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Ecological Theory Origin from Natural to Social Science of Vice Versa? A Brief Conceptual History for Social Work

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Abstract

The origin of holistic social work and ecological theory was investigated. Emphasis was placed on Howard W. Odum, founding dean of the University of North Carolina School of Public Welfare, and subsequent scholarship by his sons, collaborators on the first American ecology text. Eugene and Howard Thomas Odum, internationally recognized ecological scholars, identified holism as a universal concept originating in social sciences, crediting their father's earlier sociological work, which later bridged to ecosystems ecology. A historical review of the influential sociologists, social workers, and ecologists is presented to build the case for ecological theory transfer across the three disciplines, beginning with sociology. Critique of the current use of the ecological perspective is discussed, specifically social work's tendency to target social systems and behavior while largely ignoring the natural environment.

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