1.4: Influences of Family, Society, and Culture on Childhood

Learning Objectives

• Describe and analyze the influences of family, society, and culture influence the lives of children.

Introduction

Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory to illustrate how the influences of nurture impact childhood. Watch Urie Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory explained on YouTube on Blackboard to learn more about this model. How might Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological theory help you study your research question or childhood in general?

Terms and Definitions

• Socialization: the process where children learn to meet the expectations of and how to fit into a society.

• Play is:
  ◦ self-chosen and self-directed
  ◦ an activity in which means are more valued than end
  ◦ structure, or rules determined by the players
  ◦ imaginative, non-literal, mentally removed in some way from “real” or “serious” life
  ◦ involves an active, alert, but non-stressed frame of mind. (Gray, 2008)

• Competence: The ability, capacity, or qualification to perform a task, fulfill a function, or meet the requirements of a role to an acceptable standard.

• Cultural Relativism: a person’s beliefs and activities should be understood based on that person’s own culture.
• **Developmentalism**: The behavior of children is shaped by physical, psychological, and emotional development. Maturity is determined by age and stage of development.

• **Diversity**: There are many different types of childhood.

• **Ethnicity**: The culture of people in a given geographic region, including their language, heritage, religion and customs. To be a member of an ethnic group is to conform to some or all of those practices. Race is associated with biology, whereas ethnicity is associated with culture.

• **Familialization**: the caring of children in individual households and homes by family members rather than in state institutions.

• **Gender**: The condition of being male, female, or neuter. In a human context, the distinction between gender and sex reflects the usage of these terms: Sex usually refers to the biological aspects of maleness or femaleness, whereas gender implies the psychological, behavioral, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female (i.e., masculinity or femininity.) [American Psychological Association, 2015]

• **Friendship**: Children’s affective social relations with their peers and others.

**Sources:**


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**Ecological Systems Theory – used often in Social Work**

The Ecological Systems Theory is a framework that examines how various systems interact to influence an individual's development. It recognizes that an individual’s behavior and development are shaped by the interactions between the individual and their environment, which is composed of multiple levels or systems. This theory emphasizes the importance of examining the interplay between the individual and their environment at different levels, including microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Each level has a unique role and impact on the individual’s development.

- **m**icrosystem is the small, immediate environment the child lives in. How these groups or organizations interact with the child will have an effect on how the child grows; the more encouraging and nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the child will be able to grow. Furthermore, how a child acts or reacts to these people in the microsystem will affect how they treat her in return. Each child’s special genetic and biologically influenced personality traits, what is known as temperament, end up affecting how others treat them.

- **m**esosystem, describes how the different parts of a child’s microsystem work together for the sake of the child. For example, if a child’s caregivers take an active role in a child’s school, such as going to parent-teacher conferences and watching their child’s soccer games, this will help ensure the child’s overall growth.
exosystem includes the other people and places that the child herself may not interact with often herself but that still have a large effect on her, such as families workplaces, extended family members, the neighborhood.

macrosystem, which is the largest and most remote set of people and things to a child but which still has a great influence over the child. The macrosystem includes things such as the relative freedoms permitted by the national government, cultural values, the economy, wars, etc.

Chronosystem developmental processes vary according to the specific historical events that are occurring as the developing individuals are at one age or another. Moreover, cultures also are continually undergoing change.

Nature and Nurture Shape Childhood

- Do you assume biology (nature) is destiny that may be minimally modified by culture (nurture, or environment) throughout childhood?
- Do you assume environment (nurture) is a more important factor in shaping individual psychology than biology (nature)?
- Specifically, what is the relationship between biology and culture with respect to sexuality?

sex is male or female and is biological. Gender is meaning given to biological sex by culture. We develop a gender identity which is how an individual identifies as masculine or feminine. Gender is a spectrum. We learn gender roles during childhood, such as, appropriate behaviors and work or division of labor

- Can a male can be a female?
- Is it only one or the other?
- Are gender and sexuality fluid over a lifespan?
- Can they change? Is sex a spectrum like gender?
- Did you know the Navajo have four genders?
  - women
  - men
  - nadleehi (born male functions in women roles)
  - Dilbaa (born female functions in male role)

challenge you to reflect on gender and sexual diversity. Imagine you have a child who is born with an intersex anatomy [XXX, XXY, XO, XYY] You read up on diagnostic testing and the recommendations of the Intersex Society of North America, that suggest you give your child a binary gender assignment (girl or boy). Do you follow the advice of the ISNA? Why/why not? If not, what do you name your child? How do you dress your child?

As your child acquires language, what pronouns do you use for your child? Would you use he, she, ze, or they? You inform yourself and read about current possibilities at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Center’s article on Gender Pronouns

What is ‘competency’?

Families should help children mature and become competent. The concept of competency is related to the concept of agency discussed in Chapter 2. Listening to children and respecting their opinions can contribute to their personal development. A supportive environment can lead to children to making better decisions, prepare them to participate in
society and strengthen their accountability. Children’s competency or abilities may be recognized, ignored, encouraged or inhibited. The supporting adults’ willingness to respect children’s decisions will determine whether the children’s choices are honored Figure 1, described by Alderson (1992) and illustrated by Orr (1999), illustrate the internal and external variants that may influence a child’s competency. (van Rooyen, Water, Rasmussen, & Diesfeld, 2015)

Figure 1: Internal and external influences on children’s competence

Influences on the Competence of Children

When we consider competence, we should also think about cultural relativism, are there universal standards we can apply to childhood? Is the UNCRC a set of universal standards? Implementation of the UNCRC can be difficult when violations of the rights of children are justified on the basis of cultural practice. Think about the practice of female circumcision.

Female genital mutilation

Does the UNCRC allow the practice?

Role of families

- Global
- Societal [Macrosystem in Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory]
- Institutional [Exosystem in Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory]
- Group [Microsystem in Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory]
Individual [The center of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory]

What happens to children when families find it difficult to provide basic needs? Families often struggle with finding time, money and resources to effectively parent. In the US, families may have difficulty earning a living wage, finding social supports, securing affordable housing, high-quality child care and paid family leave. It can be difficult to provide a nurturing environment all children need and may result in neglectful or abusive environment.

How can we create environments that enrich the lives of all young children and their families, allowing them the opportunity to realize their full human potential?

So I definitely think that the Department of Children and Families (DCF) needs to be more pro-active in checking in on families, especially families living under the poverty line, to ensure they are receiving assistance if needed and that the child is living in a stable home where he/she is healthy and can thrive. I agree with the student that all children deserve a safe and healthy environment and our society should support them. I wonder why income often is the only resource considered when giving families assistance. To help you think about interacting with diverse families, please read the following scenario:

- Which child would appear to be experiencing a greater number of risk factors that can affect his development?
- With which family would it appear to be easier to develop a partnership? Why?

What questions might you or others ask to find out “the whole story”? Ruby Payne (2009) describes the nine resources by which one negotiates their environment. Poverty is when you need too many of these resources, not just financial.

1. Financial
2. Language (ability to speak formally)
3. Emotional
4. Mental
5. Spiritual
6. Physical
7. Support systems
8. Relationships/role models
9. Knowledge of middle class rules

How do you and other discover what resources are available to children and families? How do you build on a families strengths. Everything that improves the economic security, safety and peace of mind of families improves parenting—and increases children’s chances for growing into healthy, compassionate and responsible adults. These include living wages and reliable hours, secure housing, high-quality childcare, paid family leave, safe neighborhoods, flex time, desegregation and social inclusion. Which disciplinary perspectives might help you understand family influences on childhood?
## Friendships

Why might it be helpful to understand the stages of friendship? How would it inform your possible work with children and families?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 0</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 - 7 year olds</td>
<td>4 – 9 year olds</td>
<td>6 - 12 year olds</td>
<td>11 – 15 year olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Momentary Playmates</td>
<td>One-way Assistance</td>
<td>Fair Weather Cooperation</td>
<td>Intimate Mutually Shared Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on proximity</td>
<td>Friends are important because they perform specific activities for me</td>
<td>Interpersonal relationships are reciprocal</td>
<td>Awareness of continuity of relationship and affective bonding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playmate</td>
<td>A friend is known better than other persons</td>
<td>There is coordination of play and adjustments by self and others.</td>
<td>Conflicts do not mean the friendship ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues such as jealousy or in the intrusion of a 3rd party into the play are seen as fights over toys or space rather than involving personal feelings or interpersonal affection.</td>
<td>There is knowledge of the other’s likes and dislikes.</td>
<td>Give and take of thoughts and feelings.</td>
<td>Overemphasis on the 2-person clique and possessiveness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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“**I Want It My Way**” | “What’s In It For Me?” | “By the Rules” | “Caring and Sharing” |

## Play

1. **Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.**

2. **Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.**

It is through play that children engage and interact in the world around them at an early age. Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles, developing new competencies that lead to enhanced confidence and the resiliency they will need to face future challenges.

[National Association for the Education of Young Children website](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Early_Childhood_Education/Book%3A_Early_Childhood_Mentored_Field_Observ...). After reviewing the information on the website reflect on these questions:

**How can we enhance the opportunities for balance in children’s lives that will create the optimal development**
Conclusion

How are interactions between children and adults shaped, modified and redefined by overlapping institutional and organizational forces such as the economy, family, education, politics, religion, and so on? What is the impact of experiences in childhood later in life?

After reading this chapter and completing the activities you should be able to

- Describe and analyze the influences of family, society, and culture influence the lives of children as seen the discussion and assumptions inventory

Challenge

Reflection and Discussion

Reflect on your understanding of these ideas:

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Developmentalism</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<td>Play</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Friendship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Ecological Systems Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Relativism</td>
<td>Familialization</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Collaborative Research Project

- Summarize your research question (What). Remember to relate the question to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Present the research from different disciplines that help to answer or explain the question. (So What)
- Apply criteria listed in the grading rubrics to create a persuasive presentation
- Discuss possible solutions. (This is the start of the NowWhat of the project)
- Complete a peer feedback questionnaire.
References


