Conceptualizing Family Well-being

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“It is rather unsettling to think that with all of our attention to definition for almost a century, we have not spent more time on this concept” (Mitstifer, 1996, p. v).

“There is no coherent view of what constitutes ‘well-being of individuals and families’” in home economics (Brown, 1993, p. 106).

“We need to develop a conceptual framework” for family well-being because the concept “is widely used in public policy” but not well understood (Wollny et al., 2010, p. 3).

“We may never achieve ultimate agreement as to the meaning of family well-being but our understandings [must be] open to ongoing change and development/evolution” (Henry & Smith, 1998, p. 4).

Introduction

The purpose of a family (no matter its form) is to maintain the well-being of its members who belong due to birth, marriage or some other relationship (e.g., kinship (blood relation), adoption, foster, placement, legal guardianship). Families impact individual well-being (Collins, Jordan, & Coleman, 2010). But, what about the well-being of the family unit itself—family well-being? One peer reviewer observed that, when focused on well-being, home economists “tend to slip from individual to society to humanity. There is an interim step, the family, which does need clarification” (Peggy O’Neil). Kihm and McGregor (in press) recently observed that the home economics discipline and profession use the catchword individual and family well-being, but their conceptualization tends to focus on a person being well rather than the group as a whole.

This is problematic, because not every person (individual) lives within a family unit, meaning well-being needs to be conceptualized differently for the family. Aside from living in a family unit as individuals, individuals could be adults living alone or in a shared household, teens living on the street, adults living in a senior’s complex, or patients or inmates living in institutions. What constitutes being well for an individual within or outside the family unit may not be meaningful for the family as a group, an institution that is constantly evolving. As two peer reviewers noted, family is undergoing its own conceptual refinement, meaning conceptualizations of family well-being will need to be revised as this discourse evolves (Peggy O’Neil and Julie Caissie) (see also Henry & Smith, 1998).

Conflating (i.e., failing to distinguish between) and then combining the two concepts into one catchword that encapsulates a particular concept—individual and family well-being—lacks philosophical, conceptual, theoretical and pragmatic clarity. As well, and is a conjunction that connects two words, phrases or clauses of equal importance in a sentence, but it does not convey whether the two entities mean the same thing. Combining individual and family in one phrase about well-being may be a disservice to policy recommendations, curricular innovations, program development, research initiatives, and direct interventions intended to benefit families.

Admittedly, “most definitions of well-being refer to individuals rather than families”

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1The ideas herein pertain to the home economics discipline, whichever name is being used: family and consumer sciences, human ecology, human sciences, home sciences, home ecology, consumer sciences, family studies.
(Zimmerman, 1992, p. 23). But, this lax conceptualization is shortsighted and not advisable for a discipline and profession that profess to enhance the quality of life and well-being of individuals and families (Brown, 1993; McGregor & Goldsmith, 1998; Pendergast, 1998). Granted, individuals need families so they can be well, and the family depends on individual members for its well-being as an entity (IHC New Zealand, 2016; Krys et al., 2019a). But, the question driving this inquiry is whether family (small group) well-being is different from individual (single person) well-being, and does it merit unique conceptualization?

This issue is timely given that, in a 49-country study, Polish researcher Kuba Krys and colleagues (2019a) recently reported that virtually all nations valued family well-being over individual well-being (Kuba Krys, personal communication, March 18, 2020). In light of their results, it would be irresponsible (i.e., not respecting the consequences) for home economists to assume that individual and family well-being are the same thing. They should differentiate between the two (Mitstifer, 1996) to ensure proper comprehension and application in practice, education, policy and research.

Robust conceptualizations of family well-being matter, because family well-being matters. People intent on improving the well-being of families need models, frameworks and theories that capture the dynamic essence of their existence. Because being well is meaningful to the public, it should be well understood. The well-being of a family unit can be compromised by many factors, which differ across cultures. If the profession wants to improve and sustain well-being within families, it must be able to rely on robust conceptualizations of what constitutes its well-being. Robust (Latin robustus, ‘firm’) means being able to withstand intellectual challenges (Anderson, 2014; Harper, 2020). Awosika Itunu’s comments (peer reviewer) inspired this assertion.

**Well-being within the Home Economics Literature**

The word *well-being* has its roots in Old English *wel,* ‘abundance, in a satisfactory manner’ and *beon,* ‘be, exists’ (Harper, 2020) – in effect, a good or satisfactory condition of existence (being). Generally speaking, well-being is “a state of being where [people] have economic security; are respected, valued and have personal worth; feel connected to those around them; are able to access necessary resources; and are able to participate in the decision-making process affecting them” (Marshall, McMullin, Ballantyne, Daciuk, & Wigdor, 1995, p.1). Hall (2016) clarified that well-being is a state characterized by “the absence or minimization of distress and disorder” (p. 3).

The following text chronologically sets out how family well-being has been addressed in the home economics literature over the last 25 years (1993-2019). This will be followed with an overview of contributions from aligned disciplines, including childhood education, child and family studies, and family and social policy (1998-2019). As a caveat, this philosophical inquiry took the form of a conceptual analysis (Coombs & Daniels, 1991). Scholars use this research strategy to “seek more precise meaning and goodness of fit for what otherwise may be

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2 As a caveat, the literature reviewed herein is mainly from North America and Australia. European home economists tend to eschew the *well-being* construct in favour of *everyday life* (McGregor, 2012). Ruffing-Rahal (1991) coined the term *everyday well-being* meaning daily well-being for older women with health issues. Future home economics initiatives might want to conjoin European notions of everyday life with everyday well-being, which would be new, unique concept for the field to ponder.
obfuscating, vague psychological, or conceptual constructs” (Kahn & Zeidler, 2017, p. 539). Philosophers use this method “to clarify meanings and boundaries of concepts to promote understanding and support further research” (Kahn & Zeidler, 2017, p. 540). Kudos to Peggy O’Neil (peer reviewer) for serendipitously drawing my attention to a formal name for my intuitive research strategy.

**Marjorie Brown’s Initiative**

In her treatise on how she thought American home economists philosophically understood themselves, Brown (1993, Chapter 3) prepared an essay using the catchword “the well-being of individuals and families” (p. 49). At one point, she asserted that “naivety exists in conceptualization of the family and its role in individual well-being” (p. 71). She then seemed to contradict herself by referring to “the well-being of the family” (p. 71). This conceptual slippage reflects the concern herein that we use this catchword without clear agreement of what it means – (a) individual well-being, (b) family well-being, (c) individual and family well-being as the same thing or (d) even individual and family well-being as its own construct (see also Pendergast, 1998).

Brown (1993) cautioned that, although the home economics discipline and profession “claimed a concern for the ‘well-being’ of the individual and the family” (p. 221, emphasis added), its members had “not engaged ... in rational public deliberation and argumentation concerning what ‘well-being of individuals and families’ means” (p. 223, emphasis added). She confused the issue by placing the article the before individual and family in the first instance and then placing the article and between them in the second. Settling on the latter, she proposed “there is no coherent view of what constitutes ‘well-being of individuals and families’” in home economics (p. 106).

Believing that the profession does need its own conceptualization of well-being (not family well-being specifically), Brown (1993) advocated for a “[holistic] interpretive scheme of well-being of families and individuals [comprising] a valid set of concepts, beliefs, and norms” (p. 111). For clarification, “interpretive schemes operate as shared, fundamental (though often implicit) assumptions about why events happen as they do and how people are to act in different situations” (Bartunek, 1984, p. 355). An interpretive scheme of well-being would reflect how home economists cognitively map well-being and identify its relevant aspects and how home economists are to understand them (see Ranson, Hinings, & Greenwood, 1980).

**Kappa Omicron Nu’s Initiatives**

Cognizant of Brown’s (1993) critique and vision, Kappa Omicron Nu (KON), an American-based honor society, arranged for three meetings (two happened) about theorizing family well-being as part of the American Home Economics Association’s (AHEA) annual meetings (now called the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, AAFCS). Mitstifer (1996) (then Executive Director of KON) observed “it is rather unsettling to think that with all of our attention to definition for almost a century, we have not spent more time on this concept” (p. v).

In preparation for the first event in 1996, participants read Baldwin’s (1996) (Australia) specially prepared working paper wherein she conceptualized family well-being using Habermas’ (1984, 1987) theory of communicative action. Baldwin (1996) thus viewed family well-being as comprising (a) the material dimension (e.g., food, clothing, and shelter); (b) a practical-moral dimension wherein family members focus on shared understandings of meanings, values, norms;
and (c) an emancipative dimension that is concerned with power relations, human autonomy, freedom, justice and truth. The *being* (existence) of a family is *well* when it is effectively dealing with all of these dimensions and meeting (ideally exceeding) basic needs on a continual basis.

Henry, Mitstifer, and Smith (1998) edited the second meeting’s proceedings, which happened in 1997. Henry and Smith (1998) affirmed that those in attendance in 1997 could not agree on whether the discipline should (a) create a framework in which to determine family well-being, (b) define and describe the meaning of family well-being or (c) both. They surmised that “we may never achieve ultimate agreement as to the meaning of family well-being but our understandings [must be] open to ongoing change and development/evolution” (p. 4). At the same event, another Australian home economist Pendergast (1998) characterized well-being as “a slippery concept” (p. 31) and questioned whether we should be focused on individual well-being, family well-being or both suggesting that “perhaps it is either/or/both depending upon the context in which well-being is being considered” (p. 33).

**McGregor and Goldsmith’s Initiative**

In a separate initiative that same year, McGregor and Goldsmith (1998) (respectively Canadian and American) wrote a seminal article on what constitutes well-being relative to standard of living and quality of life. In the millennial issue of the *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, their article was recognized as one of seven key papers representing intellectual contributions for the profession during the 1990s decade (Humm, 2000). McGregor and Goldsmith asserted that “our concern for families requires that we articulate our thoughts on what constitutes the well-being of families” (1998, p. 5), and they conceptualized *being well* along seven dimensions: economic, physical, social, emotional, political (personal autonomy), spiritual and environmental. They did not, however, distinguish between individual and family well-being. Similarly, McGregor’s (2010) monograph on well-being, wellness and basic human needs clearly focused on individual well-being not the family as a group.

**NASAFACS’ Initiative**

Since their inception in 1998, the content and process standards of the National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Sciences (NASAFACS) (2018) have accommodated well-being. These standards pertain to teaching home economics in American secondary schools (Grades 7-12). In particular, Standard 6.0 refers to the importance of evaluating the significance of family and its impact on the well-being of individuals and society. Conversely, Standard 7.0 deals with how individual well-being can influence the well-being of other family members and the entire family unit along various conditions (e.g., economic, social, emotional, physical). This standard could accommodate spousal or partner well-being. Standard 15 narrowly focuses on parenting and its role in strengthening the well-being of individuals, families, and society. Families with children are supposed to use parenting to *strengthen being well*.

**AAFCS’ Initiatives**

In a 2001 white paper, the AAFCS aligned well-being with individuals and not families with its assertion that the profession’s work focuses on “*individual well-being* [emphasis added], strong and resilient families, and healthy communities” (p. 3). A decade later, the AAFCS Body of Knowledge (BOK) reinforced this distinction, when it identified our core work to be “basic human needs, *individual well-being* [emphasis added], family strengths, and community vitality” (Nickols et al., 2009, p. 269). A BOK is the complete set of agreed-to concepts, terms, principles
and activities that make up a professional domain as defined and advocated by the relevant professional association (Hernandez, 2012). Neither AAFCS initiative used the phrase family well-being calling instead for strong families in concert with individual well-being.

**Present Day**

As noted earlier, in a decade review of the presence of well-being and wellness in AAFCS’ two professional journals, Kihm and McGregor (in press) observed that the discipline and profession used the catchword individual and family well-being, but their conceptualization of well-being tended to focus on an individual rather than the family group as a whole. They were left wondering “how prevalent is the notion of ‘family well-being’ in the FCS profession, and how do members conceptualize this construct?” (Kihm & McGregor, in press, pages forthcoming).

Epp and Price (2012) observed that families pursue family well-being with pursuit meaning trying to attain it as a goal. This implies a continuous process in response to a perceived deficit state – not being well or well enough or not wanting to lose the current state of being well. Given the lacuna of comprehensive conceptualizations of family well-being in the home economics literature, with too many practitioners equating individual well-being with the well-being of the entire family unit (Kihm & McGregor, in press), this inquiry explored how other disciplines and sectors have approached the topic of small-group family well-being. What lessons can be learned from this intellectual exercise about improving the robustness of a home economics conceptualization of family well-being?

**Lessons learned.** To clarify, lessons learned constitute experiences distilled from analyzing likeminded initiatives so that planners can draw on these lessons in the future. A lesson can be significant, valid, and applicable. A significant lesson would have a real or assumed impact on operations. A valid lesson would be factually and technically correct (Secchi, 1999). An applicable lesson would identify a specific design, process or decision “that reduces or eliminates the potential for failures and mishaps, or reinforces a positive result” (Weber, Aha, Muñoz-Avila, & Breslow, 2000, p. 360; see also Secchi, 1999).

**Conceptualizing Small-Group Well-being**

The family is a small group. Conveniently, Ruffing-Rahal (1993) spoke of the “small-group properties of well-being” (p. 447). Before elaborating on how aligned disciplines have conceptualized family well-being (e.g., childhood educators, family and social policy), a conceptual detour will focus on the well-being of small groups (aside from families) to illustrate that other scholars and practitioners are also interested in the topic – What is involved in a group of people being well compared to an individual being well?

**Small-group Well-being**

Favretti (2011) compared individual and group well-being but not family specifically. She suggested that group well-being requires consideration of the needs of all group members first, while individual well-being depends on people putting themselves first. Group well-being can be achieved through agreeing to norms and regulations that let the group work effectively. This involves collectively setting and achieving goals with a sense of pride and purpose. The needs of the group are put ahead of any one person in the group. In reality, this is probably not an either/or situation, because strong individuals are needed for strong groups and vice versa (Krys et al., 2019b; Pendergast, 1998).

Ruffing-Rahal (1989, 1993) employed an ecological model to understand small group
well-being. She facilitated a wellness group for older women who lived alone and explored what group well-being looked like. She concluded that three core factors came into play: (a) group as ritual, (b) group as celebration (c) and group as community. The well-being of the group improved when it saw itself as a community (i.e., a collective) with rituals and a place to celebrate life. Rituals help people feel grounded, balanced and achieve a purpose. They tend to reflect core values with degrees of intentionality. Importantly, rituals are “tools to increase... positive well-being” (Chopra, 2018, para. 7).

**Work Group Setting Well-Being**

Biggio and Cortese (2013) explored workplace well-being in an establishment with 72 employees. They focused on (a) what well-being means in a work group setting, (b) what factors affect this well-being and (c) what, if any, individual characteristics influence group well-being. Four elements emerged as key indicators of what well-being means in a group setting. It means (a) accepting the rules; (b) participatory forms of leadership; (c) positive relations and working climates; and (d) appreciating the value of work including its ability to provide personal growth, recognition, and feeling valued. This work should provide satisfaction, rewards and varied experiences. A group is well if these four things are in place.

Three general factors seemed to affect group well-being: (a) values (e.g., respect, humility and transparency); (b) the physical environment (comfortable, common areas); and (c) organizational functioning (e.g., share strategies, understand dynamics and role expectations). Finally, four characteristics of individuals contributed to the group’s well-being: (a) being positive (e.g., proactive, confident, motivated, respecting diversity); (b) communicating (open, lead group conversations in a positive manner, listen to understand, and defuse situations); (c) managing conflict and difficulties leading to resilience; and (d) applying socio-emotional skills, especially creativity and empathy (Biggio & Cortese, 2013).

In summary, the well-being of a small-group work setting depends on a combination of individual factors, general factors, and the specific group’s understanding of what well-being means (Biggio & Cortese, 2013). At first blush, these findings seem to differ from Favretti’s (2011) suggestion that the well-being of a small group depends on putting the needs of the group over those of individual members. However, this might not be the case, because Biggio and Cortese (2013) concluded that people actively construct well-being in a small-group setting, a process that likely requires a consideration and blending of individual and group well-being so that the group can be well.

**Common Well-being**

“The concept of commons is often understood to refer to resources shared among a group of people and [their] governance for sustainable management. Another approach to the idea of commons emphasises social relations” (Basu, Jongerden, & Ruivenkamp, 2017, p. 144). The latter concerns the management of the commons with a focus on interactions amongst people and between people and their commonly shared resources. Ensuring the commons depends on the “ongoing process of community building” (Basu et al., 2017, p. 147). Indeed, community is Latin communis, ‘common, everybody’ and ity, a word-forming element meaning ‘condition of being’ (Harper, 2020); in this case, the condition of being held in common through social relations among everyone.

Russian scholars recently conceived common well-being, meaning it is shared by two or more people. They defined it as “a state of human physical, mental and social satisfaction in
particular conditions of human activity or a sphere” (Baryshev & Kashchuk, 2016, p. 1). This neologism (i.e., newly created term) accommodates the well-being of humans “living in civilized conditions [informed by] substructures of life quality [comprising] economic, social, psychological and ecological well-being” (p.1). This is similar to Marshal et al. (1995) McGregor and Goldsmith’s (1998) definitions of well-being. The common well-being construct merits mention, because it pertains to the commonality of shared experiences that shape being well in the sphere of human activities, which could be the family sphere.

**Conceptualizing Family Well-Being: Aligned Literature**

This section contains an overview of several efforts to conceptualize family well-being that unfolded outside of the home economics discipline. Efforts arose within the fields of early childhood education, child and family studies, family and social policy, family and parent-based organizations, and psychological studies. Published between 1989 and 2019, they mainly reflect results from an extensive review of the literature using Google Scholar Boolean search functions with the key search terms of family well-being and conceptualize (ed, ing, ation). I also used resources in my personal home economics library (see Figure 1) and tracked down references cited by sources found using both strategies (a form of snowball sampling).

**Early Childhood Education**

In research by and for early childhood educators, the Boston Children’s Hospital (2013) claimed that family well-being requires the stability, security and safety of the family unit. In particular, it involves (a) safety and stability, (b) health and wellness and (c) financial stability. Families need to address several aspects of stability, security and safety: housing, personal safety, overall health, food security, health care, income and assets, education to obtain employment, and neighbourhood and community safety. A family unit that can meet these requirements is more likely to be well and able to meet any goals it set for itself.

This initiative viewed “family well-being [as] one of a number of important family outcomes for families” (Boston Children’s Hospital, 2013, p.1). They argued that “challenges [related to stability, security and safety] can be especially difficult when they occur together and build up over time” (p.4). This cumulative effect justifies a deep concern for family well-being as affected by these three key factors. “Families experience well-being when all family members are healthy, safe, and financially secure” (p. 6). Unstable, insecure and unprotected (exposed) family units will not be well. This eventuality is exacerbated because “family well-being is a vast and complex family outcome” (p. 6) whose achievement is impacted by each family’s strengths and needs (Boston Children’s Hospital, 2013).

**Child and Family Studies**

Frey, Greenberg, and Fewell (1989) conceptualized family well-being as comprising four dimensions: family cohesion, family life harmony, family conflict and expressiveness, and parental agreement on child rearing. Drawing on Frey et al.’s (1989) work and others, Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch, and Ungar (2005) envisioned family well-being along four corresponding dimensions: (a) parents’ intra psychological status, (b) parents’ self-efficacy (i.e., sense of
competence in dealing with children), (c) interpersonal relationships and (d) the family’s organizational structure. The latter, oddly named dimension, pertains to cohesion, harmony, expressiveness (conveying thoughts and feelings), and conflict management. Their approach to family well-being is quite relational in nature (in and outside the family unit), which they described using the term “family milieu” (Armstrong et al., 2005, p. 273).

Newland (2015) asserted that family well-being is affected by “a myriad of individual and family-level factors” (p. 4). The well-being of the family unit provides a foundation for the well-being of other family members, especially children. In an approach based on ecological systems theory, she tied family well-being to the well-being of the parents, family self-sufficiency, and family resiliency. Family self-sufficiency pertains to having the skills and resources to meet basic needs. Family resiliency entails remaining strong and being able to bounce back when facing pressures, urgency and demanding situations (challenges). Newland (2015) explained that family resiliency is determined by (a) family functioning (e.g., communication, problem solving); (b) leadership skills (e.g., conflict management, balancing competing needs); and (c) supportive relationships within and outside the family unit.

**Family and Social Policy**

Rather than personally conceptualizing family well-being, United Kingdom (England) scholars Wollny, Apps, and Henricson (2010) canvassed the literature to profile the various approaches developed to that end. These include, first, understanding family well-being through different theoretical lenses especially family systems theory, ecological systems, and resource theory (see also Zimmerman, 2013). Second, some family well-being researchers utilized a domain-based framework wherein they chose domains, benchmarks and indicators of family well-being based on subjective judgements and preferences.

A third approach was to employ data-derived and inductive models of family well-being, which involved conceptualizing family well-being using empirical data and inductive logic (i.e., infer general laws from particular instances). Fourth, some scholars conceptualized family well-being from a very particular perspective or focus. For example, some assumed that families are well *if* there is a healthy marriage while others drew on the family strengths approach. A final school of thought was that family well-being is directly linked to risk and protective factors (e.g., individual, relationships, family, community and society) and how these interact (Wollny et al., 2010).

The results of this exercise lead them to two conclusions. First, “much of family well-being literature does not attempt to specify the nature of the concept” (Wollny et al., 2010, p. 3). Second, “amid a variety of approaches to conceptualizing family well-being, there is no well-established consensus about the best way to measure it” (Wollny et al., 2010, p. 5). They strongly believed in the “need to develop a conceptual framework” for family well-being because the concept “is widely used in public policy” but not well understood (Wollny et al., 2010, p. 3).

Although titled *Family Well-being*, McKeown, Pratschke, and Haase’s (2003) Irish study really focused on how a family member’s well-being is “intricately bound up with family processes and experiences” (p. 70). Their work focused on an individual in the parental role. Although referring to family well-being as a concept, they mainly argued that the well-being of the parents impacts the well-being of the family unit, not the other way around. McKeown et al. (2003) concluded that the most important variables impacting family well-being (as they narrowly defined it) were (a) an individual’s personality and (b) relationships between couples
with their children. (c) The broader social environment also factored in with a special focus on support networks, extended family, and social class. Succinctly, McKeown et al. (2003) construed family well-being as the well-being of parents and their children as shaped by family processes.

A decade later, Swords, Merriman, and O’Connell (2013) took McKeown et al.’s (2003) approach and conceptualized family well-being as comprising (a) parents’ well-being, (b) children’s well-being, and (c) intra-familial processes and relationships. They used a Venn diagram with family well-being at the core where all three aspects interface. In effect, their conceptualization of the well-being of the family was tied to individual, relational and processual well-being, which they said are interrelated and reciprocal. However, while talking about family well-being (a term that connotes the well-being of a group of people), they narrowly referred to “the influences on the well-being of the individuals within the family” (Swords et al., 2013, p. vi). It seems they did not conceptualize the well-being of the family unit itself; instead, they reinforced “the importance of the family’s specific contributions to the fundamental well-being of its members” (Swords et al., 2013, p. 2).

Family and Parent-based Organizations

IHC New Zealand (2016), an organization dealing with intellectually handicapped children (IHC), began their report on why family well-being is important with a definition from a likeminded set of scholars. Family well-being refers to a “sense of wellbeing of the family, collectively and subjectively, defined and informed by its members, in which individual and family-level needs interact” (Zuna, Summers, Turnbull, Hu, & Xu, 2010, p. 262). IHC New Zealand’s (2016) report provided a roster of “wellbeing indicators for families [that help stakeholders become better at] capturing and monitoring the dynamic and interconnected areas that contribute to family wellbeing” (p. 10). If a family has a dynamic sense of well-being, it will have an improved quality of life. Dynamic means constantly changing and active (Anderson, 2014), which is an apt descriptor of family well-being if many factors interface to influence it.

In more detail, four dimensions of family well-being were identified: (a) attitudes, which include feeling welcomed, accepted, and part of the community; (b) belonging and inclusion wherein the family unit is welcomed into and connected with their community; (c) fair systems meaning the family’s culture is respected, and the family has equal access to resources and universal services; and (d) good support and connections with their community, societal systems and institutions (IHC New Zealand, 2016). A key component of their approach is the family’s link to community and being a welcomed, accepted and cared-for member. They asserted that family well-being indicators for families with IHC “are the same as for all families” (IHC New Zealand, 2016, p. 12) implying universality.

Psychological Studies

Psychology researchers from four countries just finished an inquiry into whether people tend to value family well-being or individual well-being. This involved studying “how families are satisfied with their life [rather than] how individuals are satisfied with their family life” (Krys et al., 2019a, p. 3). They were interested in whether individualistic countries (Canada and Poland) might value their personal (individual) well-being over family well-being compared to collectivistic countries (Japan and Columbia). Collectivism involves prioritizing the group over the individual self. Krys et al. (2019a) did not find this. What they did find was that, regardless of country or orientation (individual or collective), people valued family well-being (58%) over
their own personal well-being (26%) with 16% saying these are equally important.

As a discussion point, they raised the issue of “personal-family well-being tension” (Krys et al., 2019a, p. 10), which arises when people have to put one above the other, creating conflict. They reasoned that “personal well-being may contribute to family well-being and [vice versa]. The conditions under which [they] are complementary or incompatible” deserve more research (Krys et al., 2019a, p. 10).

In a 12-country study (students), Krys et al. (2019b) innovatively explored “putting the ‘we’ into well-being” (p. 256). They defined family well-being along two dimensions. (a) Family life satisfaction arises from individualism and refers to “a person’s overall [global] assessment of their family’s quality of life according to their own criteria” (p. 258). (b) Family interdependent happiness is a collectivistic variable that captures “an overall assessment of the degree to which a person’s family is ordinary, quiescent [calm and at ease], connected to the collective way of well-being, and socially harmonized” (p. 258).

They found a strong positive association between individual family life satisfaction and individualism (not indicative of causation). But, they did not find the same correlation between family independent happiness and collectivism, which prompted them to propose that family interdependent happiness (as they measured it) is universal and not culturally specific. This unexpected result led them to suggest that future family well-being researchers should focus on the “well-being of us (a family as a whole)” (Krys et al., 2019b, p. 257). This recommendation redirects research to collectivism, which puts the well-being of the family group ahead of its individual members (see also Favretti, 2011).

Proposed Conceptualization of Family Well-being

Inspired by (a) insights emergent from iterative readings of initiatives to conceptualize small group and family well-being and (b) McGregor and Goldsmith’s (1998) and Kihm and McGregor’s (in press) roster of individual well-being domains, I propose that a family’s existence (being) will be good or satisfactory (well) if it is healthy and functional along eight dimensions: financial, relational, group dynamics and cohesion, family autonomy, collective health, community connection, spiritual health, and ecological well-being (see Figure 2).

Two caveats. First, sufficient details follow on these eight dimensions (see Figure 2) to pique readers’ interest but not to operationalize for research, policy or practice just yet. With anticipation, that will happen in the future. Second, a conceptual analysis was used to collect data for this monograph (Coombs & Daniels, 1991). By happenchance, the literature review lead to mainly Western conceptualizations of family well-being albeit from many different countries: Ireland, Russia, New Zealand, Poland, England, United States, Canada, and Columbia. Future initiatives should branch into Eastern (Asia and Middle East), Central and South American (including Carribean), African, and Indigenous efforts to conceptualize this concept. Broadening the range of contributions better ensures that the profession can “produce an explicit meaning of [the] concept by delineating its boundaries, referents, and relationships among related terms” (Kahn & Zeidler, 2017, p. 539) This recommendation was inspired by several peer reviewers’ comments.
Although surprisingly absent within many initiatives to conceptualize family well-being, economic and financial stability and security is a key factor in being well (Boston Children’s Hospital, 2013; IHC New Zealand, 2016; McKeown et al., 2003). McKeown et al. (2003) recognized financial support and security as a direct influence on family well-being. The financial aspect of family well-being comprises many factors: family income and perceptions of adequacy, financial obligations, degrees of solvency, financial problems and hardships, financial uncertainty, perceptions of their financial situation, feelings of financial security, perceived obligation (pressure) to financially provide for family, family resource management prowess, and family decision making efficacy (McGregor & Goldsmith, 1998; McKeown et al., 2003; Roy, Riley, Sears, & Rula, 2018; Swords et al., 2013).

The financial dimension of family well-being concerns economics and finances (McKeown et al., 2003). Economics deals with factors affecting goal achievement and requires the allocation of an array of resources (e.g., time, labour, money) while finances concern managing one particular resource – money, which indeed affects a family’s economic situation as...
a whole. Economics also involves managing uncertainty and making decisions when there are many possible outcomes. Decisions affect goal attainment. Family economic security depends on protection against economic risks, which better ensures both financial stability (will not deteriorate or fail) and access to resources and opportunities to manage uncertainty, meet basic needs and attain goals (Roy et al., 2018).

**Relational Well-being (Intra and Interpersonal)**

Several family well-being conceptualization initiatives identified relationships as key to being well. Relationships constitute how people (a) are connected, (b) regard and behave toward each other and (c) have mutual dealings (Anderson, 2014). Turkish home economist Ozmete (2011) recommended that the profession draw on the notion of social capital within a family unit. Social capital refers to quality social relations based on norms of trust and reciprocity. The quality of relationships within a family impacts people’s ability to come together to collectively resolve problems they face in common as a unit.

African family well-being scholars suggested that the relational components of family well-being comprise two dimensions that are positively related: “family functioning (i.e., family relational patterns, family functioning style and family hardiness), and family feelings (i.e., attachment and family satisfaction)” (Koen, Eden, & Rothmann, 2014, p. 410). Respectively, they proposed that “the effectiveness of a family’s activities and interactions [influence its ability] to meet their goals, support each other and contribute to each other’s well-being” (Koen et al., 2014, p. 410) (Awosika Itunu, peer reviewer, shared these cultural insights).

Indeed, McKeown et al. (2003) believed that one of the most important variables impacting family well-being is relationships whether they are (a) between parents and their children or (b) between couples. The quality of couple relationships is also paramount to relational well-being. This quality is determined by partners experiencing both (a) intimacy (e.g., show affection, share feelings, understand a partner) and (b) fulfilment (e.g., companionship, sex, security, trust). These in turn are informed by relationship skills, conflict resolution skills, and personality traits. The parent-child relationship also influences family well-being and is affected by the psychological well-being of the parent, their emotional state, attitude toward the parenting role, and the quality of the couple relationship (McKeown et al., 2003).

Swords et al. (2013) added another dimension to relational well-being – intra-familial processes and relationships. Whereas parental well-being refers to the person who is a parent and child-well-being refers to the child, intra-familial processes refer to interactions between and among family members within the family unit. It concerns (a) effective and responsive parenting; (b) the nature of the relationship between the parent and the child (conflictual or affirmative); (c) relationship satisfaction with a partner (e.g., happiness, agreement, cohesion); (d) the experience of significant life events as a family (satisfying or stressful); and (e) such mundane things as the distribution of household tasks and responsibilities. In short, Swords et al. (2013) proposed that family well-being is influenced by individual, relational and processual domains.

Wollny et al. (2010) recognized “internal family dynamics and the quality of family relationships as factors which [sic] determine family wellbeing” (p. 46). They asserted that the quality of family relationships is central to family well-being and functioning. Relationships are considered to be a key life domain and have an effect on family well-being as self-identified by families. Both relationships and relationship rules are tied to family flexibility with flexible meaning being open to change when confronting different circumstances versus striving to stay
the same (stable). Flexible families are capable of bending without breaking; they can adapt to new situations by making effective decisions (Wollny et al., 2010).

**Group Dynamics and Cohesion**

Shek (2005) defined family functioning as “the quality of family life at the systemic level” (p. 518). An element of family functioning, the internal group dynamics of a family system produce developmental and welfare outcomes for its members (Wollny et al., 2010). Dynamic is Greek *dynamis*, ‘power’ (Harper, 2020). Dynamics are the forces within the family unit that stimulates development and change within the family system or its processes. Group dynamics are the processes (behavioural and psychological) involved when people in a collective interact with each other. It refers to the nature of the group and how this came to be and plays out on a day-by-day basis (Cartwright & Zander, 1968).

Wollny et al. (2010) referred to “family cohesion (separateness versus togetherness)” (p. 39) as a key part of family functioning and dynamics. They considered family “cohesion/mutuality” (p. 70) to be a central part of “family dynamics [and] family well-being” (p. 61). The ‘family as a functioning whole’ depends on these group dynamics, which are informed by family belief systems, family goals and aspirations, family norms and expectations, and power distribution (Wollny et al., 2010).

Despite each family unit having its own unique set of group dynamics (called *family dynamics*) (Rivera, Guarnaccia, & Mulvaney-Day, 2008), all family units have a set of patterns for relating to and interacting with each other. These dynamics are influenced several factors: family type and size; the particular mix of people living within the group; the power dynamics (level and type of influence); and the family’s culture, ethnicity, values and financial stability (Becvar & Becvar, 2002).

Group dynamics affect family cohesion, which is “the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another” (Rivera et al., 2008, p. 357). Cohesiveness refers to actions or facts that hold things together to form a unified whole (Anderson, 2014). In her discussion of family cohesion, Sapp (2003) noted that it is affected by empathy, interest in each other and expectations of being understood. It further depends on the degree of commitment to and support of each other and the family unit. Emotional bonding affects family well-being. To ensure positive emotional distance (hence coherence), families have to install and instill rules and boundaries within the family unit to affect positive patterns of interaction. A noncohesive family unit will have failed to cohere or hold firmly together to create a healthy whole (Sapp, 2003). Unstable and unhealthy interactions and lack of, or lack of respect for, rules and boundaries will have negative consequences on family well-being.

**Family Autonomy**

If a family is well, it will be autonomous meaning independent and subject to its own rules, boundaries and parameters. Autonomy refers to governance, specifically self-governance and self-direction. Govern is Latin *gubernare*, ‘to direct, rule, guide’ and Greek *kybernan*, ‘to steer or pilot a ship’ (Guy, 1986; Harper, 2020). This aspect of family well-being pertains to how the family governs itself from day to day, steering a path forward. Referring to this as “the workings of the family,” McMullen (1992, p. 571) discussed the concept of *family autonomy*. Generally speaking, this refers to the family’s ability to govern its private decisions without scrutiny or interference from outside authorities, unless there is a compelling reason to do so (see Calder, 2016). Steering their own boat, walking their own path, involves being well enough to
freely exercise their abilities in family decision-making processes (McMullen, 1992).

To meet their societal obligations as a valuable institution, “families should ... be autonomous spheres of decision-making [sic]” (Calder, 2016, p. 131). With family autonomy, the unit will have “control over intimate matters concerning [themselves, control that comes with] presumptions of desirable consequences” (McMullen, 1992, p. 571). Also, decisions arising from the exercise of family autonomy can have “more-or-less indirect effects and not-necessarily-intended consequences” (Calder, 2016, p. 133). Negative consequences within the family unit warrant intervention by the (a) judicial system; (b) society (e.g., social workers, home economists, teachers, concerned citizens, neighbours); or (c) both (Calder, 2016; McMullen, 1992).

**Collective, Overall Health**

Adapting Brazil’s approach to collective health based on social medicine (Osmo & Schraiber, 2015), the construct of collective health proposed herein reflects an aspect of family well-being focused on the health of the whole family unit instead of just particular members. A collective approach to family health would involve ensuring that the unit is healthy especially by taking preventive (health promotion) approaches rather than just remedial measures (disease or illness prevention). The health of the whole family depends on its structure, culture and solidarity (togetherness). This comprehensive formulation of well-being respects both the physical reality and social nature of the family (Blake, 2016; Osmo & Schraiber, 2015; Roy et al., 2018).

Recently, American medical researchers turned to “collective well-being as a holistic measure of the overall ‘health’ of the community” (Roy et al., 2018, p. 1800). The notion of a holistic measure of overall health could also pertain to the family unit. Just like collective well-being was adapted from individual well-being models to focus on community and health, it can be adapted to family well-being. Like communities, families are unique units each with their own culture and values, ways of organizing and running themselves, family politics (ways of governing behaviour and relationships), and social identity (Rivera et al., 2008; Roy et al., 2018).

Collectively (pun intended), these factors shape the health of the entire unit appreciating that collective health is dependent on individual health and vice versa (Rivera et al., 2008; Roy et al., 2018). In an analogy, this would be like an arborist (i.e., a tree doctor) being concerned for the health of the entire tree versus the health of offshoots, separate branches, or leaf clusters, fully appreciative that these affect the tree’s health.

Roy et al.’s (2018) five domains of collective well-being have some bearing on the family as a group. First, the health of the group is reflected in members’ perceptions of the family’s overall health – its vitality, which is a state of being strong and active. Second, the health of the family group is informed by perceived financial stability and the group’s satisfaction with its current access to opportunities to achieve goals and lessen worry and stress.

Third, collective health manifests in the level of connectedness and support afforded by the group as a whole to its members. The fourth domain is the degree to which family members attribute engaging with and belonging to their family to meaning and purpose in their life. Finally, the inspiration domain pertains to the ability of the family unit to motivate, stimulate and inspire family members and, in return, bolster collective health (Roy et al., 2018).

**Community Connection and Belonging**

Several family well-being initiatives identified the importance of the family unit being and feeling connected to their community. In particular, IHC New Zealand (2016) identified this
aspect of family life as key to its well-being. The family gains strength and sustainability through being welcomed into their community and feeling included. The support and connections make them feel cared for and accepted. Family well-being is enhanced when the community sees the family as a valuable unit and welcomes its participation in community activities. These connections bring a sense of safety and security to the family unit, and community support scaffolds families and contributes to them being well, which improves with “the experience of belongingness” (McKeown et al., 2003, p. 50).

Both McGregor and Goldsmith (1998) and Wollny et al. (2010) viewed community connection as associated with the social needs of the family; it is part of the sociological/social dimension of family well-being. Aside from safety, support, inclusion and participation (as noted above), Wollny et al. (2010) reported that this aspect of family well-being also involves the principles and values of trust, reciprocity, and social engagement rather than distancing.

Community connection also includes cohesion, which generally means a united whole. In this context, cohesion refers to a bond among people that serves to protect from stress and pressure. This protection acts as support and bolsters well-being (Rivera et al., 2008) (i.e., a cohesive unit). A community connection can also entail hooking up with other families and social institutions (e.g., church, synagogue, mosque, library, sports arena) in the neighbourhood and engaging in activism or simple companionship and camaraderie (Wollny et al., 2010).

Spiritual Health

For clarification, compared to family spirituality, individual spirituality is an inner essence or dimension – a subjective experience of the sacred dimension in a context separate from organized religion (Saucier & Skryzpinska, 2006; Wong & Vinsky, 2009). Of the 16% of the world (1.2 Billion) who “don’t identify with or practise an organised religion... some – perhaps most – have a strong sense of spirituality” (Sherwood, 2018, para. 4). Four basic characteristics of spiritual health for a person have been identified: a proper lifestyle, a connection with others, an interest in the meaning and purpose of life (existentialism), and transcendence (i.e., moving beyond normal human experiences to a different threshold). Spiritual health influences physical, mental and social health (Ghaderi, Tabatabaei, Nedjat, Javadi, & Larijani, 2018).

Cunningham (2016) offered the construct of spiritual mindedness within an individual and a family. He claimed that the human mind is the headquarters for the soul, clarifying that the mind is more than a brain. It is “the centre of consciousness and will ... and whatever influences the mind determines ... a whole range of things connected with everyday living” (p.1). People make choices and decisions in their mind with the process acting as “the governing centre for the whole person” (p. 1). Spiritual mindedness is a sign of growth and maturity for a person and a family.

None of the literature about conceptualizing family well-being mentioned the spiritual dimension except for Wollny et al. (2010) who viewed “family spirituality/religion [as part of] the family as a whole” (p. 70). They viewed it as a family strength. But for our purposes herein, scholars studying spiritual health “have failed to propose a comprehensive definition for the term” (Ghaderi et al., 2018, p. 2). Preliminary thoughts follow on what this dimension of family well-being might look like.

Without taking on any particular religious overtones per se, spiritual health for a family might involve members having a relationship with some deity (e.g., God, Allah, Buddha)
enabling them to find peace and direction in their lives. Spiritual health might give families a focus that is larger than themselves, an anchor and a source of strength and inspiration. Families might thrive when they find solace in a deity. A spiritually healthy family might make sounder judgements and healthier and more appropriate adjustments to challenges in life (Anthony, 2015).

Wollny et al. (2010) viewed both religiosity (i.e., religious beliefs and/or practices) and spirituality (inner essence) as a family strength. Abbott, Berry, and Meredith (1990) also linked religiosity with family well-being claiming that these practices can (a) enhance the family’s support network (e.g., fellow worshippers, devotees, followers); (b) help reinforce family teachings and values; and (c) provide access to social support and solidarity. They found a strong correlation between religiosity and family well-being. Spiritual health augments coping within the family unit by (a) strengthening it (i.e., withstand great pressure without breaking) and (b) increasing its resiliency (i.e., bounce back after being pressed) (Cunningham & Scanzoni, 1993).

In her comments about this dimension of family well-being, Peggy O’Neil (peer reviewer) commented that if home economists confine themselves to social sciences and the science paradigm to conceptualize family well-being, their work will be incomplete, because their schema of family well-being will not include arts and humanities, meaning it will focus on body/mind connections and not spirituality/ethos. For this reason, she felt that including the spiritual dimension in family well-being is a welcome direction. Kerry Renwick, another reviewer, pushed the profession to expand beyond the European/Christian perspective on religion and deities explaining that, etymologically, spiritual means to breathe (Harper, 2020), which ties in nicely with spiritual mindfulness (Cunningham, 2016).

**Ecological Well-being**

On a final note, McGregor and Goldsmith (1998) suggested that the well-being of the planet is in the hands of families (considered key economic units), meaning families must be ecologically well. What might that look like? Inspired by Brown and Kasser’s (2005) work, one could suggest that family behaviour and a lifestyle that support a healthy ecology and planetary welfare would be grounded in mindfulness, awareness and accountability. Mindful consideration of the family’s collective behavior, along with a set of intrinsic-oriented values, would foster ecological well-being within the family unit. For clarification, intrinsic values are not dependent on material goods and services for their fulfilment; instead, they rely on connections, networks of solidarity and community. Families living a sustainable way of life would be ecologically well.

Larson and Miller-Bishoff (2014) coined the term *environmental mastery* in their research about caregivers, defining it as a sense of competency at being able use available resources. Perhaps the term could be coopted and used in reference to how well a family unit has mastered valuing and protecting the environment. Using an ecocultural lens (like they did), one could say that the features of a family’s unique niche impact their ecological well-being. The niche approach focuses on how well people have accommodated their life to their current conditions to ensure more positive family functioning, in this case environmental mastery. The latter would depend on daily routines that are (a) aligned with environmental values and (b) directly reflect available personal and economic resources (Larson & Miller-Bishoff, 2014).

**Lessons Learned**

One of the anticipated outcomes of this inquiry was to gather lessons learned that are some combination of valid, significant, and applicable to home economics. Respectively, helpful insights into conceptualizing family well-being would be factually true; have a real or assumed
impact on operations (affecting the profession’s survival and continuity); and inform designs, processes and decisions about home economics (Secchi, 1999; Weber et al., 2000). The following lessons are offered for consideration. Other home economists will certainly have different takeaways, and we would all love to hear from you!

**Distinguishable Constructs**

First, the impetus for this inquiry was the conflation of individual and family well-being. This concern was validated. The two constructs were repeatedly conflated when they should (could) have been clearly distinguished. Then there are the undecided. Biggio and Cortese (2013) concluded that small-group well-being likely requires a consideration and blending of individual and group well-being so that *the group can be well*. Pendergast (1998) and Kyrs et al. (2019a) took a different path by suggesting that the influence of family members and the family unit on each other is context dependent. A final takeaway is that the well-being of a small group (like a family) seems to depend on a combination of individual factors, general factors, and the specific group’s understandings of what well-being means for *it/them* (Biggio & Cortese, 2013). Newland (2015) agreed that family well-being is affected by “a myriad of individual and family-level factors” (p. 4) (see also Zuna et al., 2010). More work needs to be done, but a lesson learned is that family well-being is deserving of its own unique conceptualization.

**Identifiable Collection of Dimensions**

Second, “much of family well-being literature does not attempt to specify the nature of the concept” (Wollny et al., 2010, p. 3). And, if it does, family well-being can be conceptualized in many different ways (Zimmerman, 2013). This inquiry proposes one such approach in Figure 2 with supportive narrative in the previous section. Family well-being would comprise financial security and stability, relational well-being (intra and interpersonal), group dynamics and cohesion, family autonomy, collective health, community connection and belonging, spiritual health, and ecological well-being. These elements differ sufficiently enough from how individual well-being scholars understand them to warrant further inquiry and conceptualization (per Coombs & Daniels, 1991; Kahn & Zeidler, 2017).

**Habermasian Alignment**

Third, home economist Edith Baldwin (1996) recommended that family well-being should comprise material, interpretive and emancipative (critical) dimensions (i.e., a Habermasian approach). The conceptualization shared herein (see Figure 2) supports all three to some extent: (a) the material (e.g., finances, housing, collective health); (b) interpretive (e.g., communication, dynamics, belonging); and (c) emancipative.

Regarding the latter, McMullen (1992) discussed family autonomy, and Baldwin (1996) identified “collective autonomy” (p. 9). Baldwin (1996) felt that the legitimate power and autonomy of the collective arise through emancipative action where power is revealed and overcome. Calder (2016) asserted that families have to be “autonomous spheres” (p. 131) of decision makers so they can meet their societal (and I would add familial) obligations. Baldwin (1996) would argue that, to do this, families must be critically reflective and rationally pursue the truth. It seems that a Habermasian approach *does* has merit for home economics’ conceptualization of family well-being.

**Ecological Approach**

Fourth, Newland (2015) and Ruffing-Rahal (1989, 1993) had success using an ecological model to understand family and small-group well-being respectively. The home economics
profession is deeply familiar with this approach, which focuses on the reciprocal relationship between levels of environments as individuals and families procure, use and dispose of resources to meet basic needs, needs, and wants (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993; McGregor, 2020). Future home economics initiatives to conceptualize family well-being could continue to draw on the family ecosystem and human ecosystem approaches.

**Common, Collective Well-being**

Fifth, lessons can be learned from the Russian innovation of common well-being (Baryshev & Kashchuk, 2016). If something is common, it belongs to everyone and affects the whole (Anderson, 2014; Basu et al., 2017). A family is a collection of people whose well-being would be held in common (i.e., shaped by more than one person). Home economists may want to further pursue this line of inquiry, because it could impact their theorizing, research and practice. Seeing the family as a collective with things in common for its welfare is not a new innovation for home economics (see Baldwin, 1996), but it has not been readily pursued. Other disciplines can inspire this initiative. To illustrate, social work scholars Papadopoulous and Roumpakis (2017) called the family “a collective agent” (p. 865) that plays critical roles in politico-economic settings. The family’s common well-being depends on efficacy within these and other roles.

**Family Existential Well-being**

Sixth, when discussing the spiritual dimension of well-being, Ellison (1983) referred to *existential well-being*. At first glance, this would seem to apply to individuals, because existentialism is about “pondering the meaning of their lives, their existence as humans, especially in times of strife, tragedy, crisis, or major life transition” (McGregor, 2015, p. 1). It is accepted that the focus of existentialism is on *human* existence (Burnham & Papandreopoulos, ca. 2012). But, humans live in families. Musings about how a family unit might ponder its existence would be intriguing. *Family existential well-being* is recommended as another dimension for future conceptualization. Morris, Hadley, and Koehly (2013, p. 482) used the term “existential well-being in families” but did not define it. Brown (1978) intimated that home economists should be familiar with existentialism so they can help individuals and families confront life’s problems.

**Insights from Small-Group Well-being**

Finally, elements of small-group well-being (see Biggio & Cortese, 2013; Favretti, 2011) resonated quite strongly with the family unit despite the emotional relations of the family unit being different from those in a small group. That said, future home economics initiatives to conceptualize family well-being should consult the nascent small-group well-being literature (i.e., just coming into existence and beginning to develop). To illustrate, in order for a family to be *well* (i.e., have good or satisfactory conditions of existence), many aspects of small-group well-being apply: positive relations and living climate, good communication, an opportunity for personal growth, feeling respected and valued, managing conflict to ensure resiliency, a comfortable physical environment, particular values (e.g., respect, humility), and an appreciation of role expectations, group dynamics and coherence.

**Conclusions**

Before beginning this project, I reached out to fellow home economists (N=>400 in 40+ countries) via email asking them to share their thoughts on how (whether) individual and family well-being differed. Anecdotally, virtually everyone who responded commented on the significance of the question and how it stimulated their curiosity. To illustrate,
• “I think this is a really super interesting question.”
• “Interesting question. ... You have asked a question that calls for huge and complex considerations.”
• “Interesting question. ... I think this could be a fascinating area of research.”

Recent research seems to corroborate their reaction. “Focusing on the family (as compared to the individual) as the subject of well-being may be another important distinction in how well-being is conceptualized and valued” (Kyrs et al., 2019a, p. 1). “Although it can be discussed nonconceptually in everyday language, the application of different conceptual frameworks allows for a more holistic and contextual approach” (Zimmerman, 2013, p. 23) to the study of family well-being. Approaching our work with families using a well-thought out conceptualization of family well-being is more responsible than conflating individual and family well-being assuming they are interchangeable.

Both Biggio and Cortese (2013) and Epp and Price (2012) suggested that people actively construct and pursue family well-being – it is presumed to be an achievable goal, a worthy endeavour. If this is the case, the home economics profession and discipline have to seriously engage with conceptualizing family well-being so their work is authentic, transparent and accountable. Families that are continuously trying to achieve a state of being well will need help during such complex and profoundly contentious times. This behoves the profession to take on this philosophical, conceptual and theoretical work. One peer reviewer felt that taking a conservative position on what this construct means, or waiting to see how others conceive it, means “more and more people are doing our work” (Tahira Hira).

To offset that eventuality, this monograph augmented earlier home economics initiatives to conceptualize family well-being by drawing on initiatives in other disciplines and sectors. Beyond this effort, other home economists could collaborate with like-minded scholars and practitioners vis-à-vis conceptualizing family well-being. And future researchers are encouraged to draw on lessons learned herein and work toward conceptualizing and operationalizing family well-being in home economics theories, research, policy, curricula and practice.

As envisioned by Brown (1993) and Mitstifer (1996), a theory of family well-being is doable, and this starts with conceptualizing it and differentiating it from individual well-being. This intellectual inquiry would bring us closer to Brown’s (1993) recommendation that the discipline and profession create an “interpretive scheme of well-being of families” (p. 111) thus enabling movement toward cognitively mapping the concept and how home economics understands it.

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