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[Home](#) > Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory

Sarah Mae Sincero 490.6K reads

You and Your Environment

Otherwise known as the Human Ecology Theory, the Ecological Systems theory states that human development is influenced by the different types of environmental systems. Formulated by famous psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, this theory helps us understand why we may behave differently when we compare our behavior in the presence of our family and our behavior when we are in school or at work.

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The Five Environmental Systems

The ecological systems theory holds that we encounter different environments throughout our lifespan that may influence our behavior in varying degrees. These systems include the micro system, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macro system, and the chronosystem.

1. The Micro System

The micro system's setting is the direct environment we have in our lives. Your family, friends, classmates, teachers, neighbors and other people who have a direct contact with you are included in your micro system. The micro system is the setting in which we have direct social interactions with these social agents. The theory states that we are not mere recipients of the experiences we have when socializing with these people in the micro system environment, but

we are contributing to the construction of such environment.

2. The Mesosystem

The mesosystem involves the relationships between the microsystems in one's life. This means that your family experience may be related to your school experience. For example, if a child is neglected by his parents, he may have a low chance of developing positive attitude towards his teachers. Also, this child may feel awkward in the presence of peers and may resort to withdrawal from a group of classmates.

3. The Exosystem

The exosystem is the setting in which there is a link between the context where in the person does not have any active role, and the context where in is actively participating. Suppose a child is more attached to his father than his mother. If the father goes abroad to work for several months, there may be a conflict between the mother and the child's social relationship, or on the other hand, this event may result to a tighter bond between the mother and the child.

4. The Macrosystem

The macrosystem setting is the actual culture of an individual. The cultural contexts involve the socioeconomic status of the person and/or his family, his ethnicity or race and living in a still developing or a third world country. For example, being born to a poor family makes a person work harder every day.

5. The Chronosystem

The chronosystem includes the transitions and shifts in one's lifespan. This may also involve the socio-historical contexts that may influence a person. One classic example of this is how divorce, as a major life transition, may affect not only the couple's relationship but also their children's behavior. According to a majority of research, children are negatively affected on the first year after the divorce. The next years after it would reveal that the interaction within the family becomes more stable and agreeable.

Value of the Theory

This theory, published in 1979, has influenced many psychologists in terms of the manner of analyzing the person and the effects of different environmental systems that he encounters. The ecological systems theory has since become an important theory that became a foundation of other theorists' work.

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