.

The years 1920 to 1940 constitute the latest period Howard described in detail. In these years, the key theme in family scholarship shifted from ecology to interaction among family members, with the goal of personal adjustment. In 1924, the American Sociological Society (now the American Sociological Association) established its Family Section, and at about the same time, Ernest Groves developed the first systematic college course in family life education at Boston University. Howard also noted as a countertheme during this period

a renewed emphasis on the institutional level of analysis, with studies of families in a community context and attention to cultural diversity on a broader scale. In a chapter published in Howard's book, van Leeuwen (1981) noted that European family scholars remain more interested in the institutional, or macroscopic and historical, levels. On both continents, however, the norm developed that family scholars should refrain from moral and political evaluations as they increasingly relied on empirical data collected through fieldwork (van Leeuwen, 1981, p. 133).

Reflecting on much of the same body of work mentioned above, Christensen (1964) concluded that systematic theory building in the family field did not begin until about 1950. Concepts and rough orientations were taking shape in the first half of the century, along with a growing industry of empirical research, but without formalized explanations meeting the requirements of propositional theory. Although not highlighted in any of these historical accounts, an upswing in scholarly interest about families within many academic disciplines appeared before 1950, with contributions by sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, home economists, and social workers, among others. Yet Christensen's designation of 1950 as a turning point seems to be basically correct. An inspection of the *International Bibliography of Research in Marriage and the Family, 1900–1964* (Aldous & Hill, 1967) shows that of almost 4,000 entries before 1950, only 7 contain theory or a cognate term in their titles. Of the 12,000 entries for the 1950 to 1964 period, 93 entries contain such terms. By comparison, for the 2-year period from 1991 to 1993, 264 of 7,600 entries in a subsequent inventory (Touliatos, 1994) pertain to family theory. Interestingly, the largest proportion of theoretical works before and during the 1950s dealt with courtship and mate selection. This was the first topic to receive systematic and cumulative theoretical treatment.

Aside from the increasing attention to family theory in the scholarship of the field since 1950, the last half of the century can be subdivided into three stages, each with its own set of themes.

Conceptual Frameworks: 1950–1966

The single most prominent theme in family theorizing during the 1950s and early 1960s was an emphasis on identifying conceptual frameworks. This emphasis is evidenced by a series of works devoted to the topic (Christensen, 1964; Hill, 1951; Hill & Hansen, 1960; Nye & Berardo, 1966/1981). The

number and character of the particular frameworks varied, but the basic idea remained the same. As research on family life accumulated, most analysts attempted to give explanations for their findings. The explanations often were narrowly focused, and it was difficult to see how various studies fit together. The attempt to identify frameworks was a search for underlying principles that might help in the construction of general theories for the field. It was not claimed that such theories already existed nor was it often assumed that a single integrated theory would be practical. Rather, the idea was that by comparing the currently fragmented works with respect to the concepts and assumptions they used, scholars might be able to work toward the building of family theories in a more coordinated way.

Christensen (1964) captured the spirit of this period well in the closing remarks of his introductory essay in the *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*:

As has been said several times, there is urgent need for better theory. Critics of family research have described it as being amateurish, trivial, scattered, often sterile, and sometimes moralistic. . . . There is still need for correcting what Goode (1959, p. 186) spoke of as a hornet's nest of conceptual and terminological problems. There is still need to isolate and then integrate, insofar as seems feasible, the theoretical frameworks which can guide the discipline. And there is still need to find and then specify the relationships among empirical generalizations in order to constitute true theory. (pp. 29–30)

Formal Theory Construction: 1967–1979

A change in tone characterized the next several years of work on family theory. Following Hill's (1966) address after receiving the first Burgess Award for a career of scholarly achievement in the family field, attention turned toward methods of deductively and inductively creating theories, using a clearly delineated propositional format. Many examples of this type of work emerged. Nye and his colleagues presented a propositional theory of family stability (Nye, White, & Frideres, 1969), followed by a propositional theory of age at marriage (Bartz & Nye, 1970). Goode and his colleagues published a massive volume listing hundreds of propositions relevant to scores of family topics (Goode, Hopkins, & McClure, 1971).

The most important works of this period, however, were those spearheaded by Burr (Burr, 1973; Burr, Hill, Nye, & Reiss, 1979, Vols. 1 & 2). In his 1973 volume, Burr applied the principles of deductive, propositional theory

building provided by philosophers and sociologists to 11 topical areas of research. In the first volume of Burr, Hill, et al. (1979), Burr and his colleagues applied the same procedure to twice as many areas, involving experts in those areas as chapter authors. In Volume 2, Burr, Hill, et al. (1979) focused on five general theories that were not substantively limited. The editors noted that the second volume was not comprehensive in its coverage of general theories, and they acknowledged difficulties in linking the two volumes. Inductively integrating materials from the first volume proved difficult because of the lack of semantic equivalence across domains, the complexity of models in the first volume, and the lack of a way to bridge macro- and microlevel propositions (Burr, Hill, et al., 1979, Vol. 2, pp. xii–xiv).

Organizational developments within the National Council of Family Relations (NCFR) also were important during this period. In his Burgess address, Hill (1966) had called for the creation of a Theory Section to parallel the existing Research Section. Although his initiative was defeated, by the late 1960s NCFR had created the joint Research and Theory Section that continues today. Hill did not relent in his effort to give visibility to theorizing as a major professional activity, however. With the help of Nye and others, he created the Workshop on Theory Construction, which began with meetings at the NCFR annual conference site just before the regular NCFR conference. The workshop served as a training ground for both students and more advanced family scholars, allowing them to nurture and demonstrate their talents in theory building. In 1975, the name of the workshop was expanded to Theory Construction and Research Methodology. This workshop also survives today. In its first 24 years, more than 560 papers were presented, and more than 730 participants appeared on its programs. It is interesting that both the section and the workshop evolved to combine theoretical and research interests. This symbolizes the extent to which family scholars see the two enterprises as fundamentally connected.

Pluralism: 1980–1999

The publication of the two edited volumes by Burr and colleagues (Burr, Hill, et al., 1979) seems to represent the high-water mark, if not the culmination, of the theory construction movement. The pluralism of the most recent decades has several possible interpretations. It can be seen as a continuation of the quantitative growth of contributions by scholarly participants in family theory and

research. It can also be taken to be a furthering of fragmented and specialized interests. Or it can be viewed as a new respect and tolerance for diverse philosophies, theories and theory building methods, and research strategies.

Doherty, Boss, LaRossa, Schumm, and Steinmetz (1993) provide a cogent summary of nine main trends, although they give these developments somewhat more recent origins than we would. We excerpt their list from a more detailed discussion:

1. The impact of feminist and ethnic minority theories and perspectives
2. The realization that family forms have changed dramatically
3. The trend toward greater professional (multidisciplinary) inclusiveness
4. The trend toward more theoretical and methodological diversity
5. The trend toward more concern with language and meaning
6. The movement toward more constructivist and contextual approaches
7. An increased concern with ethics, values, and religion
8. A breakdown of the dichotomy between the private and public spheres of family life and between family social science and family interventions
9. Greater recognition by family scholars of the contextual limits of family theory and research knowledge (pp. 15–17)

To be sure, Doherty et al. (1993) see challenges posed by, and potential problems with, these emergent developments, but their basic posture is laudatory and optimistic. Nonetheless, any idealistic hope on the part of some leaders in the field that we would eventually converge around one grand theoretical scheme to explain everything about families has now been completely dashed and discarded. What we see is the continuing proliferation of theories, the eclectic combination of elements from different theories, and variations and transformations within existing theories. It is as common now, if not more common than ever before, for theorizing to be narrowly focused on particular topics and issues. Countless mini theories, middle-range theories, and models of mostly causal processes, all closely linked to Hempel's (1952) plane of observation, characterize the literature, particularly in professional journals and in the proceedings of conferences and workshops.

The other main trend in recent years has been a vigorous questioning of the philosophical foundations in the field (cf. Osmond, 1987; Thomas & Wilcox, 1987). The result has been a turn toward interpretive and critical philosophies (see Box 2.1) and away from at least some elements of the positivistic philosophy (see Cheal, 1991; White, 2004). It is important to remember, however, that the entire scholarly community does not move in unison in any one direction. Some theorists attempt to blend and integrate, whereas others find one philosophy or even one theory compelling and the others inadequate.

Science in the Post-Postmodern Era: 2000–Present

The current scene is a curious and shifting mixture of consensus and conflict over theories and theory-building methods. Yet we believe that there might be some glimpses of the direction we are headed. Certainly, the *Sourcebook of Family Theory and Research* (Bengtson, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein, 2005) still showed much of the pluralism and confusion from the previous era. Although the 2005 *Sourcebook* shows the diversity of theoretical thinking in family studies, we are less sure that it is representative of the theory we see in first-tier journals in our area. Furthermore, theoretical entries do not follow the more rigorous and formal format and discussions in the 1993 *Sourcebook* and the 1979 two-volume Burr, Hill, et al. *Contemporary Theories*. Even though there seemed to be little consensus on the evaluation of theories or the role of values in theory, several chapters in the Bengtson et al. (2005) *Sourcebook* offered either theoretical or methodological advances. The overall tone, however, was continued diversity and tolerance for a multitude of ways of thinking that many scholars from previous decades might not have wanted to accommodate as “scientific progress.”

At almost the same time as the *Sourcebook* was being finalized in late 2004, White published *Advancing Family Theories* (2004). This book attempted to correct many of the misperceptions inherent within the “postmodern movement,” and White argues for a return to distinctions such as adequate and inadequate theory and competing knowledge claims. Such a stance removes the basic assumption of pluralism and relativism by saying that although we might not be able to know absolute truth or falsity, we can certainly know which arguments and theories are better able to predict and explain based on methodological criteria. White also argues against a free-for-all of value

orientations in the social sciences by saying that a methodological approach assumes that one does not bend the method (and data) to fit one's ideological biases. Interestingly, White is not alone in his attempt to return to more disciplined theory and propositions, as many social scientists in North America react strongly to the excesses of the past 30 years of pluralism (e.g., see Gross & Levitt, 1994; O'Neill, 1995).

The 2004 publication of the Chibucos, Leite, and Weis *Readings in Family Theory* sent a clear message that theories were research oriented and scientific. This was followed by the simultaneous publication of the *Handbook of Marriage and the Family* (3rd ed.; Peterson & Bush, 2013) and the *Handbook of Family Theories: A Content Based Approach* (Fine & Fincham, 2013), both of which emphasized the empirical and generalizing characteristics of theory. It is important to note that the postmodern era of pluralism and lack of consensus in the social sciences was necessary to admonish those that uncritically expounded about "privileged" knowledge claims in the sciences. The overall perspective today seems that family scholarship has largely moved beyond the years of pluralism and relativism in the late 20th century and that the new consensus follows the tenets of our discussion of the pragmatic and tentative nature of scientific knowledge and explanation.

CONCLUSION

In many ways, the history of theory in the study of the family has brought us full circle from the naive acceptance of science in the 1950s to a much more social and tentative understanding of our knowledge today. Despite this evolution, we are experiencing renewed consensus on basic criteria for evidence and scientific methods based on "pragmatic positivism." This evolution was necessary so that a more nuanced understanding of science, its values and understandings, could come to the practice of social science and family scholarship.