

FMST 101 Chapter 2: Studying the Family

Why We Should Study the Family

- Some practical reasons:
 1. Theories and research help us understand ourselves, our families, and our children and their behaviors
 2. Improves our ability to think more critically and make informed decisions regarding our families

Eight Theories

- For this text, we are going to consider eight theories about families. They are:
 1. Structural-functionalist theory
 2. Conflict theory
 3. Feminist theory
 4. Ecological theory
 5. Developmental theory
 6. Symbolic interactionist theory
 7. Social exchange theory
 8. Family systems theory

The Ecological Perspective

- Ecological theory examines how a family influences and is influenced by its environment
- The environment is a series of “systems” that surround individuals and their families
 - These systems have a bi-directional influence on the individual and the family

These systems can help or hinder a child’s/individual development and a family’s functioning

- Microsystem
 - A variety of structures that have a direct and consistent influence on a person’s life through regular interactions
- Mesosystem
 - The relationship between two or more of these structures
 - This relationship can exert a larger influence on a person than the microsystem
- Exosystem

- Settings or events that the child does not experience directly but can still affect their development
- Macrosystem
 - Societal/ Cultural norms, beliefs, and expectations that encompasses the other systems

Symbolic Interaction Perspective

- Looks at how the definitions and meaning that we give our symbols, events, and environmental settings affects our attitudes and behaviors.
 - A symbol can be words, gestures, behaviors, or pictures.
- If a symbol, event, or setting has personal value or relevance, there is a greater chance we will react and interact with it.
- Definitions and meanings change as we get older.

Symbolic Interaction Perspective

- According to symbolic interaction perspective, each family member has multiple important roles in the family.
 - Roles require different behaviors within and outside the family
 - People modify and adjust their roles as they interact with other role players

The Social Exchange Perspective

- Fundamentals principle is that people seek, through their interactions with others, to maximize their rewards and to minimize their cost
- When a relationship bears more cost than benefits for a person, the person is more likely to end the relationship

The Social Exchange Perspective

- Individuals exchange many different kinds of tangible and intangible resources
- Some of our cost-reward decisions are conscious and some are not
- With relationships we really on experience to help make future predictions of our cost-benefit ratio
 - With long-term relationships (i.e., marriage), we try to “make the best deal” as far as what our significant other can provide

Family Systems Perspective

- Family systems theory views the family as a functioning unit that solves problems, makes decisions, and achieves collective goals.
- Emphasis is on

- Family interactions within their system
- Family communication patterns
- Evolution of family patterns evolve
- Effect of individual personalities on family members
- How implicit and explicit rules hold families together

Research Methods

- Social scientists generally use six major research methods:
 - Surveys
 - Clinical research
 - Field research
 - Secondary analysis
 - Experiment
 - Evaluation research

Surveys

- Systematically collect information or data through questionnaires or interviews.
- Important to have a representative **sample** of the **population** that you are interested in studying.
- Oftentimes, face-to-face interviews are used for social science research.

Clinical Research

- Studies individuals or small groups.
- Often relies on **case studies** or an in-depth informative interview about one person.
- Case studies are typically linked with long-term counseling which can be beneficial for individuals and families.

Field Research

- Researchers collect data about people by observing them in their natural surroundings.
- Typically this kind of research is highly structured.
- There are two kinds of observations:
 - **Nonparticipant observation**—researchers do not interact with their subjects.
 - **Participant observation**—researchers do interact with their subjects.