3

Family Development Theory

John and Natasha Morrison were looking forward to their retirement in a few years. Their eldest daughter Tamara was just finishing law school and was pregnant with her first child. John Jr., their only son, was doing well in college and planning a career in communications. Their youngest daughter Kamika would soon be graduating from high school. With her college tuition safely tucked away in an education IRA, they were hoping to take retirement in their early sixties. As a couple with active professional careers and three children, they had often dreamed of an extended vacation but had been too busy to take one. They planned to take a grand world tour when they retired.

Natasha's parents, who lived nearby and saw the family regularly, came to visit for Father's Day. The family sat around the picnic table out back and reminisced about the changes in their lives over the years. When the children were young, they all had the same kinds of activities and friends. Now it was as if they were all in their own separate worlds. It was difficult to find time together because each person was so busy and focused on his or her own life. John and Natasha were worried about John's father, who lived 500 miles away and was in poor health. Tamara and her husband were busy getting ready for their first child and establishing their professional careers. John Jr. was beginning to show signs of seriousness about a girlfriend for the first time in his life. Kamika was hardly ever at home anymore, staying busy with her friends and after-school activities. She was particularly interested in dance and recently had made a new friend, Matt, who also wanted to be a dancer.

Everyone gathered around the table to watch John open his Father's Day presents. Kamika seemed very excited. "Daddy, I have the greatest surprise for you! You'll be so excited. I'm going to New York to be a dancer! I've been accepted into a little company in New York where they will train me, and Matt and I are moving there in a month! Isn't that just great?"

HISTORY

Family development theory emerged in the late 1940s, corresponding with the development of the field of family science. It was one of the first family-focused theories,

with a separate identity from psychology or sociology. Psychology-based theories, with their narrower emphasis on individuals, did not fully explain what happened in families with competing individual needs. Sociology-based theories, focused on society and culture, were too broad in their analyses. Thus, family development theory originated from the critiques of these two perspectives.

Evelyn Duvall and Ruben Hill (1948) pointed out that families were social groups that were influenced by developmental processes. Like individuals, families experienced life cycles, with clearly delineated stages, each of which required the accomplishment of specific tasks. But families needed to be studied as a dynamic unit, not as a collection of individuals. According to family developmental theorists, the family life cycle had two major stages—expansion and contraction. During expansion, children are born and raised, whereas during contraction, children leave the family home. This cycle of expansion and contraction gave rise to the term *family life cycle* (Duvall 1957).

In 1948, Duvall and Hill first presented their version of the family life cycle in which they identified tasks that were accomplished by both parents and children. These tasks were grouped into eight stages of development across the family life cycle. Later versions of the theory went beyond the demarcation of stages and tasks and began to focus on changes within the family over time, including transitions and social roles. Duvall later codified these in her textbook *Family Development*, first published in 1957. Updated and republished many times (with revised editions in 1962, 1967, 1971, and 1977), it was one of the most widely used textbooks on the subject for the next thirty years. Thus, Duvall's eight stages of the family life cycle are the best-known stages of family development theory.

Other theorists, building on the foundation laid by Duvall and Hill (1948), worked to expand these concepts. In 1964, Roy Rodgers (1964) developed a version of the theory with twenty-four different stages, but its complexity overshadowed its usefulness. Rodgers (1973) further expanded the concept of family interaction by focusing on three dynamics across the family career. He emphasized that families were influenced by institutional norms, by the expectations from the family itself, and by the expectations of the individuals within the family. In contrast, Joan Aldous (1978, 1996) suggested that family development should be considered in four stages, because families are often in several stages of parenting at the same time. She further recommended the use of the term *family career*, rather than *family life cycle*, because families did not return to the way they were at the beginning of their lives as a family.

In the 1970s and 1980s, some family scholars criticized family development theory because it lacked scientific testability. In 1973, Wesley Burr, a renowned theorist and researcher, reviewed many of the major issues in family studies, including the family life cycle. In his book, Burr (1973) wrote: "It has not yet been proved that the family life cycle will turn out to be a very useful concept in deductive theories" (219). His concern with the theory was that the concepts and variables were not well defined and so could not be properly tested in empirical research. Addressing these concerns, James White published a book in 1991 entitled *Dynamics of Family Development: A Theoretical Perspective*, in which he outlined specific testable propositions and variables for family development theory. White is considered one of the major proponents of family development theory today.

At about the same time, a new variant of family development theory—life course perspective, as applied to families—was being described. The life course perspective went beyond the life cycle view by including additional variables, such as multiple views of time (ontogenetic, generational, and historical), micro- and macro-social contexts, and increasing diversity over time (Bengtson and Allen 1993).

Most recently, Tracey Laszloffy (2002) modified family development theory to address two fundamental weaknesses—the assumption that the stages are universally experienced by all families and the bias toward the experience of a single generation. Her revision, called the systemic family development model, conceptualizes the family as a round, multi-layered cake and helps to visualize the impact of family change on complex multigenerational systems.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Aldous (1978), White (1991), and White and Klein (2008) were helpful in outlining the basic assumptions of family development theory.

Just like individuals, families change over time, and these developmental processes are essential for understanding families. Family development theory focuses on the developmental processes of individuals and families over time. Transitions from one stage to the next are usually related to changes in individuals due to maturation and aging, relationships between members, family structure, and norms associated with family roles. Although early theorists believed that families changed in fairly similar and predictable ways over the life course, more-recent thinking assumes greater variation in how these processes manifest themselves in different families.

There are tasks associated with each stage of development. Tasks are defined on the basis of normative expectations. Each stage is delineated by a set of tasks that must be accomplished to prepare adequately for the next stage of development. Failure to complete a task does not necessarily preclude moving to the next stage of development, but it may limit a family's optimal functioning at the next level. For example, parents who pay too much attention to child rearing and not enough to their own relationship may encounter problems with their relationship after the children leave home. Thus, a family's history (including the extent to which it accomplished its responsibilities at each stage) affects its goals, expectations, and future behaviors.

Institutional norms regulate family behavior. These norms control "which events are permitted, required, and forbidden; the order in which families should sequence stages; and the duration of those stages" (White 1991, 57). These social norms or rules also regulate how family members fulfill their roles within their family. For example, it is still the social norm that people will marry first and then have children, although there are more exceptions to this rule than there were in the past.

Development is reciprocal. The individual development of each family member influences other family members, as well as the overall development of the family. Reciprocally, the family's development also influences the critical periods of individual development. Because there is reciprocity in the interaction of the family and individual development, it is necessary to consider them together.

Families must be viewed in multiple levels of analysis. Family development theory requires that family life be considered in the multiple contexts of the society, the family, and the individual. The social context and/or historical period influence both the processes within the family and the developmental issues encountered by individuals within the family. The larger society, for instance, can exert environmental pressures to behave in certain ways at particular points in the family life cycle. Think about the family in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter. The behavior of Kamika and Matt would not have been acceptable in earlier historical periods.

Families should be viewed over time. One of family development theory's core assumptions is that families are not static but change over time. This *changing over time* is the primary focus of the theory. How and when families change, what they accomplish at different points in time, and why they change can be known only if one studies families over time.

PRIMARY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Family

Family developmental scholars have long debated the most appropriate and inclusive definition of family. Duvall (1977) proposed that the family is composed of "interacting persons related by ties of marriage, birth, or adoption, whose central purpose is to create and maintain a common culture which promotes the physical, mental, emotional, and social development of each of its members" (5). More recent formulations have noted that any definition should include the family as a social group; the family as part of a greater institution of marriage and family; and institutional norms that outline family roles and role relationships (Rodgers and White, 1993). White (1991) offered this definition: "A family is an intergenerational social group organized and governed by social norms regarding descent and affinity, reproduction, and the nurturant socialization of the young" (7).

Family Development

Development occurs as families make the transition from one stage to another. According to Rodgers and White (1993), family development can be analyzed at four different levels: "the *individual* family member, family *relationships*, the family *group*, and the *institution* of family" (231). Thus, for the individual, development might be framed as a particular period of family life, such as "retirement." (John and Natasha Morrison, from the vignette at the beginning of the chapter, will need to reconfigure how they spend their time after they retire. As a couple, retirement may signal a new chapter in their lives together, including more time to travel. In terms of the family group, John and Natasha's retirement may signal the acquisition of new expectations for their adult children; for example, their need for caregiving may affect other family members. At the institutional level, norms may prescribe appropriate behaviors for them as retirees.) As we can see, the dynamics of the family may change over time, dependent on the needs of the individuals, the relationships between them, and the impact of society.

Stages

Probably the most unique aspect of family development theory is its focus on the stages of the family life cycle. These stages are periods of "relative equilibrium in which consensus about the allocation of roles and rules of procedure is high" (Hill 1986, 21). In the model developed by Duvall and Hill, stages are the result of major changes in family size, in the developmental age of the oldest child, or in the work status of the breadwinner(s) (Hill 1986). Stages are thought to be qualitatively distinct from each other, often precipitated by normative events that happen with the passage of time, such as marriages, childbirth, and developmental and educational milestones.

Transitions

One cannot study change without studying transitions. Transitions are the processes that form a bridge between the different states when something changes. In family development theory, transitions are the shifts in roles and identities encountered with changes in developmental stages (Hagestad 1988). (For John and Natasha Morrison, their experience of moving into the middle years may be dependent upon their sense of success in their parenting roles, as well as the degree to which they nurtured their own marital relationship in previous stages.) Ease of transition is dependent on the resolution of the stages beforehand, or the degree to which the stage is perceived to be a crisis. As families shift from one stage to the next, their roles, behaviors, and tasks are reallocated in accordance with their new stage. Some families move easily from one stage to the next, and some do not. Depending on how prepared they are for the new stage, families respond to a change as either a crisis or an opportunity (Rapoport 1963). Family stress is usually greatest at transition points between developmental stages.

According to Rodgers and White (1993), family transitions might be operationalized as *events*. "Events are the transition points between stages" (White (1991, 42). Some developmental events that constitute transitions, such as when one's child begins school, are easy to recognize. Other transitions, such as identifying exactly when a child becomes an adolescent, are more difficult for the family to pinpoint and accommodate. Furthermore, crises can create critical transitions—i.e., those that occur in addition to normally expected transitions, such as an unexpected pregnancy. Focusing on transitions helps us to understand what families go through as they move from stage to stage (Duvall 1988).

Change

Something changes when it undergoes a transformation from one state to another. For example, John and Natasha Morrison's experience of family, noted in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, will be different when the last child Kamika graduates from high school and moves to New York, leaving them with their house all to themselves. Family development theory proposes that family relationships are not static but rather change over time. Catalysts for change can be either internal (such as biological growth) or external (through interaction with the environment). The nature of this interaction is reciprocal—i.e., the organism both elicits and responds to stimuli in its environment.

Change comes with varying levels of acknowledgment and acceptance by family members. Individual changes become the catalyst for family change, causing shifts from one family stage to another. Changes in personal roles within the family are often the result of individual changes and transitions from one stage to the next.

Developmental Tasks

The concept of tasks in family development theory is derived from a similar concept of tasks, as defined by Havighurst (1948, 1953), in individual developmental theory. According to Havighurst, developmental tasks occur at particular points over the life course in response to either physical maturation or cultural pressures and changes. The individual must respond by developing new abilities, roles, or relationships. If the challenge of development is met positively, then the individual will be happier and have more success with later stages of development. If not, then, as with other stage theories of development (e.g., Erikson and Piaget), we would predict that the individual would be less successful.

Using this model, Duvall and Hill (1948) incorporated specific tasks for each of the eight stages of the family life cycle. These tasks focus on what the family, as a unit, must accomplish, while also taking into account the individual needs of the parents and children. For example, Duvall (1957, 1977) outlined the tasks (as an individual) that a child would have to achieve to optimally develop. She further linked those individual tasks to the tasks that the family must achieve as it assimilates the individual child into its unit. For example, when a newborn moves into the toddler stage, the family must create a safe physical environment for the toddler to explore. Later, when a young adult enters into the launching phase or plans to leave home, the family's task is to provide a secure base while recognizing that the young adult's reliance on the family may be more economic than physical at this point. Each stage of development requires the family to change and accommodate the needs of the children as they grow up (Duvall 1977).

Rodgers and White (1993) challenge the utility of the *family developmental task*, as they find the concept problematic. Although there certainly might be "relatively common family patterns" (227) that occur during a developmental stage, they wonder if it is possible to truly define "success" and "failure" at mastering tasks, and if such mastery is indeed critical prior to movement to the next stage.

Norms

Each stage of development is related to behaviors or tasks that would normally be expected to occur during that stage. Norms govern both group and individual behaviors, often defining the roles that people play. It is important to note that these norms are socially defined and change over time as cultural mores change. There are two types of norms: static and process. Static norms regulate behavior and expectations within a particular stage. For instance, a static norm might dictate the appropriate age or stage for consumption of alcoholic beverages. Although children may not legally drink, upon reaching the age of 21 (or other legally defined age), young adults are allowed the choice to consume alcohol. Similarly, a static norm would mandate that

a father protect and provide for children in the home. Process norms regulate timing and sequencing of expectations and behaviors over the family life course. For example, in many Western cultures, it is expected that love will precede marriage. Another process norm might be that marriage will precede childbearing.

Timing

When something happens has an impact on family life. Time is multifaceted. *Timing as normative* recognizes that social prescriptions exist as to *when* individuals and families are to engage in particular behaviors or accomplish certain tasks. Pressure exists for family life events to occur "on time," rather than "off time" (Neugarten, Moore, and Lowe 1965). *Age timing* notes the chronological demarcation of a beginning event. For the individual, that beginning is a birthday, just as an anniversary might denote the age of a relationship. *Event and stage sequencing* suggests that the order in which a family approaches events and stages has ramifications for family development. In other words, it makes a difference to the family when a child is born, when a couple marries, when someone retires, or when someone moves out of the house. This is particularly apparent when there are multiple events occurring at or near the same time. For instance, many traditional-aged college students often note that parents and others hold expectations about the normative order in which they should do things; first, they should finish their education, then get a job, and only then get married.

The life course perspective theorists introduced the concept of different qualities of time into family development theory. *Ontogenetic time* refers to the time one recognizes as one grows and changes through one's own lifetime (one's personal awareness of time—like an "internal clock"). *Generational time* refers to how time is experienced within one's social group (as in one's family or in a cohort). *Historical time* refers to how time is experienced in the social context or greater historical period (e.g., living during the Great Depression in contrast to being a baby boomer; Bengtson and Allen 1993). Thus, one can experience one's adolescent period as a unique stage in one's developmental history (ontogenetically speaking). But it might matter whether one's adolescence was experienced during the turbulent Vietnam era or the recession of 2009 (generationally speaking). Similarly, it might make some difference if one becomes a first-time parent at the age of seventeen or at the age of forty-four.

COMMON AREAS OF RESEARCH AND APPLICATION

The Family Life Cycle

Evelyn Duvall's eight-stage model (see Table 3.1) is one of the original versions of the family development theory. As with all stage theories, there are specific tasks associated with each stage. The chart provided by Duvall and Miller (1985)[1] provides a delineation of those eight stages, corresponding family positions, and associated developmental tasks.

Table 3.1 Stage-Sensitive Family Developmental Tasks through the Family Life Cycle

Stages of the family life cycle	Positions in the family	Stage-sensitive family developmental tasks
1. Married Couple	Wife Husband	Establishing a mutually satisfying marriage Adjusting to pregnancy and the promise of parenthood Fitting into the kin network
2. Childbearing	Wife-mother Husband-father Infant daughter or son or both	Having, adjusting to, and encouraging the development of infants Establishing a satisfying home for both parents and infant(s)
3. Preschool age	Wife-mother Husband-father Daughter-sister Son-brother	Adapting to the critical needs and interests of preschool children in stimulating, growth-promoting ways Coping with energy depletion and lack of privacy as parents
4. School age	Wife-mother Husband-father Daughter-sister Son-brother	Fitting into the community of school-age families in constructive ways Encouraging children's educational achievement
5. Teenage	Wife-mother Husband-father Daughter-sister Son-brother	Balancing freedom with responsibility as teenagers mature and emancipate themselves Establishing post-parental interests and careers as growing parents
6. Launching Center	Wife-mother-grandmother Husband-father-grandfather Daughter-sister-aunt Son-brother-uncle	Releasing young adults into work, military service, college, marriage, and so on, with appropriate rituals and assistance Maintaining a supportive home base
7. Middle aged Parents	Wife-mother-grandmother Husband-father-grandfather	Refocusing on the marriage relationship Maintaining kin ties with older and younger generations
8. Aging Family Members	Widow or widower Wife-mother-grandmother Husband-father-grandfather	Coping with bereavement and living alone Closing the family home or adapting it to aging Adjusting to retirement

Source: Duvall and Miller, 1985. *Marriage and Family Development* 6th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. Copyright © 1985 by Pearson Education. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Each of the stages can be more thoroughly examined in an effort to better understand the events and developmental tasks associated with it.

Stage 1: Establishment phase—courtship and marriage. Stage 1 is known as the *establishment phase* because couples are focused on establishing their home base. There are many tasks associated with the establishment phase of relationships, and as in individual developmental models, the accomplishment of future tasks relies heavily on the successful negotiation of the previous stage's tasks. If couples can blend their individual needs and desires, find workable solutions to conflicts, and maintain good communication and intimacy patterns, then they are better able to handle the tasks associated with the next stages.

Individuals thinking about forming a couple need to learn about each other's desires, dreams, expectations, and style of living. They need to find out more about each other's habits and hobbies, ways of interacting with their friends and families, and likes and dislikes, from foods to movies to household decor. In addition to these pragmatic considerations, couples also have to develop intellectual and emotional communication patterns, patterns of behaviors and preferences, and a jointly workable philosophy of life and set of values. Some couples, frequently encouraged by clergy or marriage educators and counselors, participate in a marriage preparation program in order to be certain that the most important issues have been discussed. Once these topics are explored, the marriage ceremony is an outward and clearly demarcated symbol of status change for couples. It receives both legal sanction and public recognition and, in many instances, religious validation. Before cohabitation became more common, the marriage ceremony also signaled the end of individuals living separately.

The new marital tasks for the couple include developing systems for acquiring and spending money, establishing daily routines, and creating a satisfying sex life. Both partners must also create new and appropriate relationships with relatives and old friends while establishing new friendships as a couple.

Many of the tasks associated with early marriage focus on the establishment of a home suitable for children. Some of these tasks include developing family-planning strategies, agreeing on the timing of pregnancy, arranging for the care of the baby, acquiring knowledge regarding parenthood, and adapting the home to accommodate children.

Stage 2: Childbearing families—families with infants. The arrival of an infant brings about a new set of tasks for the family to face. The new roles of "father" and "mother" appear. The couple must now negotiate how they will share the new responsibilities of caring for the child and must reallocate previously assigned household responsibilities.

Parents must provide food, clothing, shelter, and medical care for their infant, as well as nurture their infant's cognitive and emotional needs. Infants require a safe and stimulating environment, which can include car seats, diapers, cribs, and toys. The couple might have to expand their household space by moving to a new home or rearranging their current space and how they use it.

All of this, of course, costs money, which places an additional financial demand on the family. These stressors can be damaging to the couple's relationship, so the couple must continue to practice effective communication strategies to maintain a strong bond. They should also remember to pay attention to their own relationship while they attend to their infant's needs.

Stage 3: Families with preschool children. Preschoolers need structure in their play and activities, and they benefit from intensive parental involvement. When there is more than one child, parents need to manage greater physical needs and adjust to individual differences and temperaments of the children. Infants and toddlers also need a lot of physical attention, with diaper changes and feedings, as well as emotional and cognitive nurturing.

Just as in Stage 2, there are the issues of additional physical space and additional financial demands. The more children there are, the more difficult it becomes for the couple to meet their own developmental needs and continue to grow as a couple. Despite demands on the resources of time, energy, and money, the couple still needs to spend meaningful time together.

Stage 4: Families with school-aged children. School represents an expansion of the family to other social systems that influence the family system in significant ways. Parents relinquish some authority to the school. Their parenting skills and their children's behaviors are judged in this public forum as well.

Families with school-aged children must provide for their children's activities inside and outside of school; these often include sports, music, and religious and social interactions. Parents must work to develop relationships with teachers, religious leaders, and parents of other children. They must develop strategies for accomplishing tasks around the home, particularly if schedules require the parents and children to be away from home more frequently, and find ways to appropriately delegate family tasks to various family members. Parents must also determine what the appropriate expectations are for their children (who may be at different developmental stages) for helping around the house, developing responsible behavior, watching television, or listening to music. Parental monitoring is important. For instance, R-rated movies may be prohibited in one ten-year-old's household but may be allowed at her friend's house. One reason for this may be that, as their children's physical autonomy increases, many parents increase their level of parental monitoring.

Stage 5: Families with adolescents. As in Stage 4, individual development drives the family in Stage 5. Adolescence is a time of rapid physical (sexual), cognitive, and psychosocial change. Parents must allow adolescents to establish their own separate identities, which sometimes may be in conflict with the family's values and ideas. Duvall (1957) states that open communication helps parents and adolescents learn from each other and helps to bridge the generation gap.

The adolescent may express a need for more space, both physical and emotional, more freedom to choose activities, and more activities to do, along with the need for more money to do those things. In addition, many adolescents and their parents have concerns about their futures, including the cost of tuition for college or technical training.

Adolescents are able to share more of the responsibilities of family living, perhaps cooking meals, making repairs around the house, or looking after younger children. This enables many parents to work longer hours and earn more money without having to spend money on child care for younger children. Thus, families can find ways to develop cooperative and symbiotic interactions.

Stage 6: Families with young adults—the launching stage. This stage begins when the oldest child leaves home and ends when the last child has left. During the launching stage, the family experiences the cycle of contraction.

Whenever one member leaves the family, the family must adapt, and this includes reallocating responsibilities, duties, and roles among the family members who remain at home. At times, there is a reallocation of physical facilities and resources, such as when bedrooms are shifted after the oldest child moves away. More frequently, there is a reallocation of financial resources, because the oldest child's move may entail financial burdens such as tuition, room and board at a university, a large wedding, or supplementing the oldest child's finances until he or she "gets situated."

As the children leave the physical home, communication patterns change. Daily casual communication or chatting around the dinner table gives way to phone calls or text messages. The nature of the communication might also change to include crisis management and questions about how to cope with being on one's own. When good communication patterns between parents and children have been established in previous stages, young adults can rely on their parents to support them during the launching stage.

With launching comes an ever-widening family circle where friends and new family members enter into the family setting. From a roommate who visits on Thanksgiving to a potential life partner, young adults' relationships bring a new dimension into the family structure. Similarly, their new interactions may also bring divergent life philosophies into the family. Reconciling these differences can bring about major family changes.

Stage 7: The middle years. The middle years refer to the time after all the children have launched, but before the parents retire. One of the associated tasks is ensuring security for later years by increasing retirement accounts. The couple must reallocate household responsibilities once again, as they are no longer serving as "shuttle services" for their busy teens. They need to work to maintain a comfortable home, but they may look for a smaller one that requires less maintenance and space, given that their children have moved out. Although the children are not physically there, emotional ties still exist, of course, so parents must develop new methods of extended family contacts, which can include increased phone contact, electronic communication, or visits. Their children begin to have children during this stage, and now the couple can begin to develop relationships with their grandchildren.

So what is a couple to do when they stop being caretakers of their children? For many couples, this is a major transition, as they have just lost the job of parenting that they had for 20 to 25 years. Couples who neglected their own relationships during the child-rearing years may be at risk during this time. Or, couples might take the opportunity to renew their relationship with their partner and become more involved in community life by pursuing political office, volunteer work, or mission work. They may also simply indulge themselves, for example, by eating out more frequently. Most importantly, the couple must work to maintain their own communication, as they consider what they want to accomplish during the remainder of their lives.

Stage 8: Aging family members. According to Duvall (1957 [rev. ed. 1977]), this last stage "begins with the man's retirement, goes through the loss of the first spouse, and ends with the death of the second" (385). This stage includes the task of adjusting to retirement, including the reduced income that retirement frequently brings. If there is illness or physical limitation, couples may seek a new home arrangement that is more satisfying or safe, such as a retirement village, long-term care facility, or

moving in with one of their children. All such transitions require a shift in household routines.

Aging adults continue to spend time with their adult children and grandchildren. Some of these couples may need to care for their elderly relatives, as well as their grandchildren. As the couple ages, they encounter the deaths of family and friends more frequently. Older relatives die, and then friends of their own generation whom they may have known for years, or even decades, begin to die. As they face bereavement, the couple must prepare for their own death and the death of their partner. The family cycle is complete when the last partner dies.

The Family Career

Aldous (1978, 1996) built on the concept of the family life cycle, but noted that not all families followed the cycle from beginning to end, as in the case of divorced or remarried families. She preferred the term *family careers* to indicate that families followed stages that were somewhat predictable but not cyclical in nature. Moreover, she combined Duvall's (1957) stages of parenting into one stage, because parents were often in several stages of parenting at the same time (depending upon the ages of their children). Thus, Aldous's family career had only four stages—the establishment of the marital relationship, the parental role, the return to the couple relationship, and the aging couple.

Aldous's model did not focus exclusively on the family, however, but went further to include dimensions of family interdependency and social networks. For example, in addition to her analysis of the family career, she also considered the parent-child career and the sibling career, and how these interactions changed over the lifespan of the family. Expanding on the sibling career, Cicerelli (1994) indicated that the sibling relationship was, for many individuals, likely to be the longest bond experienced in their lifetimes.

The Dynamics of Family Development

White (1991) and his colleagues (Rodgers and White 1993; Watt and White 1999) expanded the family development theory to provide a more contextualized perspective. The stages of family development are driven not only by the ontogenetic development of the individuals, but also by the contexts in which the development occurs. These changing contexts make the family development stages dynamic rather than static. This perspective still takes into account stages over time but recognizes that, in this social context, all families do not follow the exact same path at the exact same time (White 1991). Understanding the family as a dynamic process encourages researchers to see fluidity and interrelationships between the process of development, the individual, and the context of the development (Fuller and Fincham 1994).

Interestingly, Watt and White (1999) found that the family development perspective created a structure for analyzing how computer technology pervades family life. Through each family developmental stage, computers serve as inexpensive tools for education, recreation, and communication. For example, computers affect mate selection by creating a "space" for cyber dating. Computers assist newly married couples with financial planning and career enhancement. When children leave the home, computers can help parents fill the "empty nest" with e-mail or allow them to pursue educational and occupational interests.

It is not enough, according to White (1991), to simply note that computers are used differently in each stage, but their use must also be studied based on context. For example, are boys more likely to use computers than girls? Does differential computer use/competency create a hierarchical status in the family? What are the effects of spending long hours on the computer? How is family life affected? And—more to the point of development theory—does it matter to the family *when* those hours are spent? Is there a different consequence if a young adult, early in his or her married career, spends hours on the computer, compared to an older, retired adult? These are all interesting questions to consider.

White (1999) also used family development theory to examine satisfaction with work–family balance over the course of the family career. Particular attention was devoted to the sequencing of family and work demands of married couples with at least one child under the age of fifteen years living at home. White suspected that dual-earner families would be more synchronized with societal and institutionalized norms and expectations than single-earner families. Surprisingly, however, single-earner families had significantly higher work–family balance than did dual-earner families. Similarly, both females and males in part-time dual-earner families experience higher work–family balance than those in full-time dual-earner families. Mothers experienced greatest satisfaction in work–family balance when they were able to spend more time at home and less time at work when children were in the home. Men, generally, seemed to have higher satisfaction when their wives were in the labor force, although satisfaction with work–family balance tended to be higher when female labor force participation was reduced. White's work reiterates the need to understand the impact of family stages on work–family balance.

Erickson, Martinengo, and Hill (2010) have examined work–family interface across six family life stages—before children, transition to parenthood, youngest child preschool-aged, youngest child school-aged, youngest child adolescent, and empty nest. Using a large sample of IBM employees in 79 countries, they examined the extent to which work and family role demands across the stages of family life affected work–family experiences. Work–family and family–work conflicts were highest among employees with preschool-age and school-age children, while work–family conflict was lowest among those in later family stages. Although work role demands increased linearly over the life course, role demands and work–family conflict were greatest during the transition to parenthood stage. The authors suggest that job flexibility is most likely to reduce work–family conflict for those entering the parenting years and family–work conflict for those during the preschool child stage. Thus, family development theory offers important insights about the work–family experiences of employees over the life course, details that might be lost without utilizing such a framework. In addition, examining phenomena across family life stages has a variety of ramifications for policy developments, particularly those in the workplace.

The Life Course Perspective

Bengtson and Allen (1993) expanded our thinking about family development by applying the *life course perspective* to the study of families. They contended that the life course perspective has a number of advantages over the family life cycle perspective in that it takes into account the dynamic versus the static nature of the concept of

the family life cycle. Rather than emphasizing fixed hierarchical stages, the life course perspective recognizes more contextual variations. It also introduces the notion of *continuity* in addition to change, such that family values, obligations, rights and exchanges can be examined over time. The perspective also offers insights on three different kinds of time: ontogenetic, generational, and historical. Each element of the theory adds richness to our understanding of how families exist in time, space, context, and process. It enhances our understanding of the social meanings that people give to their own developmental and family life (Bengtson and Allen 1993).

Elder and Giele (2009) noted that a life course perspective incorporates four important paradigms: *historical and geographical location*, *social embeddedness*, *human agency*, and *variations in timing*. When and where one is born, as well as the historical events occurring at various points during one's life, are significant in shaping the life course. Social ties or *linked lives* (Elder 1994, 6) reflect the fact that humans are interdependent upon one another, embedded in social relationships with family and friends. Personal control, or agency, acknowledges the ways in which individual and family decisions and behaviors shape the life course, within certain constraints. Timing, or when events or transitions occur, affects the life course as well.

In the context of families, then, the life course perspective encourages the consideration of the multiple social contexts of family development. Although our families are our primary socialization agent, we are also influenced by our peers, schooling, faith systems, government, culture, and historical context. The diversity of culture should be included in any analysis of the life course, as the differences of our ethnic, racial, geographic, socioeconomic, and religious heritage play out in our families and our lives. Similarly, the historical context in which family events take place, as well as the critical experiences or events that occur before and after each developmental stage, impacts the family's current state and future possibilities (Bengtson and Allen 1993).

Consider widowhood as an example. As individuals, we mourn the deaths of those we love in a multitude of ways. Thus, we have an *individual response* to death. Placed within a *time context*, the death of a spouse is likely to be experienced differently depending on how old one is when widowhood occurs. Some people believe that, as one grows older, death is easier to accept, although it is difficult to gather hard data on such a belief. What about *family context?* Is the death of a spouse processed differently if the children are grown, or if the spouses spent most of their time together (as in a family-run business) compared to less time together? Next, consider the *social context.* Is the death processed differently if both partners worked and neither was totally dependent on the other for family income? Finally, contemplate the *meaning* associated with death. Is the death processed differently if it is the result of a long illness? Is it different for those who ascribe religious meanings to death, such as the possibility of "eternal life"?

The life course perspective has been successfully applied in examining the consequences of becoming a father on the life courses of men, particularly in regard to personal growth and identity, social relationships, health and well-being, and work and education (Settersten and Cancel-Tirado 2010). The authors found that, rather than solely investigating the impact of fathers on the development of their children, it is imperative to study how fatherhood changes the lives of men in order to enhance the performance of men in the fathering role and ultimately enrich the quality of their own lives. Settersten (2006) also acknowledged the value of assuming a life

course perspective when considering the impact of wartime military service on a variety of life course outcomes related to marriage and family, friendships, occupation, education, income, and mental and physical health. Bucx, Raaijmakers, and van Well (2010) also utilized life course stage in better understanding intergenerational congruence in family values among those in the young adult stage. They discovered that intergenerational congruence on attitudes about marriage, cohabitation, divorce, and gender roles within the family decreased when young adults leave the family home, but increased as they become parents themselves. All of this work reminds us of the ways in which unique personal and historical events and experiences distinctly impact the family life course.

Carter and McGoldrick Model

Family development theory has found support in family therapy, particularly when it defines family more broadly (e.g., remarried families, multigenerational families, gay and lesbian families) and is expanded to include varied developmental trajectories. Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick (1999) analyzed the individual, from a therapy perspective, in terms of his or her place in the larger context of the family life cycle. Table 3.2 reflects the therapeutic focus of this version of the theory.

For each family life cycle stage, fundamental emotional processes and requisite second-order changes are noted. For these therapists, however, recognition of a variety of trajectories is essential. Table 3.3 outlines an example of an additional stage in the developmental course for families who encounter divorce.

As a therapeutically focused model, the Carter and McGoldrick version helps therapists to consider how problems or symptoms develop in individuals and families over time. In addition to developmental stages, they recognize several different levels—the individual, immediate household, extended family, community and social connections, and larger society—useful in assessing families. At the individual level, clinicians might focus on such things as individual temperament, class, genetic makeup, and religious and spiritual values over time. The immediate family level of analysis might include an exploration of emotional climate, communication patterns, ethnicity, family structure, and boundaries and triangles. When assessing the extended family, such things as relationship patterns, loss, family secrets, work patterns, and dysfunctions are of interest. When examining a family's connection to the community, attention might be given to friends and neighbors, volunteer work, and other links to organizations. Finally, both the individual and the family need to be considered relative to their positions within the larger sociocultural context. Thus, it is important to recognize the existence of any societal or contextual biases based on class, sex, race, sexual orientation, family structure, and so forth. Carter and McGoldrick provide an example. The birth of a child is naturally a taxing event on a couple, producing "the normal stresses of a system expanding its boundaries at the present time" (Carter and McGoldrick 1999, 7). If there was excessive turmoil in the family of origin for one or both of the parents, then there might be heightened anxiety for the couple as new parents. Relational distress might also arise if there is a mismatch between the temperaments of the parents and the new child. Similarly, if the child is born with a major defect, and the larger society encourages abandoning or institutionalizing such child, the parents may encounter considerable turmoil. Finally, additional disorder might

Table 3.2 The Stages of the Family Life Cycle.

Family life cycle stage	Emotional process of transition: key principles	Second-order changes in family status required to proceed developmentally
Leaving home: single young adults	Accepting emotional and financial responsibility for self	a. Differentiation of self in relation to family of origin b. Development of intimate peer relationships c. Establishment of self in respect to work and financial independence
The joining of families through marriage: the new couple	Commitment to new system	a. Formation of marital system b. Realignment of relationships with extended families and friends to include spouse
Families with young children	Accepting new members into the system	a. Adjusting marital system to make space for children b. Joining in child rearing, financial and household tasks c. Realignment of relationships with extended family to include parenting and grand parenting roles
Families with adolescents	Increasing flexibility of family boundaries to permit children's independence and grandparents' frailties	a. Shifting of parent/child relationships to permit adolescent to move into and out of system b. Refocus on midlife marital and career issues c. Beginning shift toward caring for older generation
Launching children and moving on	Accepting a multitude of exits from and entries into the family system	a. Renegotiation of marital system as a dyad b. Development of adult-to-adult relationships between grown children and their parents c. Realignment of relationships to include in-laws and grandchildren d. Dealing with disabilities and death of parents (grandparents)
Families in later life	Accepting the shifting generational roles	a. Maintaining own and/or couple functioning and interests in face of physiological decline: exploration of new familial and social role options b. Support for more central role of middle generation c. Making room in the system for the wisdom and experience of the elderly, supporting the older generation without overfunctioning for them d. Dealing with loss of spouse, siblings, and other peers and preparation for death

Table 3.3 An Additional Stage of the Family Life Cycle for Divorcing Families

Phase		Emotional process of transition: prerequisite attitude	Developmental issues
Divorce	The decision to divorce	Acceptance of inability to resolve marital tensions sufficiently to continue relationship.	Acceptance of one's own part in the failure of the marriage.
	Planning the breakup of the system	Supporting viable arrangements for all parts of the system.	a. Working cooperatively on problems of custody, visitation, and finances. b. Dealing with extended family about the divorce.
	Separation	a. Willingness to continue cooperative co-parental relationship and joint financial support of children. b. Work on resolution of attachment to spouse.	a. Mourning loss of intact family. b. Restructuring marital and parent-child relationships and finances; adaptation to living apart. c. Realignment of relationships with extended family; staying connected with spouse's extended family.
	The divorce	More work on emotional divorce: overcoming hurt, anger, guilt, etc.	a. Mourning loss of intact family; giving up fantasies of reunion. b. Retrieval of hopes, dreams, expectations from the marriage. c. Staying connected with extended families.
Post-divorce	Single parent (custodial household or primary residence)	Willingness to maintain financial responsibilities, continue parental contact with ex-spouse, and support contact of children with ex-spouse and his or her family.	a. Making flexible visitation arrangements with ex-spouse and family. b. Rebuilding own financial resources. c. Rebuilding own social network.
	Single parent (non custodial)	Willingness to maintain financial responsibilities and parental contact with ex-spouse and to support custodial parent's relationship with children.	a. Finding ways to continue effective parenting. b. Maintaining financial responsibilities to ex-spouse and children. c. Rebuilding own social network.

be introduced if the child's birth occurred during a natural disaster, like the Japanese tsunami, or during a time of political upheaval, such as when the parents might be refugees living outside their own country.

This model is particularly useful in exploring life cycle stressors and how these interact with family stories, themes, triangles, and roles over time. It further emphasizes a balance between connectedness and separateness, as individual identity is understood in relation to significant people, relationships, and contexts.

The Systemic Family Development Model

Most recently, Tracey Laszloffy (2002) proposed a new model that incorporates aspects of family systems theory, family stress theory, and a multigenerational perspective of family development theory. Laszloffy's efforts address two perceived shortcomings in the original theory: the assumption that all families develop similarly (universality) and the bias toward a single generational experience/focus of the life cycle (for example, labeling a stage the *launching stage* emphasizes the parental experience, whereas naming it *launching and leaving* acknowledges this as a multigenerational interchange). The systemic family development (SFD) model proposes, just like other developmental theories, that families experience transitions and shifts in family roles. Unlike other theories, though, that attempt to generalize patterns of family development over time, SFD states that each family's developmental pattern is unique. An analysis of a family must account for the combination, specific to the family being analyzed, of all the factors influencing it, including socioeconomic status, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, politics, and sociocultural values. Laszloffy describes the family as a layer cake, with each layer representing a generation within the family. Each layer is at a different stage within the family cycle (aged adults, parents, adolescents, preschoolers, and others), having to deal with its own issues and developmental tasks. Laszloffy argues that, in order to fully describe the family, one must study the interrelationships between the layers and describe the complexities that result from the family dealing with emerging stressors.

At this particular time (or slice of "cake") in the life of the Morrison family (from the vignette at the beginning of the chapter), there is concern about the health and well-being of John's father, a member of the third generation. John and Natasha (second generation) are anticipating retirement and the opportunity to travel. Each of their three children (first generation)—Tamara, John Jr., and Kamika—is dealing with a variety of issues including preparation for a first child, the completion of college, and graduation from high school. Depending upon when the next slice is removed from the Morrison family cake, there is likely to be four generations, the anticipated birth of Tamara's child as well as the possibility of other grandchildren for John and Natasha. Assuming they are still alive, Natasha's parents would become generation four, John and Natasha would be generation three, their three children would be generation two, and Tamara's child and any other grandchildren would become generation one. Again, each generation would be examined for its developmental issues and stressors. Consideration would also be given to the way in which these events affected the total family system. From a systems perspective, families are process-oriented. Although there is a great deal of variability in the timing and type of family stressors they encounter, all families experience stressors and the need to change and adapt.

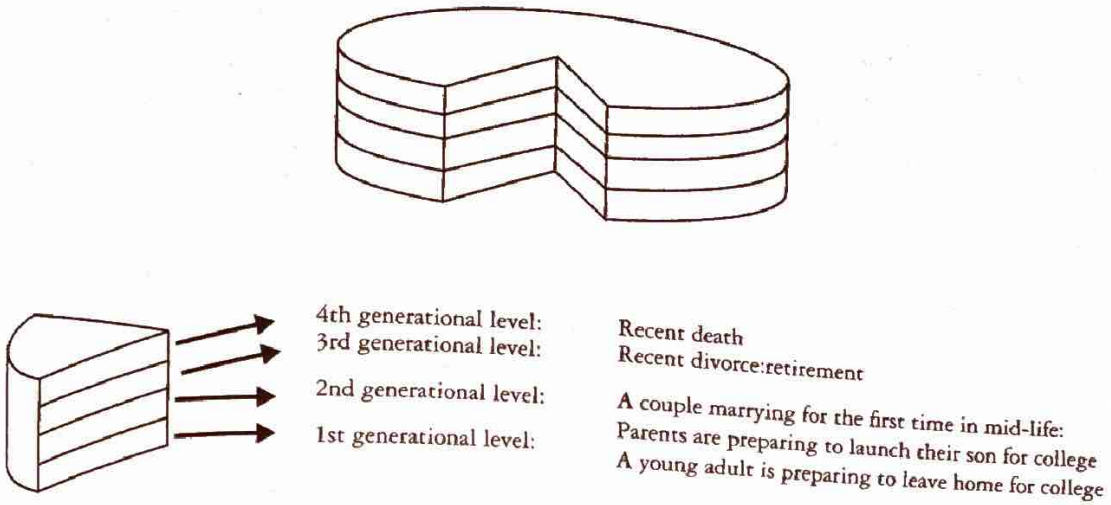

FIGURE 3.1 The Systemic Family Development Model as illustrated by the round-layered cake.

Therefore, even normative developmental transitions cause stress for the family unit. The family's response to its stressors will vary according to its resources, as predicted by stress theory. The more difficult a transition is, the more intense the stress will be. If the family has many resources, and the developmental transition is normative (and therefore expected), it will be easier to handle. When the family successfully negotiates the transition, stress is relieved, and the family returns to stability. For the SFD model, "it is the complex interplay between the nature and timing of stressors that makes family development highly idiosyncratic" (208).

The SFD model provides a way for family scholars, family life educators, and family therapists to view the family in multiple developmental cycles concurrently while respecting the various social contexts (e.g., race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) that influence development. It allows us to investigate the influences across, as well as within, generations. It may also prove to be an important research tool, because scholars can use the same theory to explain a family both at a point in time (a cross-sectional view, or the vertical slice of the cake) and over a span of time (a longitudinal view, or a layer of the cake).

CRITIQUE

A primary criticism of family development theory is that it best describes the trajectory of intact, two-parent, heterosexual nuclear families. For example, Duvall's (Duvall and Miller 1985) eight-stage model was based on a nuclear family, assumed an intact marriage throughout the life cycle of the family, and was organized around the oldest child's developmental needs. It did not take into account divorce, death of a spouse, remarriage, unmarried parents, childless couples, or cohabiting or gay and lesbian couples. In so doing, it "normalized" one type of family and invalidated others. Today's family experiences and structures are more varied. For example, launching comes later in life for many families and is less complete than when Duvall first described these stages (Qualls 1997). Similarly, Dykstra and Hagestad (2007), in examining the impact of childlessness on older adults, expose the way in which parenthood is deemed to be a

critical "organizer of the life course and a major factor in social integration" (1275) in family development, disadvantaging those who do not have children, whether by choice or circumstance. Slater and Mencher (1991), too, acknowledge the exclusion of lesbian families from most family life cycle models and the need to afford such families rituals that delineate important markers of family life and connect them to the larger society.

Family development theory has also been criticized by many as being only descriptive and not heuristic (research generating). Critics said it lacked a sense of usefulness as a theory because it had little predictive power. It described only one particular kind of family (middle class, heterosexual, lifelong couples and their children), and it did not provide much insight into what governed their patterns of behavior (Bengtson and Allen 1993; Burr 1973; Falicov 1988). In fact, in the early 1980s, some researchers pronounced it a "minor" theory (Holman and Burr 1980). Because of these criticisms, White (1991) worked to formalize the theory in a more scientific way, with testable propositions that could be used to predict family functioning.

Mattessich and Hill (1987) worked to expand the theoretical structure, but it was still deemed too descriptive and broad (Aldous 1990). In other words, the theory suffered from trying to explain too much, so it could only explain things simply in order to avoid being overwhelmingly complex. Furthermore, although family development theory described the stages of the family life cycle, it did not describe the relationship between the stages or how they formed a total pattern of the family's development (Breunlin 1988).

In addition, early renderings of family development theory failed to include family identity factors such as race, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and family structure (Bennett, Wolin, and McAvity 1988; Dilworth-Anderson and Burton 1996; Winton 1995). Bengtson and Allen's (1993) development of the life course perspective specifically includes these factors and lends itself to testable hypotheses. Carter and McGoldrick's (1999) family therapy perspective actually includes even more family identity structures (e.g., stepfamilies, divorcing families, never-married families, multigenerational families) and ethnic and racial differences. Laszloffy's (2002) systemic family development model broadens the theory's scope to include not only families of different structure, race, ethnicity, and sexuality, but also multiple generations of families at the same time. The continued viability of family development theory will depend on its ability to incorporate diverse families and varied family experiences.

APPLICATION

1. Using the scenario of the Morrison family at the beginning of the chapter:
   a. Identify the assumptions in the scenario.
   b. Outline the different life cycle stages represented by the Morrison family. Note the different tasks that each must accomplish.
   c. Create a family genogram of the Morrison family to help record family information in a more concise and visual way.
   d. Analyze the tasks that each family member must accomplish in terms of different social and personal constraints. Can some tasks be avoided altogether? Must some tasks be addressed within a limited time frame?