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## Ethical Reflections for a Globalized Family Curriculum

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### A Developmental Paradigm

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**F**or several decades the discipline of family science has worked to extricate itself from its Western, and most notably, American moorings. By the dawn of the twenty-first century, many departments had made significant strides toward infusing their curricular offerings with enhanced appreciation for culturally diverse families (Smith & Ingoldsby, 1992). A growing collection of resources helped enhance these curricular offerings (Fine, 1993; Hamon & Ingoldsby, 2003; Hutter, 2004; Leeder, 2004). Support for this trend was further galvanized by the 1994 United Nations International Year of the Family (Altergott, 1993) and its 2004 International Year of the Family successor (Benjamin, 2003; Fitzpatrick, 2005). Even those departments initially lagging behind are now making concerted efforts to internationalize their curricula, faculty, and research agendas.

As a result, students in family science classes are being confronted with an ever-broadening kaleidoscope of traditional family practices they occasionally describe as “strange,” “bizarre,” even “incomprehensible.” Initial classroom response to a more globalized curriculum can range from shock

and disdain to outright ridicule. Well-intentioned faculty are sometimes left with a nagging suspicion that this enhanced knowledge base has in some cases resulted in less rather than greater cultural sensitivity.

What concrete steps might be taken to address this challenging dilemma? Is it possible for students to be freed from the grip of their own cultures without becoming stranded in a nebulous amoral quagmire? And what exactly is the objective for faculty? Is the pedagogical goal to simply neutralize students' visceral reactions based on their sometimes limited experience and ethnocentrism, or can there be a larger vision of guiding future family scientists along a trajectory from ethnocentric thinking toward constructive ethical reflection and responsible social action?

If so, this process is not likely to happen by chance. If the discipline of family science is truly committed to a more thoroughgoing internationalization, it is imperative to cultivate reflective and analytical skills in nuancing cross-cultural family ambiguities and complexities. This chapter proposes a developmental paradigm for launching a more robust understanding of and appreciation for complex family issues.

## Theoretical Framework

Cultivating a global worldview with its corollary appreciation for culturally diverse families is a lifelong process. The most seasoned of diplomats, anthropologists, and development workers are often caught by surprise at the stubborn persistence of their own ethnocentric beliefs and judgments. Even after such individuals have rationally and cognitively rejected their own judgmental thinking, they may still find themselves repelled when encountering certain traditional family practices. When learning, for example, of practices like child marriage, arranged marriage, polygamy, the levirate, infant swaddling, child fosterage, sibling caretaking, cosleeping patterns among extended family members, ritual circumcision, and ancestor worship, it is easy for westerners to dismiss them out of hand. Indeed, few of us ever fully transcend the delimiting vision of our own cultures.

If seasoned professionals struggle to reconcile these issues, it is easy to understand why students would have at least as much difficulty. Change is not likely to happen overnight, and not without some intentionality. For this reason, it might be helpful to visualize the journey toward greater cultural competence and sensitivity as a developmental process (Bennett, 1993; DeSensi, 1994; Mahoney & Schamber, 2004).

The idea of employing a developmental construct is not alien territory to family scientists. There is a long tradition of conceptualizing family life

cycle changes or “family careers” (Aldous, 1978) in developmental terms (Duvall, 1957; White, 1991). Despite its limitations, family development theory continues to find application to a variety of cultural contexts including those of German, Indian, and Eastern European families (White, 2003).

In addition to family development theory, family science also focuses on the life course development of the human person from birth to death. Indeed one of the substance areas required for official certification as a family life educator (CFLE) is called “Human Growth and Development Over the Life Span” (Bredehoft & Walcheski, 2005; Powell & Cassidy, 2001). More recently there have been creative attempts to integrate the human life course perspective with family development theory (Aldous, 1990; Bengston & Allen, 1993). White (2003) predicts the synergy between individual development and family development theories may reach new levels of integration and application in the years ahead.

As demonstrated above, there is a long tradition of employing developmental paradigms in the field of family science. It would appear a developmental model is particularly well suited to describe the progress one might make along a personal trajectory from ethnocentrism toward greater openness and ultimately informed critical reflection and social engagement (see Figure 14.1). It is hoped that such a journey will ultimately temper the knee-jerk reactions and cavalier judgments regarding unfamiliar family practices that students and professionals alike are sometimes prone to make.

## Developmental Stages

### Stage 1: Recognizing and Claiming One’s Own Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to evaluate and judge other cultures with the standards of one’s own (Leeder, 2004; Strong, DeVault, & Cohen, 2005). From this perspective, “The local is viewed as universal, the relative as absolute, and the complex as simple” (Kauffman, Martin, & Weaver, 1992, p. 140). In its extreme form, jingoism, people truly believe their own culture to be superior over others. Media coverage of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta might illustrate this ethnocentric bias:

At those games the United States did quite well, garnering many medals. Other countries did equally well. However, if one watched only U.S. television, including CNN, one would think that only the United States had been so successful. The media featured mainly U.S. athletes, and showed only events in which the

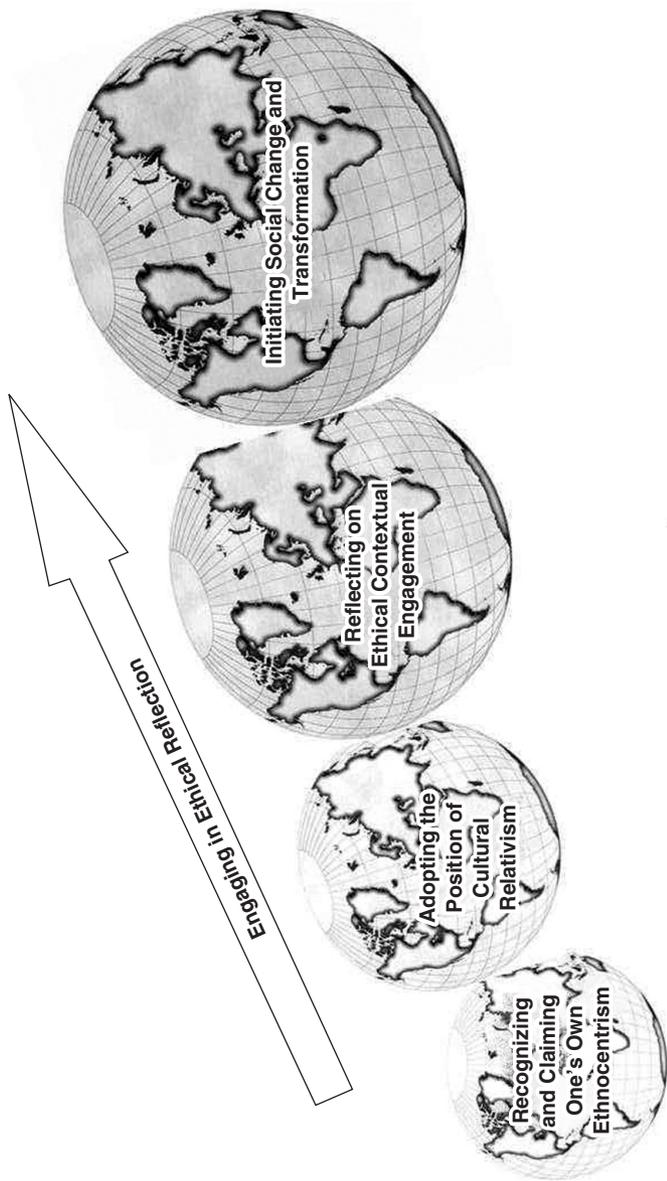


Figure 14.1 Developmental Model for Ethical Reflection

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United States triumphed. This is an example of jingoism, which led to embarrassment on the part of those who have a more global perspective. (Leeder, 2004, p. 18)

Ethnocentric impulses turn even darker when held hostage to fear of those that are different and unknown. In her book on *Families in Cultural Context*, DeGenova (1997) observes that

to minimize these uncomfortable feelings, many people want to be associated only with others similar to themselves in color, belief, or language. Even among people who look like them, act like them, and dress like them, if they don't know anyone in the new group from previous experience, they are distinctly uncomfortable. So adamant are some people in their desire to be with their own kind that tribal genocide, ethnic cleansing, and civil wars are now a way of life in many countries. (p. 2)

It was partly from the ashes of such experience that Leeder (2004) was inspired to write her book on *The Family in Global Perspective*. As she describes it,

I have written this book as a labor of love. As I said earlier, my father was a Holocaust refugee, and I am of the post-Holocaust generation. The Holocaust occurred because of racism and an exaggerated idea about the evils of difference. I believe that it is imperative that we, as citizens of the world, understand others so that there will not be another Holocaust. (p. 272)

One might ask why ethnocentrism is so pervasive. Greeley (1969) suggests that "family, land and common cultural heritage have always been terribly important to human beings, and suspicion of anyone who is strange or different seems also deeply rooted in the human experience" (p. 21). But while this propensity toward ethnocentric thinking is seen in all world cultures, it is uniquely expressed among Americans. Perhaps it is rooted in our legacy of manifest destiny or more recently our economic prosperity, but for whatever reason, it is a trap into which many Americans unwittingly fall. Waiarda (1985) laments that this "deeply ingrained American ethnocentrism [creates] an inability to understand the Third World on its own terms, an insistence on viewing it through the lens of our own Western experience, and the condescending and patronizing attitudes that such ethnocentrism implies" (1985, p. 1).

The critical importance of addressing issues of ethnocentrism was brought home to me some years ago while teaching a course on cross-cultural childrearing. During the second week of class we were discussing the comparative family contexts in which children are raised and nurtured. To

help visualize the experience of growing up in an extended versus a nuclear family, I showed a short clip from the video *Not Without My Daughter* (Ufland & Ufland, 1991).

The narrative unfolds with a successful Iranian doctor interacting in a small nuclear family setting in Michigan with his American-born wife, child, and in-laws. Juxtaposed against this tranquil, intimate setting, the viewer then follows the Mahmoody family as they return home to Iran and are greeted at the airport by a boisterous throng of extended family members. The tiny nuclear family is enveloped and whisked away in an extended family motorcade. Upon arrival home, they step out of the car in a welcoming ritual over the carcass of a freshly slaughtered lamb. Despite the fact that the class roster included two veiled women from Saudi Arabia and an American student with an Iranian husband, a portion of the class snickered throughout the video clip at the traditional Islamic dress and the passionate, demonstrative airport greeting. Likewise, there was much audible gagging at the sight of the slaughtered lamb in the welcome-home ritual. Needless to say, students from the Persian Gulf region were sliding pretty low in their seats by this time. They were visibly shaken by the ridicule of their home cultures, and by the lack of sensitivity on the part of some students toward their sense of isolation and exclusion.

If our long-range goal is building the capacity for objective and critical reflection, we need to begin by recognizing the pervasiveness of our own ethnocentric thinking. It may be too threatening to start by positioning the laser beam directly on one's own most private thoughts, affections, and prejudices. Instead, an initial strategy might be identifying ethnocentric thinking woven throughout academic literature and the popular press (Paul, 1992). For example, what does a closer examination of our textbooks reveal? Is a Eurocentric bias subtly perpetuated? Some texts still draw heavily on maps and terminology dating back to the colonial era when the British Empire was viewed as the geographic and political center of the universe. With Britain as the reference point, the Holy Land was viewed as the "Near East," Persia as the "Middle East," and India and China the "Far East" (Hernandez, 1989).

One might also make note of lapses into ethnocentric thinking exhibited by even the most respected journalists. Typical examples include the following:

1. *Time* magazine once featured a special inset announcing the upcoming marriage of Benazir Bhutto, then prime minister of Pakistan. After explaining this was an arranged marriage, the *Time* writer added, "The wedding will probably not take place until winter, by which time her followers—and

Benazir—should have grown accustomed to the idea” (“Getting to Know You,” 1987, p. 23). In actuality, it was not Bhutto and her devoutly Muslim followers that had to “get used to” the idea of arranged marriage, but rather the ethnocentric Western journalist.

2. A similarly jaded view of arranged marriage was conveyed by a front-page article in the *Washington Post* (Coll, 1994). The article described an enterprising young Indian businessman, Jatin Mehta, who heads an international diamond cartel. Mehta had announced plans to market his diamonds to the 400 million-plus Indian women.

The *Post* writer mused that Mehta would have his work cut out for him trying to persuade these millions of women that diamonds are their best friend. The task would be especially daunting since, as the writer noted, many of these women were “trapped by lonely, arranged marriages and feudal family values” (p. A1).

I watched for letters of protest from the Indian community, but saw none. It is likely that the nonconfrontational approach of many Asian cultures would make it difficult to publicly protest biased journalism by a major media outlet. But one might safely assume that there were more than a few readers who were hurt and offended by such pejorative language.

3. Not only can Americans be quite ethnocentric in their view of other cultures, they can also be guilty of regional ethnocentrism, as well. The *Washington Post* recounted the story of an Indiana University student who is a prime example of ethnocentrism run amok. The student, a native New Yorker, had never been west of the Hudson River prior to landing in Bloomington, Indiana. According to a classmate,

This woman never bought the local newspaper because she never had to. Her mother Federal Expressed her the *New York Times* every single day, including Sundays, for four solid years. Also Fed Ex-ed her bagels and lox once a week, minimum. The one that really got to me was the weekly shipment of two gallons of Evian water. As if they don't sell that blessed fluid in the Midwestern provinces!” the classmate quipped. (Levey, 1994, p. D20)

Sleuth work for illustrations of ethnocentrism can become addictive! Just as sensitivity to inclusive language has solidified over the past several decades, so our radar screens can be sharpened to instances of ethnocentric thinking. By the end of the semester, they should fairly leap out at us from the page.

As sensitivity to ethnocentric attitudes and behaviors exhibited by others is heightened, we are better equipped to confront the possibility that we, too,

might be guilty of ethnocentric thinking. Through critical self-reflection we come face to face with our own denial, painfully aware of those instances where we arbitrarily judge others by the standards of our own culture.

The capacity to recognize and claim one's own ethnocentrism is of critical importance to emerging family science researchers, educators, and practitioners. It is far easier to assume that family practices with which we are most familiar are somehow "innate" to all people (DeGenova, 1997, p. 8). Holding fast to ethnocentrism is "entirely inconsistent" with an ability to offer holistic care for children and families of diverse cultures (Husband, 2000, p. 58). It also impedes the practitioner's ability to gain appreciation for and deep knowledge of other cultures (Leininger, 1995), for it leads us "to believe we have nothing to learn from places or people unlike ourselves, particularly people who might be materially less well-off" (Leeder, 2004, p. 18).

## Stage 2: Adopting the Position of Cultural Relativism

As we begin to distance ourselves from our own lived experience, we are more open to viewing the world through the lens of "the other." In the process we recognize the limitations of judging other cultures by the standards of our own. We are eventually persuaded, to paraphrase an old proverb, that "anyone who knows only one culture, knows no culture" (Augsburger, 1986, p. 18). To a certain extent, this stage involves "deconstructing the myths of American culture," as one college student freshly returned from studying abroad put it (Kauffman et al., 1992, p. 110).

Inherent in the notion of cultural relativism is the willingness to study and learn from other cultures. This challenge may be more daunting for middle- and upper-class Americans who, from an international perspective, come from backgrounds of enormous privilege and learned entitlement (Marks, 2000). Cultural relativism argues for deep engagement with and meaningful dialogue between cultures:

This is not the easy cosmopolitanism that implies enormous privilege—the capacity, for example, to spend three days in the Bali Hilton. It's a deeper form of knowing that entails some recognition that I am one among others. I am not the center of the universe. (Rosaldo, 2000, p. 5)

In Stage 2, cultural relativism, the family scientist temporarily suspends ethical and moral judgments. It is essential to "bracket one's own values and control one's spontaneous reactions to a number of exotic phenomena"

(*Cultural Relativism*, 2005, p. 1). If one ceases to operate from the assumption that one's own culture is normative for all others, family practices that originally seemed absurd or irrational can begin to make sense when situated in their larger, natural context.

## Cultivating Empathetic Understanding

Among other things, cultural relativism involves stepping inside the shoes of individuals in another culture in order to gain a more empathetic understanding of the culture (Bennett, 1993; Leeder, 2004). In the process, a serious effort is made to imagine or comprehend the other's world without imposing one's values upon it. At its best, "intellectual empathy" (Paul, 1992, p. 153) presupposes a fairly high degree of intercultural knowledge and sensitivity (Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver, 1992).

Leeder (2004) employed the lens of cultural relativism to shed light on the traditional practice of child marriage. She notes that even though child marriage was outlawed in India through the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1978, as late as 1996 over half of all females surveyed in Rajasthan were married by age 18. In this province, it was not uncommon for brides to go to the altar as young as four years of age. Leeder cautions that

since such a union is not about love, it is interesting to ponder the causes. Once again it is important to look at history rather than to judge by Western standards. Remember to employ cultural relativity, rather than ethnocentrism, in thinking about this. (p. 184)

She continues by describing the link between child marriage and economic deprivation. For poor families, arranging an early marriage helps lighten the crushing load of poverty. As such, it is not irrational for families to marry off their toddler daughters in order to shorten the number of years required to support them. It is further believed in this culture that early marriage will protect their daughters from sexual exploitation, since many men in the region believe that "having sex with a 'fresh' girl can cure syphilis, gonorrhea, and even the virus that causes AIDS" (Burns, 1998). Leeder (2004) models a serious attempt to understand traditional family practices through the eyes of Rajasthani culture.

The traditional practice of polygamy might also be explored through the lens of cultural relativism or intellectual empathy. When westerners are asked their views on polygamy, they typically think of one thing: sex. Why else would a person be motivated to consider such a relationship?

Polygamists must have voracious sexual appetites. One woman for each man is just not enough for these sexual perverts! It takes so little effort to judge a practice like polygamy from the norms and values of our own culture. However, it is only when stepping inside, say, a West African worldview, that one comes to appreciate the roles and purposes polygamy serves in providing economic stability for the family and security for widows in their old age (Hillman, 1975).

## Acknowledging Integrative Aspects of Culture

In addition to creating intellectual empathy in Stage 2, we also grow to appreciate the integrative aspects of a culture. This approach assumes a fundamental respect for the “integrity” of all world cultures (Bennett, 1993, p. 31). Cultures come to be viewed in holistic, rather than fragmented, terms (Partington, 1987). Anthropologist Ruth Benedict (1934) argued that there is a natural “fit” or complementarity between the various components of culture. Each culture has its own unique patterning or configuration. From this perspective, family practices like bride-price payments or the levirate are not just random ideas or novel experiments. Their meaning and function are intimately tied to the norms, values, beliefs, and worldview of the cultures in which they are embedded. Through this lens one can more readily see the social, economic, or ritualistic purposes served by otherwise baffling family customs.

As we progress through Stage 2, it is hoped that we will begin migrating from ethnocentrism toward a cultural relativism that enables us to evaluate a culture on its own terms (Rosado, 1994). Cultural relativism as understood here is not to be confused with moral relativism. The point is not to see how desensitized we can become to such practices as infanticide, sex-selective abortions, wife-beating, and genital mutilation. Rather it is to more fully appreciate the functions and purposes served by traditional family practices before judging and critiquing them.

### Stage 3: Ethical Reflection and Engagement

The cultural relativism of Stage 2 is not our final destination. By expanding appreciation and respect for other cultures in this stage, we are better prepared to engage in thoughtful ethical reflection. It is here that “selective adoption” is employed, whereby certain practices are appreciated and valued while others are rejected (Pusch, 1979, p. 19). Here we actively affirm what is worthwhile and valuable while recognizing our own responsibilities

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in a pluralistic world (Kauffmann et al., 1992). There is a curious paradox here, because in higher education today, “pluralism” is a cherished value. There is much ambivalence about sounding judgmental of other ways of life. To run that risk sounds neither enlightened nor politically correct.

Several years ago *U.S. News and World Report* (Leo, 2002) featured an article entitled, “Professors Who See No Evil.” It described the findings of a national poll in which 73 percent of college seniors claimed their professors did not believe in right and wrong. Morality was seen simply a matter of personal preference and cultural diversity. Within this context, 10 percent to 20 percent of students in one study indicated they

could not bring themselves to criticize the Nazi extermination of Europe’s Jews. Some students expressed personal distaste for what the Nazis did. But they were not willing to say that the Nazis were wrong, since no culture can be judged from the outside and no individual can challenge the moral worldview of another. College students are rarely taught this directly, but they absorb it as part of the multiculturally tolerant, nonjudgmental campus culture. Deferring to the moral compass of mass murderers is a drastic step, even for collegians steeped in moral relativism. (p. 14)

Applebaum (1996) discusses this unsettling phenomenon at some length. She observes that while multiculturalism has heightened public sensitivity toward ethnocentrism, it has at the same time led to a form of “moral paralysis” (p. 185). People of goodwill are so fearful of making ethnocentric and racist-sounding judgments that they sometimes “decide not to risk judging at all” (Walking, 1980, p. 89).

Out of this relativistic milieu has come a clarion call for more intentional ethical reflection in higher education. Some have written disparagingly of the so-called Trivial Pursuit theory of knowledge, which fills students’ brains with arcane bits of information but does little more with them. Projects like Princeton University’s Center for Human Values were designed to correct this perceived deficit in higher education. In a monograph commissioned for the center’s inauguration, the director wrote,

The ethical issues of our time pose a challenge to any university committed to an educational mission that encompasses more than the development and dissemination of empirical knowledge and technical skills. Can people who differ in their moral perspectives nonetheless reason together in ways that are productive of greater ethical understanding? The University Center faces up to this challenge by supporting a university education that is centrally concerned with examining ethical values, the various standards according to which individuals make significant choices and evaluate their own as well as other ways of life. (Taylor, 1992, p. ix)

Stanford University responded to a similar challenge by hosting a teach-in on moral relativism and absolutism as part of their new “ethics across the curriculum initiative” (O’Toole, 1999, p. 1). According to a participant, faculty lamented “how omnipresent ethical relativism is among students and that [they as] faculty don’t know what to do when they hear students treat everything as a matter of personal opinion” (p. 2). Faculty feared appearing dogmatic and narrow-minded, yet they also did not want “to leave students with the impression that all opinions are equally valid and that there are no systematic ways of thinking about ethical issues” (p. 2).

A similar interest in ethical reflection has filtered down to the social sciences. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* featured an article on the “Revival of Moral Inquiry in the Social Sciences” in which Wolfe (1999) argues there is no inherent conflict between a scholar’s commitment to objectivity and the possession of strong moral convictions:

Good social science does not require complete detachment and neutrality—just objectivity. Objectivity does not mean that one has no personal views about the world. It means, instead, that one demonstrates a willingness to recognize the viability and integrity of positions other than one’s own.” (p. B5)

Not only is ethics now of keen interest to social scientists generally, but it has percolated down to the field of family science in particular (Brock, 1993). In 1998 the discipline formally adopted a code of professional ethics (Adams, Dollahite, Gilbert, & Keim, 2001), and since then it has identified ethics as one of 10 areas of demonstrated expertise required for certification as a Family Life Educator (Bredehoft & Walcheski, 2005; Powell & Cassidy, 2001). Many family science departments offer at least one course in ethics related to the discipline.

One explanation for this groundswell of interest in ethics is that the “Trivial Pursuit” of empirical knowledge tends to oversimplify complex issues and strip them of their controversial and ambiguous elements (McPeck, 1990). At times students themselves complain that the learning process is aborted. Exotic new worlds are opened up to them, yet they feel inadequate to process this information on their own. They want to be open-minded and receptive to new ideas, yet they sense a vague disease over the pain, injustice, and oppression that is implied by some of these customs.

In fact there *are* some pretty sobering, and at times horrific, traditions practiced by well-meaning family members around the world.

- In some cultures, when twins are born, one of them is or both of them are routinely killed (Queen, Habenstein, & Quadagno, 1985).
- In Ivory Coast, Down syndrome babies are sometimes gently laid by their mothers back into the lagoon or river whence they are believed to have come so

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they have a chance to “come out right the next time” (Krabill, personal communication, March 8, 1994).

- Scarification is practiced in Nigeria, where babies were traditionally cut with deep tribal markings on their face and torso to identify them with their family and lineage (Ecker, 1994).
- Nearly 100 percent of all young girls in Somalia are subjected to a painful circumcision ritual often performed without anesthesia (Headley & Dorkenoo, 1992).
- Honor killings are performed in parts of South Asia and the Middle East, whereby men seek to protect the honor of their families by killing or physically punishing their daughters and sisters for their sexual indiscretions (Muslim Women’s League, 1999).
- Brides in India are sometimes burned alive if their families cannot deliver dowry payments in timely fashion, while other Indian families live in abject poverty as they struggle to pay back dowry debts into the third and fourth generations (“India: Till Death,” 1990).

Somehow it seems irresponsible to drop information like this in students’ laps and walk away. After all the soul searching to peel away judgmental attitudes and layers of resistance, what then?

Martha Nussbaum (2000), professor of ethics and law at the University of Chicago, has wrestled deeply with this issue. In her book *Women and Human Development*, she concludes,

In light of the fact that some traditional practices are harmful and evil, and some actively hostile to other elements of a diverse culture, we are forced by our interest in diversity itself to develop a set of criteria against which to assess the practices we find, asking which are acceptable and worth preserving, and which are not. (p. 59)

The following ethical frameworks may be useful in this process of assessing global family practices. Each has relevance for Stage 3, ethical reflection, and each will be followed by a practical illustration from the field of family science.

### Consequentialist Ethics

The first is the consequentialist approach, in which ethical reasoning is based on the consequences of human actions (Thiroux, 1990). In addition to ethical egoism, a key variation of consequentialism is utilitarianism (Hollinger, 2002). Here one asks, “What is the greatest good for the greatest number of people?” A related question might focus on the issue of relative risk. What

implication, for example, does a practice like female genital mutilation have for mortality and morbidity? Can one quantify the economic and social consequences of this practice?

In fact, it does appear that a practice like female circumcision is not just an unappealing birth or puberty ritual. Research in countries like Kenya indicates that more than 80 percent of all circumcised women report having had at least one related medical complication including hemorrhaging, infection, scarring, psychological problems, or painful intercourse (Leeder, 2004; Okie, 1993). Additional complications identified by the Institute for Development Training include infertility, chronic pelvic pain, menstrual difficulties, recurrent urinary tract infection, and loss of tissue elasticity during childbirth (*Health Effects*, 1986). In economic terms, there is a staggering medical cost associated with these otherwise preventable health conditions.

Consequentialist ethics can also be used to evaluate child marriage. On the one hand, child marriage is clearly compatible with the worldviews of particular subcultures in the Indian subcontinent, where it is “vigorously defended in both religious and cultural terms” (Nussbaum, 2000). On the other hand, child marriage can be shown to have serious economic and social consequences for society. For one, early unions are associated with low rates of female literacy. In one region where child marriage is practiced, only 18 percent of the 5,000 women studied were literate (Leeder, 2004). Families were large and in generally poorer health than families in other parts of India. Infant mortality rates were high with 176 of every 1,000 live births ending in death by age five. Of the remaining children under four years of age, 63 percent were found to be malnourished (Leeder, 2004).

One might also apply consequentialist ethics to the traditions of dowry and bride-price. With the practice of dowry, money or property (cattle, land, jewelry, utensils, furniture, even VCR and DVD players) pass from the bride’s family to the groom’s as part of an arranged marriage (Strong et al., 2005). Srinivasan and Lee (2004) conducted a fascinating study of the dowry system in the northern province of Bihar, India. Using a consequentialist approach, the authors identified a number of negative consequences that can result from the practice including financial ruin for the bride’s parents, wife battering, bride burnings, female feticide (abortion of female fetuses), and infanticide. Despite these potential negative consequences, the practice appears to be flourishing. In an intriguing twist of fate, the very modernism that critiques the dowry system on the one hand may be perpetuating it on the other. The authors suggest that one reason its practice may be resistant to change is “because its social and economic consequences carry tangible benefits in an increasingly materialistic culture” (p. 1108).

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A final application of consequentialist ethics might be to the issue of sex-selective abortions. In countries like India there is a deeply entrenched cultural and worldview preference for male sons. The traditional killing of female infants through poisoning or exposure ("Asia: Discarding Daughters," 1990) has been replaced by sex-selective abortions (Leeder, 2004). With the aid of modern technology, pregnant women can now find out early on whether they are carrying a female fetus and terminate their pregnancy accordingly. This application of modern technology does not come without social and economic consequences. For example, a study in one hospital found that of the 700 amniocenteses, 430 out of 450 female fetuses were aborted, yet all male fetuses were carried to full term (Miller, 1987). The long-term impact in the region of such a dramatic gender imbalance could have dire social and economic consequences (Glenn, 2004). However, in describing these consequences, Leeder (2004) still "urges the suspension of any ethnocentric value judgments" (p. 247). She acknowledges, "It is true that these figures are disturbing and certainly are contrary to Western-based humanistic values," but she urges the reader "to keep a view that is culturally relative" (p. 248).

Consequentialist ethics, then, provides a tangible framework for evaluating the potential positive or negative impact of particular family practices. These may be related to social, mental health, economic, political, educational, or health-related criteria.

### Deontological Ethics

A second tool for moral inquiry and reflection is that of deontological ethics. Here one focuses on inherent duties and obligations that are expressed in moral principles and rules (Thiroux, 1990). These are *nonconsequentialist* in that they are viewed as inherently right regardless of the consequences. Such principles and rules are traditionally derived from three sources: reason, the cumulative reservoir of human experience, and religion.

#### Principles Derived From Reason

Sample principles that are relevant to the study of global families include values such as love, altruism, truth-telling, human dignity, equality, individual freedom, social order, democracy, self-determination, autonomy, and family or community solidarity. Additional principles identified by international social service providers include social and economic justice, peace, and nonviolent conflict resolution (Estes, 1992).

At times, these lofty sounding moral principles may actually conflict with one another. For example, families around the world struggle with the tension between individual autonomy on the one hand and family solidarity on the other. One way of resolving this value conflict is to force a choice between them, thus rank-ordering values in their descending order of importance (Hardina, 2004). An illustration of this is seen in feminist approaches to ethics:

*Fully* feminist approaches to ethics are committed first and foremost to the elimination of women's subordination . . . in all its manifestations. A feminist approach to ethics asks questions about power—that is, about domination and subordination—even before it asks questions about *good* and *evil*, *care* and *justice*, or maternal and paternal thinking. (Tong, 2003, p. 12)

In addition to rank-ordering competing values, one might also attempt to hold competing values and principles in creative tension. For example, is it possible to maintain a dialectic between the principles of individual well-being on the one hand and collective solidarity on the other? Sherif (2004) describes this tension in the context of Islamic family life:

Even in relatively nonreligious families strong social pressures constantly reinforce conformity and discourage rebelliousness of any sort, at least in public. . . . A young child quickly learns that it is shameful to disregard parental directives. Conformity to parent authority extends to all spheres of life, such as the choice of a major in college and, at times, the choice of a spouse. Decisions that most Americans consider individual choices are, for Muslims, the result of extensive group discussions and negotiations. The individual may make the final decision but only after a great deal of familial input. (p. 187)

The same tension between individualism and community is seen in countries like Somalia, where female circumcision is a cultural rite of passage. What would be gained if one were able to free individual girls from this torturous procedure? Their individual freedom would, in many cases, deprive them of solidarity and identification with the group. By not participating in the traditional puberty ritual, they would miss the opportunity to be formally admitted into adulthood in their own society.

The tension between individual well-being and collective solidarity is further seen by the fact that uncircumcised girls often fear that they have diminished their marriage prospects (Ecker, 1994). A Somali man living in Washington, DC, confirms this fear: "If the lady is 'open,' her chance of marriage is lost" (French, 1992, p. F4). Any recommendation to discontinue ritual circumcision would ideally incorporate the value for collective solidarity along with that for individual freedom. This might be accomplished

by creating alternative festivals and rituals to be celebrated during the traditional circumcision months that “promote positive traditional values while removing the danger of physical and psychological harm” (Amnesty International, 1998, p. 3).

An interesting variation on the theme of competing principles and values is seen in the case of child prostitution in Thailand. Instead of two different values in competition, this is a case where the conflict lies between two parties laying claim to the same value: human rights. In Thailand, 63 percent of children under 16 who are brought to brothels are brought by their parents (Skrobanek, 1991).

While child prostitution was traditionally associated with poverty in Thailand, it appears this is less the case today. Instead of being a strategy for economic survival by peasant families, it is now seen more as providing access to consumer goods. It reflects “a yearning for a better standard of living by parents who are not always the poorest of the poor” (Skrobanek, 1991, p. 45). Girls refusing to comply are “regarded as ungrateful and irresponsible by parents and neighbors” (p. 45). Indeed, there are reports of girls being visited at the brothels by teachers and community leaders in order to solicit donations for their pet community development projects. In a position paper describing this phenomenon, Skrobanek argues that parents’ rights over their children “should be removed” in order to safeguard the rights of children over their own bodies. The critical issue here becomes whose rights prevail: parents’ or their children’s?

### Principles Derived From Human Experience

A second approach to deontological ethics is to identify principles derived from human experience. As one looks around the world, what family-related principles seem to transcend time, space, and culture? What values enjoy relatively broad, universal consensus? It has been suggested that a worldwide consensus may be gaining momentum around the issue of family violence (Balswick & Balswick, 1995; Lachman, 1997). In the past, violence against women was quite pervasive, occurring in up to 85 percent of traditional societies (Balswick & Balswick, 1995). By way of contrast, the authors believe there is now an “emergent worldwide recognition of violence against women” that discourages pervasive violence:

The emergence of feminist theory invites us to identify such acts of physical abuse of one spouse by the other as undesirable to marriage and as acts of violence in any cultural system. In the name of cultural relativism, some may seek to normalize marital violence by showing that it is sanctioned by the wider

cultural system of which the marital system is a part. The lesson to be learned from feminist and other so-called value-laden theories, is that so-called value-free theories of marital power must be challenged. (p. 309)

Many values and principles that are widely embraced are eventually codified by the international community. Documents that address the needs and vulnerabilities of women, children, and families, and that have been ratified by such bodies as the United Nations, would be prime examples. Sample documents include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (Amnesty International, 1998). Appealing to international documents such as these broadens the conversation beyond the idiosyncratic critique and biases of a lone family scientist.

Among other commitments, these documents are typically grounded in a broad-based, universal consensus regarding human rights. Indeed, the whole notion of using human rights as a criterion for evaluating traditional family practices sounds quite logical to the Western ear. However, we sometimes forget what a challenge it has been to bring the global community into compliance with such a standard. The former human rights director for UNESCO in Paris suggests that the only reason the UN was able to gain such consensus was that countries were not forced to agree over the fundamental *reasons* behind the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Senarclens, 1983). According to him, it would have been “illusory to try to reconcile ideologies, philosophies and spiritualities which were over and beyond this fragile point of convergence” (p. 9).

When family scientists in the West attempt to apply human rights principles to specific cultural contexts, it is imperative that they do so with great care and humility. The concept of human rights is after all the product of European liberalism (enlightenment thought). It is an integral part of the framework for philosophical, political, and judicial values affirmed in Europe since the Renaissance (Senarclens, 1983).

Westerners who uncritically embrace the principles of human rights, individualism, equality, democracy, and freedom don't fully appreciate how far these ideological foundations deviate from those of cultures placing a higher value on hierarchy, social control, and community. Indeed, human rights are perceived as extremely subversive in certain social, economic, and political systems (Senarclens, 1983). Lesdema, a Venezuelan law professor, notes that many South Americans associate the human rights agenda with the Western political propaganda machine (1983).

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Other cultures have also dragged their feet en route to the human rights table. Daoudi, a Syrian law professor, notes that in Arab countries the teaching of human rights cannot be envisioned if it goes against Muslim dogma for fear of being considered contrary to public order (Daoudi, 1983). In Islam, according to Daoudi, "Man has no rights, for all rights belong to God, and human beings are the reflection of God's rights. Man cannot, therefore, become free except by submission to God" (p. 69).

Despite the obvious challenge of garnering broad support for international human rights documents, the fact remains that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been "adopted by the international community" as both a moral compass and an "incontestable juridical authority. It has become the reference for innumerable UN resolutions. It has been the source of inspiration for many national constitutions, laws, and conventions" (Senarclens, 1983, p. 9). Vehicles like the Declaration of Human Rights provide family scientists with external frames of reference for evaluating the merits and shortcomings of particular global family practices.

### Principles Derived From Religion

In addition to reason and human experience, deontological ethics is also informed by religion. Nussbaum (1999) argues that religion should be treated with deference, due to her belief that all religions, at some level, care about reforming and improving the conduct of life:

Furthermore, it would not be too bold to add that all the major religions embody an idea of compassion for human suffering, and an idea that it is wrong for innocent people to suffer. All, finally, embody some kind of a notion of justice. (p. 20)

When looking to religion for ethical principles and guidelines, one might consider religious history and tradition, broad theological themes, and sacred writings.

#### *Religious History and Tradition*

Americans can be remarkably ahistorical in their perspectives. European tourists sometimes chuckle at our revered "historical sites," some of which are a scant 50 to 100 years old. In much of Europe, such buildings would not stand a ghost of a chance to merit a historic marker. At Oxford University in England, for example, New College was built some years after the university was established, in approximately 1379 AD (Prest, 1993)!

It is not intuitive for most Americans to look to the past when trying to resolve contemporary relational or family problems. Likewise, identifying historical parallels is not a strategy we typically use to understand family life in other cultures. Yet researching religious tradition can provide insight and collective wisdom for responding to and evaluating particular family practices. For hundreds of centuries, family-related issues were among those discussed and debated by a variety of religious tribunals and councils. Many culminated in formal resolutions and treatises summarizing carefully argued guidelines and recommendations. These provide fresh perspectives that might otherwise elude those of us situated in the twenty-first century.

### *Broad Theological Themes*

Another linkage between family and religion is to ask how family practices relate to overarching theological themes or foundational worldviews of particular religions. It has been suggested, for example, that a theology of family in the Christian tradition views family more as a covenantal relationship than a contractual one (Balswick & Balswick, 1989). It is argued that covenant is a central theme in both Jewish and Christian theology. When applied to marriage, the concept of covenant places less emphasis on defending one's own personal rights than on entering into a mutually accountable relationship where commitment may not, in exchange theory terms, always strive to maximize personal rewards and minimize personal costs (Strong et al., 2005, p. 51).

Another overarching theological theme in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian traditions is that of the value, dignity, and worth of the human person (Nussbaum, 2000). The Jewish Talmud records a debate in the second century AD where Ben Azzai argued that since all human beings are created in God's image, they must be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of whether one *feels* love for them (Matalon, 2002). In describing how this overarching theme relates to family caregivers, Matalon writes,

In practice, Jewish law reflects a hierarchy of values in which the commandment to save a life, *Pikuah nefesh*, precedes the requirement to love. While the inner quality to our actions is important, it is the deed itself [that] takes precedence. According to Maimonides, it is better if the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* (charity) is performed with love, but it is still an obligation even if it not performed with love. For the [caregiver], Judaism requires efforts to rescue the patient's dignity even when the patient is off-putting, or difficult to relate to. The main task of the caregiver is still "to save a life," even when all efforts to awaken love and

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positive feelings fail. Performing a mitzvah is the very act of loving God and loving fellow. In the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, “by doing the finite we come into contact with the infinite.” (p. 2)

A similar affirmation of human dignity is found in Muslim theology. The prophet Muhammad taught that all “children of Adam” are born with dignity and nobility (Mattson, 2002). In the words of the Qur’an, “We have dignified the children of Adam, and borne them over land and sea, and provided them with good and pure things for sustenance, and favored them far about a great part of Our creation” (17:70). This inherent dignity extends across the human life cycle, despite the fact that humans begin and end their lives in a state of helplessness (Mattson, 2002). Even in the most vulnerable state of advanced illness, Islamic tradition teaches that the human person is to be treated with dignity and respect. For example, the religion does not permit family members to force medical treatment on unwilling members of their family. It is said that

the Prophet Muhammad was angry at his family when they forced him to drink some medicine as he lay on his bed in the last days of his fatal illness. Indeed, when he regained some strength for a short time after that, he made his family drink the medicine themselves—to experience how humiliating it is to be forced to take a medicine one does not want. (Mattson, 2002)

This same theme of human dignity figures prominently in Roman Catholic thought, as well. Feminist Sidney Callahan (2002), professor of moral theology at St. John’s University, notes that

all humans are made in the image of God and as morally equal cannot be discriminated against or denied care. No one earns their intrinsic dignity which is a gift from God. All human beings no matter what their abilities or stage of growth possess an inalienable dignity granted by the Creator. (p. 1)

In summary, overarching theological themes such as human dignity would suggest that traditional family practices that oppress or erode the value and integrity of individual family members are highly problematic.

### *Sacred Texts and Writings*

At times deontological ethics also appeals to principles and ethical guidelines imbedded in sacred texts and writings. The practice of the levirate is one such example. This practice required a widow to marry the brother of her deceased husband. The tradition has been embraced by various cultures

including Afghans, Hebrews, Hindus, and Native Americans (Ingoldsby, 1995). In the case of the Hebrew people, an appeal was made to their sacred scriptures to support the practice:

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel. (Deut. 25:5-6)

Muslims, likewise, appeal to their sacred writings. They appeal not only to the Qur'an, for ethical guidance, but also to the *shari'a*, its "legal interpretation" (Sherif, 2004, p. 185), and *sunna* or "practices" (p. 186). According to Fluehr-Lobban,

The shari'a has developed specialized topics that reflect the highly protective attitude of the *Qur'an* toward minors and aged parents. Specifically, the primary legal relationship centers on adequate maintenance of dependent children and needy parents. The economic and social welfare of children is a major parental responsibility enforceable under Islamic law. (as cited in Sherif, 2004, p. 186)

In using sacred writings, there are several cautions. One is that sacred texts can be distorted and manipulated to support almost any idea to which a person takes a fancy. Sherif (2004) observes that the Qur'an has at times been used selectively:

Contemporary scholarship has shown that, rather than determining attitudes about women, parts of the Qur'an are only used at certain times to legitimate particular acts or sets of conditions that concern women. This selective use is part of the way in which gender hierarchy and sexuality are negotiated and enforced. It does not explain gender roles; instead, it is part of a constant process of gender role negotiation. (p. 184)

In exploring ways that sacred writings might inform ethical reflection, it is also important to distinguish between folk expressions of a religion and official articulations of the same. Not all ideas people associate with a religion are actually affirmed by religious scholars, rabbis, and clerics of that religious group. Returning to the case of female circumcision, Leeder (2004) notes that in countries where it is common, "it is practiced by both Muslims and Christians" (p. 135). She goes on to emphasize there is no evidence female circumcision is prescribed by Jewish or Christian scriptures. While many Muslim laypeople assume circumcision is taught or required by Islam,

interviews with a series of respected Muslim leaders, however, reveal otherwise (“Africa: A Ritual,” 1992; Amnesty International, 1998; Leeder, 2004).

Nussbaum (2000) offers a helpful summary of the challenges related to using religious texts and writings in ethical reflection:

Religions are intertwined in complex ways with politics and culture. Even when a religion is based on a set of authoritative texts, culture and politics enter in complex ways into the interpretation of texts and the institutionalized form of traditional practice. Jews differ about where to draw the line between what is genuinely religious in the tradition and what is the work of specific contextual and historical shaping. Similar debates arise in Christianity and Islam. . . . Where Hinduism is concerned, the absence of scriptural authority makes it all the more difficult, if not virtually impossible, to identify a necessary religious core distinct from layers of history and culture, all powerfully infused with imperfect people’s desire for political power. (p. 194)

## Care Ethics

The third ethical framework useful for evaluating global family practices is care ethics, often viewed as a subset of character or virtue ethics. Care ethics places a value on meeting others’ needs and on caring relationships lived out in a context of mutual trust and responsiveness (Held, 2004, p. 145). This framework reflects a feminist vision for a “new way of seeing and interacting with the world” (Riley, Torrens, & Krumholz, 2005, p. 91). It is often claimed to have “assumptions, goals and methods” (Held, 2004, p. 143) that differ from those of the dominant ethical theories described earlier in the chapter:

Among the characteristics of the ethics of care is its view of persons as relational and as interdependent. [Deontological] and consequentialist moral theories focus primarily on the rational decisions of agents taken as independent and autonomous individuals. . . . In contrast, the ethics of care sees persons as partly constituted by their relations with others. It pays attention primarily to relations between persons, valuing especially caring relations. (p. 143)

One advocate of the care orientation is feminist Carol Gilligan (1982). She suggests that women’s narratives reflect a different voice and a different morality (Hollinger, 2002). Their orientation tends to be more “contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 19). As such, care ethics focuses more specifically on “context, relationship and compassion,” rather than on “truth, rights and fairness” (Hollinger, 2002, p. 50).

Many advocates of the care approach recognize that justice and care each “have a place in moral development and ethical reflection” (Hollinger, 2002, p. 50); however, exclusive reliance on one over the other can be highly problematic. An overemphasis on justice ethics has created a global “culture of neglect” by systematically devaluing “interdependence, relatedness, and positive involvement in the lives of distant others” (Robinson, 1999, p. 7). As such, an ethic of justice that fails to give attention to care is “clearly deficient” (Hollinger, 2002, p. 50).

On the other hand, care should not be the primary criterion upon which to base ethical decision-making. “In the opinion of Loewy (1996) it would be as dangerous to blindly obey the rules and regulations as it would be to base one’s ethical decision-making solely on one’s emotions and urge to care” (Botes, 2000, p. 1073). Some would argue that in an ideal world, both would be affirmed:

Both the fair and equitable treatment of all people (from the ethics of justice) and the holistic, contextual and need-centered nature of such treatment (from the ethics of care) ought therefore to be retained in the integrated application of the ethics of justice and the ethics of care. (Botes, 2000, p. 1071)

#### Stage 4: Social Action

Following an intentional process of ethical reflection, there are times when family scientists feel compelled to become catalysts of social change and transformation. As long as education remains a cerebral exercise, there is little sense of urgency to become engaged in the lives of real flesh and blood families or in cultural practices that might be deemed harmful. While it is true that action at this stage is fraught with many potential perils and misunderstandings, passive acquiescence to violence, oppression, and exploitation is not an honorable option either.

In considering one’s potential role in advocating for social change or in community organizing, Hardina (2004) stresses the importance of developing guidelines, frameworks, and best practices for this advocacy work. Strategic interventions should be weighed in terms of their relative costs and benefits and their short-term versus long-term effectiveness as well as their potential to “violate social norms” (Hardina, 2004, p. 599).

#### Spheres of Influence

As the family scientist weighs the potential spheres of influence through which to implement social change or transformation, there are many

possibilities. These might include working through local education, development, health care, or religious institutions. At times it may be desirable to initiate change at the level of law or public policy. It has been observed that legislative change is most effective when consistently integrated throughout the entire legal code. A training manual distributed by Amnesty International offers the following advice:

Ensure that FGM [female genital mutilation] programs are integrated into all relevant areas of state policy. Departments of health should clearly prohibit medicalization of FGM, and move to incorporate this prohibition into professional codes of ethics for health workers. Departments of education, women's affairs, immigration and development should all include FGM programs, as well as addressing the underlying factors which give rise to FGM such as access to education. (1998, p. 5)

As a general rule, the greater the number of institutions and spheres of influence engaged, the more significant the long-term change. For example, changes in the legal code will be more far-reaching "if accompanied by a broad and inclusive strategy for community-based education and awareness-raising" (Amnesty International, 1998, p. 2).

## Guiding Principles

There are a number of general principles to keep in mind when strategizing for social change or transformation.

1. An *attitude of humility* is of critical importance (Marks, 2000; Weaver, 1999). Such humility rejects the paternalistic notion that we, the advantaged ones, are there to "restore" those less fortunate than ourselves (Marks, p. 614). "Epistemological humility" recognizes that even after careful ethical reflection, ones' beliefs should be held with a small amount of hesitation (Applebaum, 1996). In other words, family scientists are keenly aware of their own fallibility and potential for mistakes in judgment. Epistemological humility allows one to say,

I believe I am right and insofar as I do, I believe you are wrong, but I grant that I might be wrong on this matter just as I have been shown to be on many others. (Gardner, 1992, p. 79)

It is hoped that open-minded humility will enable us to affirm clear value commitments, while becoming more astute and sensitive when interacting with those whose viewpoints or approaches differ from ours (Applebaum, 1996).

2. A second principle is an overarching *commitment to family well-being* (Brock, 1993). Anthropologists have long been skeptical of efforts to define quality of life in universal terms (Wilk, 1999), recognizing that cultures differ quite dramatically in their visions of individual and family well-being (Gough, 2004). Pioneering anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski and Margaret Mead challenged conventional wisdom that quality of life is somehow tied to personal income and material abundance. These founding anthropologists

invented the concept of “cultural relativism” as a critique of what most felt was excessive materialism, loss of meaning, and decay of kinship and community that inevitably followed Westernization and modernity. Their portraits of other cultures were meant to remind the literate West that there are other sets of values, deeper and more meaningful than money, by which to assess the texture of a life. (Wilk, 1999, p. 91)

Despite the ever-present danger of linking quality of life to free-market economics and material prosperity, it still seems appropriate that family scientists be motivated by a passion to ensure basic quality of life standards for all world families. As such, there would be great interest in determining the bare social minimum or threshold below which “truly human functioning is not available to citizens” (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 6).

3. Yet another related principle is a *commitment to beneficence or to doing no harm*. Practitioners working with global families may have the most generous of spirits and selfless of intentions, but in the rush to do good, they must remain alert to their own potential for doing harm:

Virtually every caring system we have keeps its eye on the good it hopes to accomplish and blinks at the harm it is doing. As a result, hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of people are violated every day of their lives by the encroachments of their ostensible benefactors. (Glaser, 1978, p. 165)

Family scientists should attempt to anticipate “how interventions [will] impact participants and their families” (Leigh, Loewen, & Lester, 1986, p. 579). At the very least, potential risks should be identified. For example, risks one may encounter by refusing to participate in female circumcision rituals might include “ostracism, ridicule, and other social pressures” (Leeder, 2004, p. 135).

4. The fourth guiding principle is that of *family empowerment* (Kagitcibasi, 1996). It is so easy to assume that one knows best what other people need, particularly if one is an expert with formal academic training in

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family dynamics and well-being. The challenge is to balance this expert knowledge base with families' very real need for "self-determination and empowerment" (Hardina, 2004, p. 595). Indeed, professionals involved in community organizing often cite "constituent self-determination [as] one of the primary goals" (p. 596).

### Strategies of Intervention

Having noted some broad principles for initiating social change, the final section highlights selected strategies one might employ in intervention. There have been many attempts to identify practical skills and strategies for effecting social change and transformation. Some are more relevant for work with families than others. These might include the following:

1. Conducting *background research*. Before embarking on planned social action, it is important to do your homework. You should seek to understand the issue in as holistic a way as possible. With regard to an issue like FGM, Amnesty International advises that

information is particularly needed on its prevalence, physical and psychological effects, social attitudes and religious requirements. Research should also review the impact of efforts to date. In particular work needs to be done to study the prevalence of FGM outside Africa, especially in the Middle East, Latin America, and in many countries where it is practiced among immigrant communities. (Amnesty International, 1998, p. 4)

Disciplining oneself to do relevant background reading and research will ensure that strategies employed will be more thoughtful and well conceived.

2. A *collaborative approach* is also much wiser than embarking on a solo mission to change the world. The collective wisdom of a multidisciplinary team can round out the perspective and skill set of a family scientist. The team might be composed of "human rights activists, educationalists, health professionals, religious leaders, development workers and many others" (Amnesty International, 1998, p. 3).

3. Close *cooperation with grassroots leaders* and movements can also enhance one's chances of success. Even when appealing to internationally agreed upon standards of human rights, "Those best placed to set the direction of the campaign are the grassroots activists and community workers with a presence in the areas" (Amnesty International, 1998, p. 3) where the tradition in question is practiced.

4. In addition to collaborating with multidisciplinary teams and with grassroots leaders, it is important to *consult closely with local families* themselves. There is a great danger that one might be consulting with everyone else about the problem but the people directly involved. Rhodes (1991) has observed this tendency in social work practice where the client's point of view is sometimes overlooked. Here, casework

emphasizes clients' psychodynamics and excludes serious consideration of their values or their opinion about how to solve problems. Clients sometimes report that they have never been asked by their workers how they would solve a problem; workers simply assumed that as workers they were in the best position to decide. (Rhodes, 1991, p. 51)

Nussbaum (2000) notes that by simply informing people of what is good for them, "We show too little respect for their freedom as agents (and in a related way, their role as democratic citizens). People are the best judges of what is good for them, and if we prevent them from acting on their own choices, we treat them like children" (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 51).

Doherty (2000) echoes this sentiment by challenging family scientists to shift their focus away from a "trickle down model of research and practice" (p. 319). In this model, serious knowledge about families is seen to be generated from academic researchers, who dispense their wisdom down through practitioners to families. In the process, real flesh-and-blood families are rarely invited to identify problems or organize to solve them. Doherty rejects the trickle-down approach in favor of one where family scientists work "as catalysts for families to be active shapers of their [own] communities and their destinies" (p. 321). As such, family scientists' intentions are not to "stifle families' own wisdom and initiative" (p. 322).

5. Another useful strategy for addressing difficult and controversial family practices is to begin by *searching for common ground* (Bennett, 1993). It is reasonable to assume that one could hypothetically construct common goals with every culture of the world (Rhodes, 1991). Celebrating common values and commitments can create a climate of trust before tackling the more difficult discussions related to areas of difference. Rhodes (1991) provides the example of working with a culture to celebrate common values related to human dignity, equality, and community as a backdrop for later discussions on issues where views might diverge.

6. Closely related is the suggestion to begin by *acknowledging family strengths and capacities*. It is so tempting when working with diverse families to equate difference with a deficit model of family functioning. Kagitcibasi

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(1996) discusses this deficiency model in his work with the Turkish Early Enrichment Project. He notes that rejecting a deficiency model

does not imply that the existing conditions are optimal for the development of children. If this were so, there would be no need for intervention. It rather means that the agent of change builds on the existing strengths in changing the conditions to promote optimal development. (p. 173)

By highlighting family strengths, the hope is to “strengthen what is adaptive in order to change what is maladaptive” (Kagitcibasi, 1996, p. 173).

7. A *fertile imagination* can be a wonderful asset in strategizing for social change. Feminist scholars typically place a high degree of importance on the role of imagination (Nussbaum, 2000). Unfortunately, our imagination is often limited by our own cultural backgrounds (Rosaldo, 2000). Rhodes (1991) notes that “too often we limit our inquiry to an established set of questions or assume constraints imposed by society and therefore limit the possibilities of creative and satisfactory solutions to ethical problems” (p. 51). A helpful antidote might be planned exposure to a broader range of societies and cultures so that we are able to think outside the box of our own culture and to experience “a rich contextual imagining of particular lives and circumstances” (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 250).

8. In addition to a fertile imagination, it is helpful to adopt *strategies that are nonconfrontational*. It is quite easy to allow the ends to justify the means by endorsing tactics of coercion, violence, terrorism, deceit, or personal humiliation (Hardina, 2004). In selecting appropriate intervention strategies for work with global families, one might ask whether the strategies are ethical and whether they sacrifice long-term substantive change for short-term benefits (Hardina, 2004).

## Conclusion

The foregoing developmental model has particular application for faculty and students processing complex family issues in the university classroom. It was designed in response to expanding globalization of the family science curriculum. The paradigm is offered as one possible response to the vexing ethical dilemmas implied by various traditional family practices. As a process model, it moves students through a four-stage developmental sequence with each stage building off the last. It reflects a larger vision of mentoring future family scientists along a trajectory from ethnocentric thinking through constructive ethical reflection and ultimately to responsible social action.

Several years ago the Carnegie Foundation published a report in which it challenged higher education to restore its “original purpose of preparing graduates for a life of involved and committed citizenship . . . [since] by every measure . . . today’s graduates are less interested and less prepared to exercise their civic responsibilities” (Newman, 1985, p. xiii). It is hoped that the developmental model presented here might be a useful pedagogical tool for faculty and might inspire future family scientists to become more intentional about their journeys toward responsible global citizenship.

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