

FAMILY THEORIES - AN INTRODUCTION

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Family – major differences which makes family a distinct group:

1. Families last for a considerably longer period of time than do most of other social groups (don't forget about divorces, death)
2. Families are intergenerational (large age differences), intergenerational bond is crucial for human beings (caretaker or caregiver)
3. Families contain both biological and affinal relationships between members (personhood is achieved through a process of socialization – secular and religious rules ⇒ rights and obligation, codified in laws and informal agreements). The most important legislated issue is marriage.
4. The biological aspect of families links them to a larger kinship organization (history, tradition and multiple generations) ≠ work and friendship groups which tend to be much more temporally and spatially encapsulated.

Family is more than a social organization; it is a social institution, because it includes all the beliefs and practices of and about all of the families on a particular society and geopolitical context, the ways it is connected with other families and other social institutions.

The theory we are interested in are macroscopic, because they deal with a linkage between family and other social institution, comparisons between families in different culture and societies.

We have to define the concepts and after the prepositions linking them.

Explanations and ways of explaining things:

- ☞ Transitivity
- ☞ Explaining data
- ☞ Linear causation
- ☞ Nonlinear sequences
- ☞ Functional explanation

I am not going to use theories of intervention, but I am thinking to design interventions by working directly from theories about family life. Types of intervention: therapy, education, social policies and social movements.

Family theories:

- 1. The exchange framework: *utilitarianism*** ⇒ individuals rationally weigh the rewards and costs associated with behavioral choices ⇒ self-interest

Focus and scope assumption:

- The individual is real (if we understand the individual we automatically understand the macro-social phenomena)
- Prediction and understanding come about by understanding the individual actor's motivation (theory of choice)
- Actors are motivated by self interest ⇒ questions the altruism
- Actors are rational (to be able to calculate the ratio of costs and rewards)

Concepts:

- Reward and cost
- Profit or maximizing utility (profit = ratio of rewards to costs for any decision)
- Comparison level CL and comparison level for alternatives CL+
- Rationality

- Exchange and equity
- Generalizable source of reward

Propositions:

- Actors in a situation will choose whichever behavior maximizes profit
- Actors in a situation where there are no rewards seek to minimize costs (principle of least costs)
- When immediate profits are equal, then the actors choose according to which alternative provides the most profit in the long term – *Nye 1979*
- When long-term profits are equal, then one choose the alternatives that provides the most profit in the short term – *Nye 1979*

Variations of exchange theory:

- Micro-exchange theories
- Macro-exchange theories: *restricted and generalized exchanges*

Empirical applications:

- Divorce
- Gender differences in sexual behavior

2. The symbolic interaction framework: to understand social behavior, the researcher must understand the meanings actors assign to the situation and action: *idealism*

Focus and scope assumption:

- Human behavior must be understood by the meanings of the actors
- Actors define the meaning of context and situation
- Individual have minds
- Society precedes the individual

Concepts:

- Self and mind
- Socialization
- Role: *role strain and role conflict*
- Definition of the situation

Propositions:

- The quality of ego's role enactment in a relationship positively affects ego's satisfaction with the relationship
- The greater the perceived clarity of role expectations, the higher the quality of role enactment
- The more individuals perceive consensus in the expectations about a role they occupy, the less their role strain
- The greater the diversification of a person's roles, the less consensus the person will perceive in the expectations about those roles
- The greater the perceived role strain that results from performing a role, the less the ease in making a transition into the role and the greater the ease in making a transition out of the role

Variations of the symbolic interaction framework theory:

- Iowa school and Manfred Kuhn – is more positivistic and based on more structural and normative determinism and less interactional creativity
- Chicago school and Herbert Blumer
 - a. structural approach: basic notions \Leftrightarrow position or status, norm and role
 - b. interactional approach
 - c. micro-interactional approach
 - d. phenomenology of the family

Empirical applications:

- Role strain and working mothers ⇒ **role overload**
- Dating aggression

3. The family development framework: focuses on the systematic and patterned changes experienced by families as they moved through stages of their family life course; incorporates time and history as major components

Focus and scope assumption:

- Developmental processes are inevitable and important in understanding families
- Families should be analyzed on different levels
- The family group is affected by all the levels of analysis
- The family is semi-closed or semi-permeable group
- The time is multidimensional ⇒ the alternative conception of time is *called social process time*

Concepts:

- Family change and development
- Positions, norms and roles
- Transition
- Developmental tasks
- Family career (replaced the early notion of family life cycle)
- Variations and deviations

Propositions:

- Family development is a group process regulated by societal timing and sequencing norms
- If a family or individual is “out of sequence” with the normative ordering of family events, the probability of later life disruption is increased
- Within the family group, family members create internal family norms
- Interactions within the family group are regulated by the social norms constructing family roles
- Transition from one family stage to another are predicted by the current stage and the duration of time spent in that stage
- Individuals and families systematically deviate from institutional family norms to adjust their behavior to other institutional norms, such as work and education

Variations of the family development framework theory:

- Structural perspective
- Interactional perspective
- Individual life course analysis

Empirical applications:

- Stress in the family
- Transition to parenthood

4. The systems framework: it is the most recent and most of its evolution took place within the 20th century

Focus and scope assumption:

- All parts of the system are interconnected
- Understanding is only possible by viewing the whole
- A systems’ behavior affects its environment and in turn the environment affects the system
- Systems are heuristics, not real things

Concepts:

- System
- Boundaries
- Rules of transformation
- Feedback
- Variety
- Equilibrium
- Subsystems

Propositions:

- The adaptability and therefore viability of a (family) system (as contrasted to rigidity and vulnerability) is positively related to the amount of variety in the system
- The adaptability and therefore viability of a (family) system (as contrasted to rigidity and vulnerability) is related negatively to conflict and tension in the system
- Higher level goals define the priorities among lower levels goals and are intrinsically less likely to be revised and abandoned

Variations of the system framework theory:

- General system theory
- Communications theory
- Family process theory

Empirical applications:

- Marital and family communication

5. The conflict framework: the way conflict theory explains family theory

Focus and scope assumption:

- Humans are motivated principally by self-interest
- Conflict is endemic in social groups
- Conflict is inevitable between social groups
- The normal state of society is to be rather in conflict than in harmony

Concepts:

- Conflict
- Structure
- Resources
- Negotiation
- Conflict

Propositions:

- Conflict between groups is based on resources allocation and competitive social structure
- Conflict within the group is due to the inequity of resources between individuals
- Negotiation, as a form of conflict management, is more likely in egalitarian authority structures
- The outcomes of negotiation is more likely to favor the person with the greatest resources in the family
- Condition formation is most likely in groups (families) with democratic authority patterns
- In democratic groups, material resources alone do not necessarily predict family coalitions and outcomes

Variations of the conflict framework theory:

- Structural conflict
- Micro-resource conflict theory
- Macro-resource conflict theory (Marxism-feminist)

- Dialectical deconstructionism

Empirical applications:

- Wife assault

6. The ecological framework: the most basic notion is *adaptation*

Focus and scope assumption:

- Individuals and groups are both biological and social in nature
- Humans are dependent on their environment for sustenance
- Human beings are social and thus are interdependent on other human beings
- Humans are finite and their life cycle coupled with their biological needs for sustenance impose time as both a constrain and resource
- Human interactions are spatially organized
- Human behavior can be understood on several levels

Concepts:

- Ecosystem
- Niche
- Adaptive range
- Units
- Ontogenetic development
- Natural selection and adaptation

Propositions:

- The individual grows and adapts through interchanges with its immediate ecosystem (the family) and more distant environments such as school
- Ecosystem change occurs as new information is converted to new functions (specialization) or increased specialization of old functions
- Change in specialization involve changes in relationships among functions
- Increases in intensity of specialization of any given function are accompanied by increases in intensity of specialization of all complementary functions
- Complex units develop on each of two axes: on the basis of complementary differences (corporate units) and on the basis of common environmental requirements (commensalitic units)
- Corporate units tend to replicate the structural properties of the parent ecosystem
- Corporate units tend toward closure regardless of the openness of the ecosystem

Variations of the ecological framework theory:

- Human developmental ecology
- Family demography and ecology
- Sociobiology of the family
- Home economics and human ecology

Empirical applications:

- Effect of day care on young children
- Child maltreatment

Comparing the theories

1. Scope and focus: *Level of analysis*

<i>Individual</i>	<i>Relationship</i>	<i>Family group</i>	<i>Institution</i>
Exchange	Symbolic interaction	Ecological Systems Developmental	Conflict Developmental

2. Time

<i>Static</i>	<i>Dynamic</i>
Exchange	Systems
Ecological	Conflict
Symbolic interaction	Developmental

3. Source of change

<i>Endogenous</i>	<i>Exogenous</i>
Exchange	Ecological
Systems	Conflict
Symbolic interaction	Systems Developmental

A three dimensional typology of theories

<i>Level</i>	<i>Time change</i>	<i>Static</i>		<i>Dynamic</i>	
		<i>Endogenous</i>	<i>Exogenous</i>	<i>Endogenous</i>	<i>Exogenous</i>
Individual		Exchange			
Relationship		Symbolic interaction			
Family			Ecology	Systems	Systems Developmental
Interaction					Conflict Developmental