Why we should theorize about families

Dorothy Owino Rombo, Ph.D, CFLE
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Outline

- Beneficiaries of family
- Why families matter
- The role of theory
- Macro and Micro theories
- Benefits of theory
- Lessons learned
Who Benefits from Families?

Individuals and Communities

• Individuals
  • Ascribed status
  • Facilitate acquired statuses

• Foundation to strong community
  • Connections
  • Belonging
  • Access resources

Nation

• Family is the most economic unit to raise a human being (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

• Provide man power

“Loneliness kills. It’s as powerful as smoking or alcoholism.”
— Robert Waldinger
Why Families Matter

• **The Harvard study on happiness** prove the interdependency of human relations found in families and community.

• Several studies have found that people’s level of satisfaction with their relationship at age 50 was a better predictor of physical health than their cholesterol level (Mineo, 2017)

• Research has established association between role of parenting and outcomes of children’s life.
Families without Theories

The six blind men who went to see the elephant. Each one felt a different part and believed that was the elephant. Individualized family stories parallel the six blind men. We only see what we are privy to.
Looking at Families without a theory

• Biased
• Individualized
• Limited
• Contradictory
• Not representative
Theorizing about families

• A common lens through which to look at family:
  • Increases objectivity
  • Reduces bias
  • Increases intentionality
  • Guide

With theory

Without theory
Family Theories

Macro
• Examine the role of interacting systems in sustenance of families.
• Answers the question: What is conducive environment for families to thrive?

Micro
• Examine the internal dynamics within the family such as interactions between members
A: Macro: Ecological Theory

• Authors: Bronfenbrenner $ Bubolz and Sontag
• Assumptions
  • Families are adaptive, but adaptation is influenced by environment
  • Environment is composed of interacting organic (natural) and inorganic (manmade physical and social) parts
Micro: Family Systems Theory

- Principles of Family systems theory
  - Task performance (role)
  - Interdependence
  - Homoeostasis
  - Boundary
Macro and Micro: Family Strength Perspective

• Authors: DeFrain & Asay
  • Community and culture provide strength and challenges
  • Whatever you seek to find about families, you will.
  • There are problems and strengths in families
  • Challenges help families to build strength
Macro: Family Strength Perspective

• Community Strength
• Cultural strength
Micro: Family Strength Perspective

• Showing appreciation and affection.
• Commitment.
• Positive communication.
• Enjoyable times together.
• Spiritual well-being.
• Ability to manage stress and crisis effectively.
Metaphors of family life

• The apple does not fall far from the tree
• Blood is thicker than water
Metaphors of family life in Luo (Ethnic community in Kenya)

• Metaphors on personal responsibility
  • You strike the snake with your own stick
  • The elephant must carry its head

• Metaphors on collectivism
  • One must respectfully draw water from a relative’s well
  • It takes two nails to kill a louse

• Challenges to collectivism
  • The eye that you help cure can be evil towards you. (Feeding the mouth that bites)
  • Two cockerels cannot be cooked in one pot
  • When bees have honey they sting indiscriminately
Theories on families

• Helps us answer the question: Why is my family like this by encouraging and normalizing
  • seeking deeper meaning of realities
  • Exploration of role of diverse variables
  • Challenging stereotypes and myths
  • Discovery of similarities in differences
Through Theory...

• We become
  • More curious
  • Less judgmental
Selected References


• Mineo, L. (2017, April). Good genes are nice, but joy is better. The Harvard Gazette. Retrieved from https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/04/over-nearly-80-years-harvard-study-has-been-showing-how-to-live-a-healthy-and-happy-life/