

FINAL PART I

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This course has benefited me in many ways. I have learned how to think subjectively rather than objectively. Throughout my undergrad, I have focused on getting the right answer. I took multiple-choice exams and wrote objective lab reports. Throughout my life, I have never taken a course that allowed me to form my own opinions and think theoretically. In the beginning of the semester, I was nervous to not be graded standardly. Standardized tests and grading systems were all I knew. I am glad I took this course so I am prepared for my future.

It was difficult at first, picking a theoretical tension. I had previously accepted them all as truth, and had never considered the possibility of disagreeing. Making the connection that just because I had previously learned about the facts of the theories, doesn't mean they are true. I learned that I had a basis of understanding, but it was up to me to narrow down my own orientation. In my portfolio, I tried to use more "I" statements rather than stating the facts of each theory. Although unnatural to me, I used my best judgement and what I interpreted from the readings to make decisions about each theory and the tensions.

The theory I believe suits me the best is Temperament and Personality development. In each week's discussions, I found myself gravitating towards the statement of "but it depends on the child". Each individual has their own way of regulating and processing their emotions, coping with change/stress, and how they view the world (optimistic or pessimistic). Two major labels of temperament are high-reactive and low-reactive. Highly reactive children are shy, timid, cautious, and fearful. These children have an elevated risk of developing anxiety or depression. Low reactive children are easy going, outgoing, and fearless (Nguyen, 2021). These children have a lowered risk of developing anxiety or depression.

I believe that the way a child processes and regulates their emotions has a major impact on their developmental outcomes. If a child processes everything as a threat and cannot properly

regulate their emotions, they may be prone to developing anxiety. On the other hand, if a child processes stimuli correctly and can develop healthy coping mechanisms, they can possibly avoid developing anxiety or depression. Although this theory claims that temperament and personality are innate, I believe it is a factor of both nature and nurture. If parents can recognize that their child is developing unhealthy coping mechanisms, they can intervene and reverse these thought patterns, thus changing the developmental outcomes of the child. Temperament and personality are innate in some ways, but can be influenced by nurture. This process, in my opinion, can explain developmental outcomes in most individuals.

References

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Theory Reflection 1

Urie Bronfenbrenner was a psychologist who is known for his Bioecological Systems Theory. This theory views development as a system of interactions between multiple levels of the environment. The Bioecological Systems Theory was previously known as the Person-Process-Context-Time model. The person aspect represents the individual, his/her characteristics, and his/her resources. The context feature describes the levels of the environment including the microsystem (immediate environment), the exosystem (indirect environment, and the macrosystem (social and cultural values). The process element illustrates the interaction between the person and their environment. Lastly, the time aspect describes what is happening during the processes and what has happened in the world's past that impacts the processes (Guy-Evans, 2020).

I believe that Bronfenbrenner's theory is an interaction between both nature and nurture. Bronfenbrenner defined personal characteristics as including an individual's genetic information (age, gender, physical appearance, temperament, etc.). The way the theory describes development as due to context is how it gives credit to what is happening in both the child's direct and indirect environment (Nguyen, 2021). Additionally, the theory describes development as due to process by recognizing the interactions between the person (nature) and its contexts (nurture). Although Bronfenbrenner focuses heavily on environment, he does not dismiss the idea that nature also plays a role in human development. To describe this interaction of nature and nurture, Bronfenbrenner uses the term synergy. Synergism is the idea that the collective functioning of two or more forces has a greater effect than the individual forces. He also describes that the characteristics of a person are a result of a combination of genetic information and their environment up to that point in their life (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

Bronfenbrenner states that the person impacts their environment, and the environment impacts the person. Because of this, I believe his theory is on the continuous side of the discontinuous vs continuous tension. Change in each system is not a static force that affects people in a universal way, but is dynamic and ever-changing. As the individual changes their environment, their environment is then changing them. This does not occur in specific stages, but rather as one cumulative process. Although this change is discontinuous, some changes are turning points in development (Santrock, 2016). Some examples of these changes are starting school, entering the workforce, getting married, having a child, and moving. These turning points disrupt the equilibrium of development, but the everchanging environment allows for continual development even after the initial change.

After reading the articles about the theory, I concluded that Bronfenbrenner's theory views development as occurring in sensitive periods rather than critical periods. Bronfenbrenner focuses on the time and personal characteristics when development is occurring. I put this reasoning in an example of bullying. Obviously, at any age bullying is going to affect you. In this way, there is not a critical period where bullying affects you and when you pass that you are "immune" to the effects of bullying. However, getting made fun of or excluded in middle school is going to affect you more than during adulthood. The timing of the processes is extremely important, but that is not excluding the fact that the processes have an effect no matter when they occur.

To me, I think that Bronfenbrenner's theory is context specific rather than universal. Development is going to be similar to most, being a product of the individual and their environment. However, there are many contexts that leaves room for differences. More specifically, the cultural values (macrosystem) allow for development to be up for interpretation.

Because the processes of the theory are contextual, one has to identify the individual's physical environment (location), their resources, beliefs, practices, goals, and so on. Individuals make their development path unique by engaging in different contexts while internalizing certain cultural values and practices (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017).

I vaguely remember learning about the Bioecological Systems theory in high school, but this week deepened my understanding. I had many gaps in my knowledge considering I only remember seeing the diagram of the systems. Although I was unaware of the theory at the time, I experienced aspects of this theory and have seen it in action. I was raised in a religious home. Religion is a cultural value in the macrosystem. These values affected how my parents raised me and my siblings. This is an example of how the macrosystem interacts with the microsystem. How I was raised affected who I became as an individual. I acted in school (and other environments) in a way that supported my beliefs and values. Thus, I affected my microsystem by seeking friends who share the same beliefs. These friends and environments I surrounded myself with affected me. This example displays how the different levels of the environment interact with each other to influence development in an individual.

After learning about this theory, I fully understand what people mean when they say that the individual changes their environment. I am not sure what I believe in terms of how development occurs. However, learning about all of these theories is extremely beneficial in expanding my knowledge.

My overall career goal is to work with children who suffer from social anxiety. The Bioecological Systems theory would be useful for identifying risk factors present in each system of the client. Such risk factors for developing anxiety include temperament, parent psychopathology, parenting styles, family environment, and community factors. By identifying

risk factors, one can implement treatment early and possibly prevent disorders from developing.

In the cases where anxiety is already present, this theory would be useful to identify how the client's environment influences his/her well-being and development. This theory would allow me to use interventions that move beyond (but still include) the exclusive focus on the individual.

Using the Bioecological Systems Theory in a clinical setting, one can understand the relationships their client has with the people and contexts around them. By recognizing how the contexts work together to impact the individual, and how the individual equally affects the contexts, one can implement appropriate and effective treatments in each system. It is known that the individual acts on their environment, and in the same way, the environment acts on the individual. In helping children with anxiety, I would help them understand these interactions in order to promote change.

References

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Theory Reflection 2

Murray Bowen developed the Family Systems Theory in the 1950s. This theory states that families are systems of intertwined yet independent individuals. When looking to understand an individual, one must understand their family system. Moreover, individuals cannot be understood without understanding their family (Nguyen, 2021).

I believe that the Family Systems theory is an interaction between both nature and nurture. Since we are talking about family, there is going to be some gene interaction between parents and children and siblings. The theory focuses on each individual and their part in the system that is family. The individual aspect gives credit to their biological genetic dispositions and temperament. This represents the nature side of the theory. The individual brings their own characteristics (temperament, sensitivity, personality, reactivity, etc.) to the system, which in turn affects the family environment (Cox & Paley, 1997). The family aspect focuses on the interactions between individuals and their environment. Parent-child relationships, sibling relationships, and issues resulting from emotional cutoff are all products of nurture (Winek, 2010). An individual's characteristics affect how these relationships form, which in turn, affects development. It is because of this that I concluded the Family Systems Theory is an interaction between nature and nurture.

Families continue to affect each other into adulthood of children. Because of this, I believe this theory is more continuous than discontinuous. Since the interactions happen in a cycle, there are not specific stages. The theory claims that individuals are interdependent, and because of this, they all have a continuous and reciprocal influence on one another (Cox & Paley, 2017). However, there are transitional points that would disrupt continuity (adult child moving out, parent separation, new sibling, etc.). These turning points slowly lead to developing different

family roles and adaptation. For example, I would guess that the family system has less effect on an individual as they age. When an adult child moves out, it causes a disequilibrium in the system. Once it is worked out, the child does not rely on their family in the same way. Similarly, they are not a part of the immediate environment which would lead to the family environment having less of an impact on the individual.

I would conclude that the Family Systems Theory incorporates both sensitive and critical periods. We learned in the attachment theory that attachment has a critical period. The type of attachment a child has would definitely impact the environment they grow up in. In this way, I can see how critical periods are a part of the theory. However, it is known that family relationships can be mended if all individuals are willing. Since the relationship is not an open-and-shut window, but can be reversed with work, I think the theory describes development as more likely to occur in sensitive periods. Yes, there is a critical period to form an attachment, but healthy relationships form in sensitive periods. The earlier the healthy relationships are formed, the better it is for the child. The longer the unhealthy relationship goes on, the harder it is to reverse it. Due to this, there is a sensitive period to form an uplifting and positive environment, but there is a way to solve the issue rather than the door being closed.

Another example of how the theory describes development as likely to occur in sensitive periods is the example of transitional times. Take into consideration the example of an adult child moving out. This would challenge the existing patterns at all levels of the family system. Additionally, this transition may be a time of greatest risk for family disfunction (Cox & Paley, 2017). If an adult child does not move out, it does not imply that the family is at no risk for disfunction, but rather a transition may increase the risk. In this way, transitional periods are sensitive periods for development, but development can occur without such periods.

In my opinion, I think that the Family Systems Theory is a universal theory rather than context specific. It was initially stated that this theory applies to all families in all cultures. In the Family Systems Theory, Bowen focuses on the differentiation of self, or how one maintains their own sense of self while being emotionally and physically close to others. Having a low differentiation of self is known to be a risk factor for psychological problems. Across cultures, it was discovered that there were no significant differences in an individual's ability to differentiate himself (Alaedein, 2008). Although families may value certain traits, the way the system works in a child's development is the same. However, I think this theory needs to readdress some cultural differences. Families are inevitably going to be impacted by the cultural contexts in which they develop, either by growing up religious, experiencing racism, or other aspects. Additionally, families' interactions with their environment may be inhibited by cultural contexts (ex. redlining, color separating of the fifties, etc.) In this way, the family may interact with each other in a way that is different from the Western view. Yes, the children may still be able to differentiate themselves, but to what extent is the differentiation process different in other cultures?

I had no prior knowledge of this theory, but I think it deepened my knowledge of development. I knew family was a factor in a child's development, but it was interesting to know just how it connected. The part that intrigued me the most was learning that siblings should be left to work out their disagreements sometimes. I always thought my parents did not want to get involved because it seemed like too much work. Looking back now, I can understand how they were letting us develop problem solving skills. I remember my dad saying things like, "talk it out" or, "I can't solve your battles". By letting us work things out, we learned how to handle conflict on our own.

Adding on to the information learned, I had a question. At what point do parents stay out of their children's arguments? Children can get aggressive, so how do parents teach the conflict-resolution skills so they can handle their own arguments? This is something I would definitely like to research further as children's development with siblings is extremely interesting to me!

References

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