Children and Families in the Social Environment

Second Edition

James Garbarino

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To our families—past, present, and future

Contents

4   The Family as a Social System
James Garbarino and Robert H. Abramowitz

5   The Developing Child in a Changing Environment
Joanne L. Benn and James Garbarino

6   The Ecology of Childbearing and Child Rearing
James Garbarino and Joanne L. Benn

Foreword

Garbarino and his colleagues have done the social welfare field a service. Painting in broad brushstrokes, they provide a useful and integrative schema for understanding child development in context. As with the first edition, the writing is straightforward and clear. Practice examples abound at both micro and macro levels. New material on cultural diversity, neighborhood and community factors, and public policy make this volume an even more attractive option for courses in human behavior and social environment.

In examining the "risks" and "opportunities" present in the various environments that both affect and are influenced by the developing child, the authors cause us to frame the problems that beset children— abuse and neglect, for example, and family violence—in new and different ways. This approach in turn forces us to consider novel solutions at the level of the individual family, neighborhood, and community, and ultimately at the level of society itself. For Garbarino and his colleagues, the link between the proximate and distal environments of childhood is apparent, as is the connection between case intervention and broad-scale policy reform. Such an integrative approach is particularly welcome at a time when the human services field struggles with the question of balancing social treatment and social reform.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's seminal ideas on the ecology of human development are everywhere apparent in this volume. Garbarino and his colleagues have extended and deepened our understanding of the meaning of that construct for practice. Students, instructors, and human services practitioners will find much of value here. As noted in the earlier edition, the present authors have extended to the world of human services the ecological perspective articulated by Lewin and elaborated by Bronfenbrenner. As practical theorists of their own day, Garbarino and his colleagues have succeeded in providing a benchmark volume in human behavior and social environment for all those who provide care, treatment, and nurture for children and families.

James K. Whittaker
Seattle, Washington

xiii

Preface

"No man is an island" is a message that we need to hear repeated over and over again in this individualistic culture of ours. We Americans need to understand that our successes and our failures come to us as much by the efforts of others as they do by our own actions. The people close to us on a day-to-day basis play a large role in how well we channel our impulses into constructive activity, as well as in how we define ourselves. Likewise, people we may not know or even ever see exert significant influence over our lives through their institutional power and authority. This lesson on interdependence is vital to learn if we are to meet the environmental and political challenges of the twenty-first century.

Our success as *parents* depends in large measure on the character and quality of the social environment in which we bear and raise our children. Likewise, as professional helpers we need to understand how the social environment works for children and families, and why it sometimes fails to work on their behalf. We need an appreciation for how the practitioner and the policymaker can cooperate with and enhance social support systems in the family's environment. This book sets out to relate basic knowledge about human development to the problems of social risk and opportunity in a manner that is accessible and useful to the professional helper or the student in training for a professional role.

In writing the first edition of this book, I assembled a group of talented professionals, all graduate students at The Pennsylvania State University where I served as a faculty member. Each student shared special responsibility with me for at least one chapter, and all contributed to the overall writing of the book. Thus, this book reflects a collective orientation in form and process as well as content. The book is organic to the group, and its success is a credit to its collective wisdom and knowledge. As senior member of the group, I assumed responsibility for its faults. No book can be all things and in every way complete, so I assumed responsibility for deciding what we would not say as well as much of what we would.

The Afterword was a very personal statement on my part.

Since 1985, I have been President of Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development. In this capacity I have expanded my un-

derstanding of child development in several ways that motivated and guided the preparation of this revised edition of the book.

Coupled with the new research available during the 1980s and the changes in American society in the past 10 years, this growth on my part led to the current version of our book. Some of the original authors were unavailable to participate in the second edition. Those who did participate included Joanne Benn, Mario Gaboury, Anne Garbarino, and Margaret Plantz. In addition, a colleague from Erikson Institute, Kathleen Kostelny, joined us to prepare the revised manuscript.

Our goal in the second edition has been to update each chapter—new research, historical changes, and stylistic improvements—and to include a greater emphasis on ethnic, cultural, and racial issues in a new chapter. In doing so, we have responded to suggestions made by readers and users of the book over the past decade.

We have tried to speak clearly, without jargon. As teachers all, we have sought to present ideas, principles, and human lessons first, and recite facts only second, as necessary to illustrate and validate our view of the issues. Each chapter contains research and practice capsules, questions for exploration, and annotated suggestions for further reading. We hope these will aid the student reader to make good use of the book.

They say an army travels on its stomach. It is fair to say that a book travels on its typing. We have been fortunate to be on the receiving end of some excellent help in preparing the successive drafts of this manuscript. We tip our hats to Alice Saxion and Kathie Hooven who provided the principal secretarial support for the first edition. Norma Richman served this function for the second edition.

A number of people read the first draft of the manuscript and their comments and suggestions helped us to improve it. Our thanks to Susan Bates, Laura Dittmann, Eileen Furgeson, Marian Petroski, Stephen Smith, Karen Stierman, and Mary Ellen Yonushonis.

I also offer my thanks to Jim Whittaker, who first "incited" this project and who has offered advice and counsel along the way.

James Garbarino
Chicago, Illinois

1

An Introduction

James Garbarino and Mario T. Gaboury

Beginning at the End, or Ending at the Beginning?

Where does one start in seeking an understanding of children and families in the social environment? With the processes of development that characterize the individual child as a biological organism? With the family as a social entity? With the environment as a network of social institutions and events? Where is the beginning of this chain of relationships that binds together child, parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, friends, neighbors, communities, and professional helpers? And where is the end? It would be easy to cast aside the many interconnections and pretend that there is *just* the developing child, or *just* the family as a social unit, or *just* the community power structure, or *just* the professional delivering human services. It would be easy, but we believe it would not be enough. Rather, we seek to capture the whole tangled mass of relationships connecting child, family, and social environment.

Much of what makes us human beings is bound up in the social dimensions that shape and are shaped by our biology. As human beings we are social creatures: we need society and society needs each of us to function. The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle put it this way:

> He who is unable to live in society or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god.
>
> *(Politics)*

We are all neither beasts nor gods. Therefore, we must understand ourselves in a social context, in a society where we must sink or swim. In this book we consider how we swim, and why we sometimes sink.

1

An Overview of Themes

The focus of this book is the development of competence—defined as the ability to succeed in life's major challenges. What are these challenges? Although different cultures have different emphases and themes, there are some common elements. Among these are the ability to master the roles of worker, citizen, lover, and parent.

Competence is thus more than a generalized abstract quality. It is defined and measured in terms of specific situations or contexts. Intelligence—broadly defined—is certainly important. We use "intelligence" here in the sense developed by Robert Sternberg (1985). In his book *Beyond IQ* Sternberg refers to three kinds of intelligence. The first consists of the ability to process information quickly and accurately—"componential" intelligence. This is the kind of intelligence measured by most IQ tests. A person needs at least an average amount of this form of intelligence to succeed in most situations (only a few specialized settings require high levels of this sort of intelligence).

Beyond componential intelligence is creative intelligence—the ability to recombine elements in new ways to solve novel problems, to see new patterns in experience and data. Suppose you were given a stopwatch and told to figure out the height of a building? How many different strategies could you come up with? This would be one measure of creative intelligence.

A third kind of intelligence is social. How effective are you at reading people and influencing their behavior? Just as componential intelligence tends to involve analyzing and manipulating symbols (e.g., solve for X where $2X + 42 = 16X - 23$), social intelligence tends to involve analyzing and manipulating people and social situations (e.g., how can you persuade the manager of a building to show you the building's blueprints so that you can discover its height?).

Of course, intelligence, or general "adaptivity" as psychologists often call it, plays a large part in determining whether or not one will handle situations competently. But there is more (McClelland, 1973). *Communication skills* are vitally important. One must be able to communicate accurately in word, look, or gesture. One must send and receive messages accurately. *Patience* is also important. Delaying one's response to a stimulus as long as it takes to respond effectively is a skill relevant to success in many situations. Likewise, it helps to have a reservoir of self-esteem and self-confidence to go along with social and intellectual abilities. We can call this generally positive orientation toward oneself and toward one's ability to master the world—*"ego development."*

Where does competence come from? How do people get it? By and

large, they develop it in childhood, and their families and communities play a large role in the process. Furthermore, within some general guidelines that we will consider as we go along, many different strategies and tactics lead to developing competence. Many alternate social arrangements are developmentally sound; they are different but genuinely equal. Therefore, we are led to a commitment to *pluralism*, to letting families and communities utilize and pursue their different strategies and tactics for producing competent children within some common agreement on basic principles such as the need for love, affection, and acceptance. We respect diversity, but want to search for ways to ensure that where there really are general standards, all families and communities can and do meet those standards. Pluralism implies diversity within fundamental consensus or agreement on basic principles. Throughout this book we seek pluralist models of human development as a guide for professional helpers. As our society becomes more ethnically and racially diverse, this becomes ever more important.

To do justice to our central themes—the development of competence and pluralism—we need to find some way to pull apart and then reassemble the complex interconnections among child, family, and social environment. We have found an intellectual tool for accomplishing this ambitious task. It is an ecological model of human development elaborated by human developmentalist Urie Bronfenbrenner. Bronfenbrenner's approach suits us well because:

1. It focuses on the developing child in the real world.
2. It pays a lot of attention to the social environment in its many diverse forms.
3. It recognizes the essentially active role of the individual—shaping as well as being shaped by social contexts.
4. It sees the social environment as a grand human experiment, and thus invites our efforts to improve it, to make it better.

An Overview of Topics

With all this in mind, our book begins with a discussion of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 we expand upon the model to analyze the issue of social risk and opportunity for children. Chapter 4 looks at the family as the primary environment for children. In Chapters 5 and 6 we examine two fundamental topics: the child as a biological organism, and childbearing and child rearing. Chapter 7 explores the fundamental issues of identity and ethnicity. Chapter 8

addresses the child's community and neighborhood. In Chapters 9 and 10 we outline how human services and social policy work with regard to children. Chapter 11 concludes the book by setting the issues of children, family, and social environment in the broader perspective of our society's history and future. Having reached the end, let's begin again with a more detailed introduction to these chapters and then proceed to greater depth.

The Ecology of Human Development

Chapter 2 discusses several factors that influence developing individuals. Each of these can be tied to one or more situations or "contexts" within which people develop. *Contexts* of development are those regularly occurring environmental settings that can affect development by presenting risks or opportunities. Some of the relevant developmental contexts are family, friendship groups, neighborhoods, schools, communities, states, and nations. We can arrange them on a scale from smallest (microsystems) to largest (macrosystems). Events that take place at each of these contextual levels have effects on children and their families.

Subsequent chapters concentrate on the various contexts more specifically. These more detailed analyses, however, should not detract from our explicit premise that the subsystems of the overall ecological system are inextricably interrelated, one with the other. We hope to demonstrate throughout this text the *interconnectedness* of the various actors and activities in the human ecology of the child. The degree of cooperation among these interconnected systems is a vital issue for those concerned with the quality or "habitability" of the social environment.

Contexts can be positive or negative influences on development—or both at one time or another. Depending on the balance of the multiple factors (ranging from individual biological endowments to environmental forces), individuals or families are exposed to many types of developmental risk and opportunity. We introduce this notion of *sociocultural risk* and *opportunity* in Chapter 2. Later in Chapter 3, we elaborate on it in greater detail.

Sociocultural Risk and Opportunity

Chapter 3 lays out more specifically the theme of sociocultural risk and opportunity. Disruption of the sociocultural systems that surround individual development results in the disruption of people's lives. This relationship is a basic equation in human development. Chapter 3 con-

centrates on relating the aspects of risk and opportunity to the social dimensions of the ecological system—from micro- to macro. For example, it considers the impact of smaller households in the United States, styles of raising children, emotional climates in the family, density of communities, local employment levels, conditions in the work place, national economic and political attitudes, and war, all as important contributors to or detractors from child and family development.

We undertake a discussion of pluralism in Chapter 3. Considered as a macrosystem issue, pluralism leads us to recognize that our culture is comprised of a diversity of traditions, each with its own strengths and weaknesses relative to any particular environmental condition. Our approach recognizes and respects the diversity of Americans. Pluralism stresses the importance of fostering the strengths in a people's special heritage. A pluralistic perspective helps us avoid imposing one cultural view upon another. It promotes tolerance and enhances the creative approaches available to human services workers and researchers. However, pluralism has its own set of challenges. Most important is gaining respect for diversity culture-wide, and divesting dominant groups of some decision-making power. Many of us tend to view "different" as meaning "less good," with the underlying danger that dominant beliefs, habits, and attitudes can be foisted unjustifiably on those with fewer numbers and less political clout. A concern for "empowerment" at all levels flows naturally from our ecological perspective.

The Family as a Social System

The discussion of both risk and opportunity on the one hand and pluralism on the other leads us to the family. In Chapter 4 we move from bigger levels of analysis (cultures and societies) to inquire into a smaller level, the family—its various types and functions within our social system. Utilizing sociohistorical, cross-cultural, and family systems perspectives to understand the variety of views regarding families, we review some interesting patterns: First, we draw a distinction between the abstract notion of "family" (what families *should be* based on dominant views) versus the particular types of families that exist (the different ways families actually *are*). Crucial to an understanding of pluralism and environmental influences is appreciation of the conflicts that often result from the imposition of the abstract "ideal" family on specific "real" families.

Are families important? The simple fact that humans have created family units in various forms throughout history and across cultures suggests the answer to this question. Chapter 4 makes the case that

families are the mediators between individuals and their society. The various forms families take are related to their adaptiveness to contextual constraints. As well, many changes in the sociocultural environment are responses to the collective force of families. Interplay between social systems is the key here.

We explore family systems in detail in this chapter, emphasizing models that consider relationships between families and their settings in terms of stages of family development. Families change both in size and structure. Therefore, it is inappropriate to view them as static entities. How do families work? This becomes a central question in light of the almost overwhelming and complicated array of pressures involved. Forces within families (e.g., family goals, drives, and structure), and forces outside families (e.g., links to society, community/neighborhood make-up) are topics that we must consider.

The Developing Child

In Chapter 5 we descend our analytical ladder still further to consider the developing organism—the child. Children have been viewed quite differently throughout history. Differing perceptions of children's abilities and developmental agendas have resulted in wholly different descriptions of and proscriptions for proper and healthy growth. Is the child basically innocent and to be taught, or inherently wicked and to be punished? Many questions like these pervade the history of childhood and contemporary issues such as child abuse.

At the individual level of analysis, the biological or physiological aspects of development assume a prominent position. The focus here is on the intricate interrelationship between individual make-up and environmental forces. Chapter 5 broadly reviews the stages of development from conception through prenatal–perinatal development, early, middle, and late childhood. At each level, we discuss developmental landmarks (e.g., key changes and infant reactiveness, early language development, gender identity, as well as thinking ability and adolescent maturation). We introduce questions about the relative contribution of heredity and environment, and explore the relationships among biological, psychological, and social influences.

Childbearing and Child Rearing

Individual development represents our basic unit of analysis. However, individual development is intertwined with the other, broader levels. Having suspended our primarily social concerns in Chapter 5, we return to them in Chapter 6. Chapter 6 begins our journey back up through the ecological system, with the eventual goal being a discussion

of society in its largest sense. We revisit the family and investigate more specifically the most important family functions, the bearing and rearing of children.

In every culture, having a child is an important event celebrated in traditional folkways and institutionalized rituals. Also, the culturally defined correct manner of raising one's children is generally specified for parents and other caregivers. Indeed, the lack of clear messages for parents on how to rear children is one of the stressful things American parents face. In this chapter, we are primarily concerned with the dynamics of parent–child relationships. Chapter 5 supplies the child development foundation necessary for understanding parent–child interactions, and Chapter 6 relates this information about individual development to the child's first and primary context, the family.

Childbearing is the first topic we consider in this chapter. There are many influences on this miraculous event. Most births in the United States take place in a hospital, and this setting, with its related practices, exerts influence over the possibilities and probabilities of early experiences between parents and their children. However, not all hospitals are alike, and various forms of childbirth practices—some old, some new—are available. Each can have an impact on the childbearing experience. This variety of possible practices involves changes in the physical setting (e.g., home-like hospital rooms and dimly lit delivery rooms), the psychological atmosphere (e.g., supportive versus insensitive) and the range of participants at each stage (e.g., dad's presence in the delivery room). The context of this birthing experience then is linked to early parent–child interaction, and to later parent–child relationships.

The child rearing section of this chapter picks up from the point of early experience to explore changes in parent–child interaction throughout the family's life span. We discuss the emotional climate within a family, rearing styles, the roles of various participants, and other adult–child relationships in terms of their impact on the intellectual development and competencies of children and the various patterns of parent–child relationships that ensue. Again, we view the family as the basic unit of human experience embedded within a series of environmental contexts. We consider cultural and institutional constraints on the family to be quite important, and we recognize them as professional issues, for the family is the mediator of sociocultural risks and opportunities for children and parents.

Identity and Ethnicity

American society is undergoing a rebirth of ethnic consciousness. The growing demographic and political influence of "people of color" has

forced this on a society reluctant to make a commitment to multi-culturism. In Chapter 7 we explore the relationships between ethnicity and personal identity. How do we interpret and approach cultural differences? What do they mean for child development?

The Territory of Childhood

Chapters 5 and 6 offer a grounding in individual and interpersonal development, and thus provide a turning point in our analysis. We turn back to the task of understanding the social environment *around* families, having examined the social environment *within* families. Chapter 8 begins this process by focusing on the neighborhood and community levels of the ecology. Here we deal with the first wave of influence outside the family. As children are developing within families so families develop within neighborhoods and communities. Various attributes of these contexts affect the quality of a neighborhood as an environment for families. How densely populated is the area? What type of context for child development results from the design, amount, and level of maintenance of local housing? How active are family-supporting networks in the neighborhoods?

American communities are not static in nature. They change, in response to their internal dynamics and in response to broader social forces. Changes have occurred in response to historical events like mass immigration and world wars. Local business and industry managers, politicians, and other "social influentials" make decisions that also result in changes. Communities respond to changing levels of ethnic influence, and many are experiencing increasing diversity and decreasing homogeneity. Communities are urban, suburban, and rural. They are old, new, and in between. Most of all, neighborhoods and communities are contexts within which families and children behave, grow, and develop. As we demonstrate, what goes on at this level of the social ecology has much to do with the positive or negative course that individual development takes.

Developmental Issues in Human Services

Human service agencies and systems form an important link between families and neighborhoods, on the one hand, and state and national agendas for service delivery, on the other. Chapter 9 deals with many issues in the delivery of human services as they relate to the themes and concerns derived from our ecological analysis of developmental risk and opportunity. We delve into several issues in an effort to suggest some

alternatives to conventional service practice. What is the proper role of the human service provider? What is the correct timing for intervention? What should be the scope of intervention? Where should a family's inalienable right to privacy begin, and is this threshold always the same? How are the costs of service delivery weighed against the benefits?

A brief historical background provides a perspective for discussing the present day politics of providing human services. These political, even philosophical, trends of thought have a great impact on the sort of practices and services that society and individual professionals see as legitimate. The nature of social supports, like many notions discussed in this book, is not a uniform and unchanging entity. Indeed, changes in attitudes result in changes in practices. Should we be "hands off" regarding our families, or rush in at the earliest sign of difficulty? What are the criteria for such decisions, and who is the proper decision-maker? What are the goals of the human services?

Families have the largest share of responsibility for producing competent members of society. Services provided to children and families by the state imply society's responsibility to compensate for forces in the family or beyond the family's control that by nature are detrimental to development. The interdependence issue arises again as we note the mutual obligations of family and state to improve and maintain healthy human development. We discuss new models for facilitating healthy development. Based in notions of shared responsibility, interdependence, and the strengths of people, we recommend a mix of formal and informal support and suggest various programmatic models.

Social Policy, Children, and Their Families

Chapter 10 brings us to the point of discussing how the mechanics of human services and the conditions of risk and opportunity are rooted in social policy. Here we discuss the many problems of families and children as they relate to social policy at the broader levels of the social ecology and different institutions and agencies within it. New perspectives on contexts of development come into focus so that we include transportation authorities, big business, and government as actors in the family's life together. The decisions made in these contexts reverberate through communities, the workplace, and service agencies, eventually taking their toll on or providing support for children and their families.

After a description of the policy scene, we make some suggestions about how to influence policy makers. How does someone who has embraced an innovative approach go about encouraging its implementation? Although there is no single method to influencing policy, and, of

course, nothing is guaranteed, there are some basic approaches. One is the systematic documentation of the problem. Following initial identification is the gathering of information about who is being affected, who makes the important decisions, and so on. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the most important aspect of policy intervention: personal commitment to improving the lives of children and their families.

In Conclusion: The Issue Is Human Quality

Chapter 11 seeks to place our professional concern for the social environment of children and families in its broadest cultural and historical context. Where are we going as a society? Are we heading toward economic, political, and environmental disaster? Or, are we on the verge of cultural breakthroughs that will lead to a more humane, sane, and ecologically sustainable society? Is the current scene the precursor of an ugly future in which we turn our backs on children in favor of conspicuous materialistic consumption? Or, can we see the dawn of a brighter day? We think society's treatment of families will go a long way toward answering these questions. Chapter 11 explains our thinking.

Afterword: What Does It Mean to Be Human?

Throughout this book we speak of human development. But what does it mean to be human? What is this humanness we are seeking to protect, to conserve, to nurture, and to enhance in our efforts as professionals? Although it takes us far beyond the day-to-day confines of social science and professional services, we cannot end without considering this biggest of questions. Therefore, we have included an afterword to briefly raise and discuss the question of humanness. We think the answer lies somewhere in our ability and obligation to wrestle with the issue of good and evil. We believe this discussion is a fitting conclusion to our book.

Conclusion

Having mapped out our path through the complex tangle of human development in social context we are ready to begin our journey. The first step leads to our ecological perspective on human development in Chapter 2.

2

The Ecology of Human Development

James Garbarino and Robert H. Abramowitz

> Was ist das Schwerste von allem?
> Was dir das Leichste dunket,
>   mit den Augen Zu sehen,
> Was vor den Augen dir liegt.
>   Goethe, *Xenien aus dem Nachlass #45*
>   (What is the most difficult of all?
>   That which seems to you the easiest,
>   To see with one's eyes
>   what is lying before them.)

What makes a person? This simple question lies before our eyes, but the answer is hard to see. Chapter 2 explores the ecology of human development, those forces in the person's environment that affect and influence development. This ecological approach includes not only the immediate family and home environment, but also the wider social and cultural world as it affects the child and family. Urie Bronfenbrenner's model of the human ecosystem guides our discussion, making connections between children in families and in communities and the larger society that surrounds them. The human ecosystem model is much like the study of the natural ecology, focusing on the interactions between subjects at various levels of the environment as they affect each other. It differs in its emphasis on the active role of the human being in creating and recreating its environment.

Human Beings as Social Animals

By virtue of their helplessness in the first few years of life, human beings depend on others for their very survival. The developing infant's

basic reality lies in the relationship he or she has to primary care givers—particularly the mother, in most families in most societies. It is impossible for individuals to exist independently of the influence of other people. Indeed, that which makes us human is our relatedness—linguistic, intellectual, economic, political, and religious. Aristotle correctly called us social animals.

This interdependence is part of a social systems perspective. A systems approach derives from the idea that all living entities share some common features.

All systems (from the simplest bacterium to the most complex people or groups) run on *energy*. They draw energy from the environment beyond their *boundaries* (as when a person eats food) or generate it from resources they contain (as when a person burns fat stored in the body).

The nature of these boundaries determines whether a system is closed (impenetrable boundaries) or open (permeable boundaries). Of course, no system in real life is likely to be either totally closed or totally open.

Systems seek *equilibrium* as conditions inside and outside their boundaries change. They *adapt* in ways designed to restore equilibrium. And systems are connected—the action of one influences the status of others. This is called *feedback*. Put all this together and we see the human being in the midst of an ebbing and flowing network of systems.

We believe that any discussion of human development must consider the contexts or settings in which development occurs. Like the biologist who must study an animal in context by learning about the animal's habitat, sources of food, predators, and social practices, the complete study of people involves examining how people live and grow in the social wild. The term "environment" here includes everything outside the organism. The developing child's setting includes family, friends, neighborhood, and school, as well as less immediate forces such as laws, social attitudes, and institutions that directly or indirectly affect the child. The result of these forces acting on the individual is called "environmental press."

"Environmental press" is the combined influence of forces working in a setting to shape the behavior and development of people in that setting. Environmental press arises from the circumstances confronting and surrounding an individual that generate psychosocial momentum and tend to guide that individual in a particular direction. We shape our environments and then those environments shape us. Rudolph Moss (1979) called this the principle of "progressive conformity."

As we shall see, the child's environment has specific physical dimensions, but it has multiple cultural facets and multiple social levels and is a complex network of forces. Our orientation to context and the interaction between organism and environment defines an ecological perspec-

tive, and like all fields using an ecological framework, we look beyond the individual organism to the organism's environment for questions and explanations about the organism's behavior and development. We do so from a tradition exemplified by developmentalist Urie Bronfenbrenner.

Experiments by Nature and Design

Bronfenbrenner represents a compelling "fourth force" for students of human development and social service practitioners (with the first three "forces" having behaviorist, psychodynamic, and humanistic perspectives).

Until recently, it could hardly be said that the experimental ecology of human development was a systematic theoretical conception. Indeed, it did not aspire to the status of a theory as we use the term in speaking of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Rogers' humanistic theory, Piaget's cognitive theory, or Skinner's reinforcement theory. Rather, it was an emerging critique of conventional developmental psychology; a critique of what it studied and how it studied it. It then became an effort to define a field of inquiry, and its principal use has been as a framework for organizing knowledge, generating research questions and evaluating social policy (e.g., in the areas of child maltreatment, child care, and handicapped children). We will use it in this way throughout this text.

From efforts to understand issues of social policy and professional practice arose a set of propositions about the study of human development. These propositions and the rationale for them constitute the core of Bronfenbrenner's book *The Ecology of Human Development* (1979). This view sees the process of development as one that enlarges the child's conception of the world and the child's ability to act on that world. We need not go very far in summarizing this view here (but will do so later), except to say that it incorporates different levels of related social systems around the developing child in which what happens outside the immediate experiences of a child (i.e., outside a child's "microsystem") affects what goes on inside those experiences as much as if not more than do the internal forces of the child (biology and psychology). The frustrating thing about all this (and the source of its creative analytic power) is that almost everything in the content of development is variable, almost nothing is fixed, and the answer to most questions of the sort "Does X cause Y?" is "it depends."

What contributions has this perspective on the ecology of human development made? There are at least four that deserve attention.

1. Provoking a serious response from "conventional" developmental psychology.
2. Enhancing the common ground for collaboration and dialogue between European and American students of human development.
3. Providing a vehicle for serious interchange between sociologists and developmental psychologists.
4. Developing a model for defining issues, formulating questions, and approaching social policy problems.

The first contribution has been to provoke a response from more "conventional" or "establishment" developmental psychologists. The ecological critique, although initially resisted by some, has permeated American developmental psychology since the late 1970's. Major figures feel compelled to respond to the criticism with words—if not always with deeds. And although this is only a necessary beginning to genuine reform, it is significant. For thought to proceed, an adequate conceptual language is imperative. One contribution of *The Ecology of Human Development* has been to provide such a policy- and practice-oriented conceptual language with which to analyze the validity of research and theory in developmental psychology, and thus contribute to a dialogue on the process of this "science" of ours.

A second contribution has been to increase the basis for European-American dialogue. The ecology of human development contains three themes that link it to characteristically European approaches to human development. First, it emphasizes the "critical mode." Second, it emphasizes the subjective side of experience (phenomenology), a major theme in European work. This is no coincidence, since one of the formative influences of Bronfenbrenner's work was Kurt Lewin, a German psychologist of the first order. In seeking to integrate American interest in the "objective" with European concern for the "subjective," a more valid conception of "meaning" is emerging. Third, the ecology of human development stresses the role of political economy in shaping human development. This emphasis is undoubtedly strong (many would say too strong) in European work. It naturally leads to cross-cultural research, which permits us to observe, document, and analyze the effects of macrosystem variation.

In a similar vein, the ecology of human development has contributed to—and is in part a result of—serious dialogue between sociologists and developmental psychologists. In the United States such collaboration is rare, and rarely has it been as productive as Bronfenbrenner's association with Devereux, Brim, Kohn, Clausen, and Elder, for example. Indeed, some would say the ecology of human development is the result

of a deliberate sociological "conspiracy" to co-opt developmental psychology. The ecology of human development is more than sociology, however, for two reasons. First, it places the *developing* organism at center stage, as an *active* force shaping social experience. Second, it envisions experimentation at *all* levels of environmental systems and does not accept the static or deterministic thrust of sociology. The subtitle of Bronfenbrenner's book, *Experiments by Nature and Design*, is significant and leads naturally to a concern for policy.

The final area in which a significant contribution has been made is in the development of a model or "paradigm." In this, the results of a positive conspiracy with sociologists are also evident. In addition to the theoretical propositions being developed, research is being generated. Moreover, researchers are being trained to have an appreciation for the ecology of human development. And now, students can have access to texts based on the model. A full paradigm requires all these elements.

The experimental ecology of human development is *not* a theory as the term is used here. Rather, it is a point of view or definition of a field of inquiry that aids in question formulation. Its content is that of other disciplines. Indeed, each of the systems (and levels of systems) proposed in the scheme has its own attendant discipline or disciplines. Sociology, anthropology, political science, philosophy, and economics tend to deal with macrosystem issues. Biology, psychobiology, and cognitive psychology deal with the organism as a system. Social psychology seeks to explain behavior in the microsystems of groups.

Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development is different from traditional human ecology (cf. Hawley, 1950) and ecological psychology (cf. Barker & Schoggen, 1973). One of these is a substantive discipline and the other a substantive theory. The experimental ecology of human development is not really either a discipline or a substantive theory. Its principal virtue is its potential for eclecticism. In fact, it requires such an eclecticism—or "interdisciplinary focus"—because it focuses on inter-system relationships. This characteristic is a valuable one in the present intellectual epoch when narrow specialization (and *intra*system analysis) is so prevalent, and indeed is embedded in the dominant paradigms.

The experimental ecology of human development basically takes a critical stance. It is an "imagination machine": It generates questions (good questions) in response to the statement of policy issues, substantive interpretations of research findings, sociohistorical events, and intervention strategies. This is the sense in which we join Bronfenbrenner in embracing Kurt Lewin's maxim that "There is nothing so practical as a good theory." In this way the ecology of human development is "limited" in its scope and purpose to improving the *quality* of our knowledge

(something the human service field so desperately needs). If we recognize that qualitative issues outweigh quantitative ones, the significance of this becomes even more apparent. But it goes further to embrace Dearborn's Dictum: "If you want to understand something, try to change it." Bronfenbrenner has tried this with his view of child development and its relation to social policy and practice, e.g., in his activist/scholar role in the development of the National Head Start Program. We can make good use of the progress that has been made.

The Interaction between Person and Environment

Within an ecological framework, the balance of environmental forces is not the sole determinant of outcomes for an organism. The character of the individual organism also figures significantly. Those who study people from an ecological perspective view individuals and their environments as mutually shaping systems, each changing over time, each adapting in response to changes in the other. Therefore, while environmental press is the environment's contribution to individual—environment transactions, the individual brings to the situation a unique arrangement of personal resources, a particular level of development, and other attributes, including temperament. Different people thus react differently to the same environment (just as different environments react differently to the same person).

This *interaction* between individual and environment forms the basis of an ecological approach to human development. This view sees the process of development as the expansion of the child's conception of the world and the child's ability to act on that world. An individual organism and the environment engage in reciprocal interaction: each influences the other in an ever-changing interplay of biology and society—with intelligence and emotion as the mediators, and identity and competence as the outcomes.

The relationship between parent and child, for example, changes and becomes more complex over time as each continually learns from and responds to the other. Neither can be viewed as a constant causing the other to develop; rather *the relationship itself* is a cause of change in both parents and children. One of the reasons brothers and sisters often have different experiences with the same parents is that the process of rearing one child makes the parents treat a later child in a different fashion. We must add to these differences the temperament of the child and changes in the community.

A major contribution of an ecological approach is the way it focuses

our attention on the relation of development to both the immediate and the more distant cultural environment. Parents raising a child respond to this cultural environment, which is a complex web of activities, beliefs, and values. The ecology of human development is really the study of how a whole society functions to raise the children who will eventually take their place within that society. Children are the bridge between past and future, and society is always in a state of "becoming." A child's emergent identity is thus a snapshot of culture and society.

All over the world societies have different value systems, norms of behavior, and forms of social relations—different cultures. Yet some basic human needs are the same everywhere: food, shelter, affection, and continuity (Mead, 1966). In our society, as in most others, development varies greatly from person to person and group to group due to factors ranging from the different ways we go about meeting individual needs to the diversity of individuals themselves. The opportunities or risks for development that each individual faces depend on a particular mental and physical make-up and the type of environment inhabited. "Ecological niche" is the joining of both.

By "opportunities for development" we mean a person–environment relation in which the developing child is offered material, emotional, and social encouragement compatible with the needs and capacities of the child at a given time. The best fit between child and environment must be worked out by experience for each child within some very broad guidelines. Chapter 3 considers some of these guidelines, including the role of ethnicity and culture.

Risks to development can come from both direct threats and the absence of opportunities for development. Besides such obvious biological risks as malnutrition or injury, there are sociocultural risks that threaten development. Sociocultural risk refers to the impoverishment in the child's world of essential experiences and relationships. Chapter 3 considers these risks in detail and tackles the complex and difficult issue of culture as a source of risk.

We know that biology and society (or nature and nurture as we often refer to these forces) can work to enhance or impede development. Nature and nurture can work together or in opposition. The extent of risk and damage, opportunity and benefit experienced by a specific individual depends on the interplay of these two forces. In extreme cases, facts of nature can all but overwhelm environmental differences. For example, severe genetic or prenatal deficits can bring about severe mental retardation; an exceptionally gifted organism can triumph over serious adversity. Likewise, environmental conditions can be so powerful as to override all but the most powerful and extreme conditions of biology.

For example, an extremely toxic environment can produce sickness and impaired development in most children who encounter it. To make the point in the extreme, consider that individual variations in lung capacity would be trivial for people left unprotected on the surface of the moon: all would perish in moments due to the inhospitable environment.

In all but the most extreme cases of either nature or nurture, optimal conditions of the one can do much to ameliorate developmental risk or negative influences arising from the other. This is one of the keys to successful human services: help where you can overcome what you cannot change.

Understanding the interaction between nature and nurture in development is no easy matter. In fact, it is so difficult that most researchers do not even try to handle both parts of the equation at once. Rather, they tend to hold one side constant while letting the other side vary—as in studying genetically identical twins (nature constant) reared apart (nurture varied) to learn about the role of nature and nurture in intelligence, or as in seeing how different newborns (nature varied) respond to the same stimulus (nurture constant) such as a smiling face. Or, they systematically vary one while letting the other vary randomly—as in presenting children of different ages in a school with three different teaching styles and studying the overall effect of each. Thus, a researcher is rarely able to really look at the interplay of nature and nurture in development.

Because of this complexity, we rarely know what the real limits, potentials, and costs are in human development. Where risk is concerned, this is extremely unfortunate because the inevitable issues of policy making and service delivery *need* a science of the possibilities, along with the costs and benefits, of alternative experiences to the individual and to the society. In computing these costs and benefits, we have much to learn from the ways in which history fits into individual and cultural development. Understanding what has come before can illuminate the questions we ask today.

In a sense, our interest in development is really an interest in biography. We must discover how the lives of individuals and the lives of societies are interdependent. Events taking place at the level of nations—the big picture—often reverberate right down into the day-to-day life of the individual family—the little picture—such as was the case in the 1990–1991 Gulf War. Military mobilization led to widespread parent–child separation. Conversely, millions of individual decisions can add up to major social changes, such as when millions of women individually decide to delay childbearing so that they can pursue careers. This interplay of biography and history is at the heart of our

interest in human development. Although easy enough to convey in generalities, this ecological conception of development is very difficult to apply in practice.

In using the word "ecological" here we mean to convey an interest in the way the organism and its immediate environment (the "ecological niche") respond to each other. It means that we cannot account for or understand the intimate relationships between the child and the parents without understanding how the conditions surrounding the family affect interaction between child and parent and define each family's particular experience, with culture and ethnicity being one of the connecting bridges.

The most important thing about this ecological perspective is that it reveals connections that might otherwise go unnoticed and helps us look beyond the immediate and the obvious to see where the most significant influences lie. Trying to understand many important developmental phenomena is like a shell game. You think you are sure where the pea is, only to find it is really somewhere else. Let us consider a specific example.

The Great Depression as a Source of Risk

What was the effect of the Great Depression of the 1930s on families? This question is actually like the one that asks, "What is more important, nature or nurture?" The answer is, "it depends." Few events—even things such as economic depressions that may seem obviously and totally bad—have a guaranteed, universal, and inevitable significance. Most derive their importance from the context in which they occur. In the case of the Great Depression, we have more than just speculation on which to go.

Economic deprivation is generally recognized as one of the principal sources of sociocultural risk to children. Major analyses of family life conducted by blue-ribbon panels of experts repeatedly conclude that poverty remains a critical threat to family life. The National Academy of Sciences (1976) and the Carnegie Foundation (Keniston, 1977) both cited inadequate economic resources as the central villain in undermining the adequacy of families as contexts for child development.

Inadequate family income translates into developmental risk for children in several ways. First, it cuts the child off from many important opportunities—for high quality health care and education in many cases. Second, it reflects parental inability to succeed in the economic life of the community. This failure may derive from incompetence, lack

of credentials, discrimination, an inadequate supply of adequate jobs, or some combination of all four. For whatever reason, poverty is associated with poor child outcomes across the board. Inadequate income is not the only source of troubles for families, of course.

Rich people have family troubles, too. But anyone who looks at the data on the connection between poverty and family life must agree with Sophie Tucker when she said, "I've been rich and I've been poor, and rich is better."

It is exciting, therefore, to see a good study of the consequences of economic deprivation on human development. Conducted by sociologist Glen Elder (1974; Elder & Rockwell, 1977), this study permits us to look at the impact of the Great Depression of the 1930s on the children of that era. Two longitudinal studies of child development had been launched by an earlier generation of investigators in the period of 1929–1932 in Northern California, one in Oakland, the other in Berkeley. The first dealt with children born in 1920–1921 and the second with children born in 1928–1929. Both studies included middle-class and working-class families. A wide range of information was obtained about the children and their parents. The data was collected for more than forty years. When Elder came to the project in 1962, he saw a unique opportunity to explore the impact of the Great Depression on the life course of the children in these two studies. The data permitted him to look at how the Depression affected children as a function of the following:

1. Age: The Berkeley children were just entering school at the worst of the Depression, whereas the Oakland children were teenagers by that time.
2. Social class: Both middle-class and blue-collar families were included.
3. Level of economic deprivation: Some families were relatively unaffected, whereas others lost more than 35% of their income.
4. Sex: Both males and females were included.
5. Pre-Depression quality of family life: Both strong and weak marriages had been identified.
6. Self-concept and subjective analysis of personal experience.

Would you expect that the Depression affected all these subgroups equally and in the same areas? No. Does X cause Y? It depends. Elder found a very complex pattern of results. These findings are worth noting here because they demonstrate just how complicated this matter of sociocultural risk really is and just why we need the ecological framework to make sense of the data.

In families where the husband lost his job or much of his income and the marital relationship was weak, the mother often led the way in blaming the father for "his" economic failure. When this happened, girls

were encouraged by the dominant performance of their mothers and boys were disillusioned by their father's failure, with the result that girls had less personality and emotional problems than boys in this case.

Remember that in the 1930s it was customary for men to be the bread-winners. Thus, economic "failure" meant a severe loss of status.

All these factors were intensified if the sons and daughters were young children when the economic deprivation occurred, because they were then more dependent on their parents and were exposed to the new situation for a longer period of time in the home. On the other hand, a strong marital bond was strengthened under the pressures of economic loss as families banded together in crisis. The effects were greatest for middle-class families—the positive effects on teenagers from homes with strong marital bonds and the negative effects on young children from homes with a weak marital relationship. Perhaps blue-collar families are more accustomed to dealing with unemployment and income loss. Expectations shape outcomes.

These findings all refer to the long-term effects of economic depriva-tion. The short-term effects were somewhat different. Some of the groups showing the worst long-term prognosis showed few short-term problems, and vice versa. We should note that all these findings come from families with a pre-Depression record of relative stability—parents were married and had an adequate work history. These were not the "hard-core" unemployed, nor were they single-parent households. For them, the experience of economic deprivation was an *event*, not a perma-nent condition. That is a significant part of the story and cautions against simple generalizations about other groups—such as the single-parent or chronic welfare case, the "underclass" about whom much has been written in recent years.

As if all this complexity were not enough, we must remember that the Great Depression was followed by the economic "boom" of World War II and the 1950s. Military service and later job opportunities beckoned. Teenage male "victims" of that era were ready to benefit from that op-portunity while the child "victims" were not.

What is more, one response to events of the Depression itself was the creation and expansion of our whole social welfare system—unemploy-ment insurance, Social Security, and the like. Ironically, some now con-sider this very system to be part of today's problems, saying that it stimulates and reinforces dependency. Also, Depression families were much more likely to see their economic deprivation as being their own fault, as opposed to families today with their greater appreciation for the influence of impersonal economic forces in arbitrarily imposing financial hardship on individual workers (Terkel, 1963). All these things add to the already large number of variables that we must take into account.

To be a child during a time of economic or social disaster adds an

element of potential risk that is not present in less troubled times. However, whether the impact of those troubled times damages a child depends on how those forces are experienced by the child's family and community, and how they are transmitted to the child. Elder's study makes this clear. Families who were not directly hit with income loss did not show the effects that deprived families did; some occupations were more affected than were others; some communities suffered more than others.

What is more, we must keep in mind that the individual is not a passive participant. While Elder's account stresses the average effects of economic change and development, there was, of course, substantial individual variation. Some individuals were more affected than others; some capitalized on opportunities whereas others did not. It is precisely the characteristics of each individual, in concert with social factors, that make the ecological approach a valid model of the real world. Rarely is risk absolute; nor is it static. The child's vulnerability changes. Risk can be overcome or "disarmed." This comes through in Elder's study. However, the more impoverished the child's world is, the more likely the child is to fail when hurt by social, economic, or psychological stress. Risk accumulates in the child's life like a poison.

A Model of Developmental Risk

Before we go further in examining the social origins of risk, it is important to say something more about our model of risk in the life of a child. We start with the recognition that few children escape risk completely— life is like that. Most children have to contend with risk—a parent dies, the family experiences unemployment or poverty, a parent is mentally or physically incapacitated, the child incurs a physical disability, etc.

Research by Rutter, Sameroff, and others tells us that most children can cope with one or two risk factors. It is the *accumulation* of such risks that jeopardizes development—particularly where there are no compensatory forces at work. Consider, for example, the following figure (Figure 2.1) and how it illustrates this principle (Sameroff et al., 1987). It shows that mental retardation is a likely result when the number of risk factors in the child's life exceeds two. It seems most children can cope with one or two of these factors (which in this study included maternal mental illness, early negative parent–child interaction, poverty, low maternal education, single parent households, large family size, lack of family support, parental rigidity, and maternal anxiety).

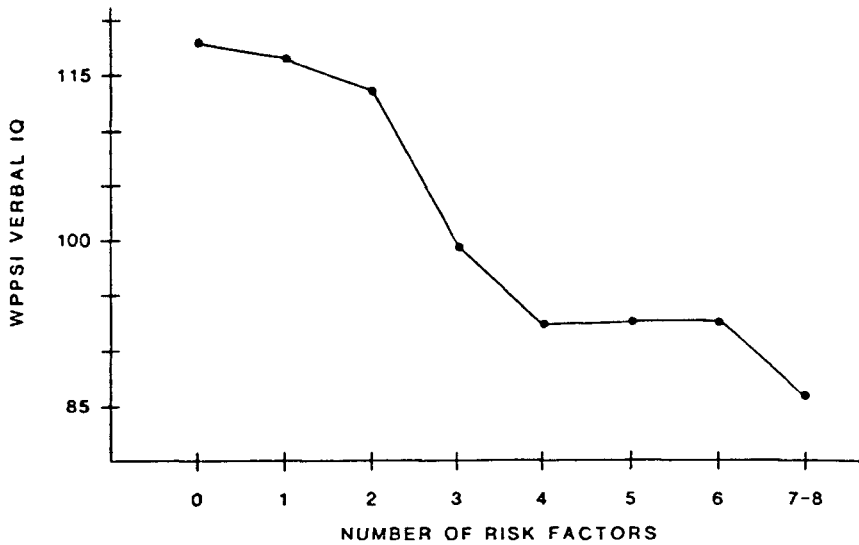We must bear this in mind as we explore our ecological model of risk.

Figure 2.1. Effects of multiple risk scores on preschool intelligence (Sameroff et al., 1987)

In particular, it tells us that even when we confront a child or family facing one or two significant risks we can approach the job of helping with the hope that we can prevent the further accumulation of risk and thus the precipitation of developmental damage.

A Systems Approach to Sociocultural Risk

The framework proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) provides a useful approach to the ecology of human development. It offers some tools to sort out the phenomena, highlight the issues, and formulate the questions we need to ask and answer about sociocultural risk. Like most frameworks, it relies on some special terms, and we need to define them before we can use them. We need them to proceed with the scientific study of how the individual develops interactively with the intermediate social environment and how aspects of the larger social context affect what goes on in the individual's immediate settings.

The child plays an active role in an ever widening world. The newborn shapes the feeding behavior of its mother but is largely confined to a crib or a lap and has limited means of communicating its needs and wants. The 10-year-old, on the other hand, influences many adults and

other children located in many different settings and has many ways of communicating. The world of adolescents is still larger and more diverse, as is their ability to influence it. The child and the environment negotiate their relationship over time through a process of reciprocity—neither is constant, *each* depends on the other. One cannot reliably predict the future of one without knowing something about the other. Does economic deprivation harm development? It depends on how old one is when it hits, what sex one is, how society defines family roles, what the future brings in the way of vocational opportunity, what the quality of family life was in the past, what one's economic expectations and assumptions are, and whether one looks at it in the short or the long term. In other words, it depends.

Bronfenbrenner sees the individual's experience "as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). In asking and answering questions about developmental risk and opportunity, we can and should always be ready to look at the next level "beyond" and "within" to find the questions and the answers. If we see husbands and wives in conflict over lost income, we need to look *beyond* to the economy that puts the husbands out of work and now may welcome the wives into the labor force, as well as to the culture that defines a person's personal worth in monetary terms and that blames the victims of economic dislocation for their losses. But we must also look *within* to the parent–child relationships that are affected by the changing roles and status of the parents. In addition, we must also look *across* to see how the several systems involved (family, workplace, and economy) adjust to new conditions over time. These social forces are the keys to ecological analyses, namely interlocking social systems. Bronfenbrenner (1979) offers a language to express these concerns in a systematic way that permits scientific study.

Microsystem

The level most immediate to the developing individual is the *"microsystem,"* the psychological realities of the actual settings in which the individual experiences and creates day-to-day reality. For children, microsystems are the places they inhabit, the people who live there with them, and the things they do together. At first, for most children, the microsystem is quite small. It is the home, involving interaction with only one or perhaps two people at a time ("dyadic or triadic interaction") doing relatively simple activities such as feeding, bathing, and cuddling. As the child develops, complexity normally increases: the child does more, with more people, in more places. Indeed, in Bronfenbrenner's