A Look at the Big Picture of Smaller Systems

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Throughout the quarter, our class has discussed small systems—what they are, what they entail, and how they are comparable and contrasting to other aspects and systems in our lives. We were given the opportunity to read various articles, have class discussions and activities, and watch diverse documentaries relating to the topic. For this final reflective paper, I will focus on one group of individuals from a documentary we watched in class and how those individuals relate to Chaos Theory and the Ecological Systems Model. First, I will introduce the individuals to be examined. The individuals I will be discussing are three friends that took part in a documentary on the manifestation of the Crip and Blood gangs of California. These three individuals grew up watching the creation of the gangs’ and their increasing acts of violence against one another. Good choice

Now that I have introduced the individuals, I can explain Chaos Theory and the Ecological Systems Model. According to Korsmo (2012), “Chaos Theory represents a big jump from the way we have thought in the past – a paradigm shift." Chaos theoryincludes two concepts, bifurcation, the butterfly effect, and self-organizing.  “Bifurcationis a scientific way to say something splits in two—or branches off” (Korsmo, 2012). According to Remer (2007), “The term butterfly effect refers to a particularly challenging aspect of chaotic systems: Small differences in initial conditions may have severe consequences for patterns in the long run." Self-organization is the natural tendency for chaotic systems to form new patterns that a more coherent and stabilized. (Korsmo, 2012). Good idea to define this here

Along with Chaos Theory, there is the Ecological Systems Theory and Model. According to John W. Santrock (2007), the theory states that human development is influenced by the different types of environmental systems. Through its utilization, we can compare our behavior in different environments, and why the change occurs. The Ecological Systems model is made up of several parts, but I will only be discussing four: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. The microsystem consists of a individuals “direct environment.” That is, our immediate surrounding such as family, friends, classmates, teachers, coworkers and neighbors. The mesosystem consists of the “relationships between the different parts of an individual’s microsystems.” For example, the relationship between your parents and your teachers or your coworkers and your friends and how it *affects* *you* are part of the mesosystem. The exosystem represents the links an individual has with a group that they do not take an active role in, but are “inactively connected to.” An example of this would be a child’s connection to their parent’s work. Finally, the macrosystem is the actual culture of the individual. Culture includes socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, gender and sexual identity, sexual orientation, and religion (Santrock, 2007). Using myself as an example, I am a (fluctuating) middle-class, Caucasian female, who is heterosexual and Irish Catholic. Now that I have introduced the basics of chaos theory and the ecological systems model, I’ll start relating these theories to the three separate groups previously mentioned—starting with the three friends and their relationship with the Crips and Bloods.

We met Ron, Bird, and Kumasi in the documentary, *Crips and Bloods: Made in America* (Peralta, Peralta & George, 2008). The life these three boys grew up in is a prime example of Chaos Theory and the Ecological Systems Model. I’ll start by explaining their relationship to Chaos Theory, specifically bifurcation points. A major bifurcation point in each of the three boys’ lives was the decision by their parents to move to California—specifically to south-central Los Angeles. Segregation was just made illegal and, as black (or African)-Americans, moving away from the south was thought to provide the best opportunity for a better life. Many people chose California because it was a younger state than those on the east coast and so there was belief that racism would be less. Even though the parents of the three boys moved to California for a better life, racism and segregation still continued illegally and the boys were forced to grow up with less than their Caucasian brethren. Another bifurcation point was the removal of black (or African)-American boys from the Boy Scouts of America. Because they couldn’t join an organized group, the boys started to create their own loosely organized groups to represent strong, manly Black/African-American men. The parents had grown up learning to accept their “place” in society, but the boys and their generation were not fond of sitting back and taking the abuse—they wanted and deserved their freedoms. So, when the Caucasian population started threatening the Black/African-American community with police force, the boys and their friends stood up for themselves. Others followed, and the Black Panther movement began. Great examples

Once they began to separate themselves from the Caucasian population and stand up for themselves against racism and prejudice, we see the fruition of butterfly effects that were the result of over 100 years of slavery and injustice. The butterfly effect I will focus on is the creation of the Crips and Bloods, two of the most violent gangs in our nation’s history, and the bloodshed that resulted and continues to this day. With the “gentlemen’s clubs” (the self-led groups described in the previous paragraph) and the Black Panther movement, the Black/African-American residents of California had a strong support system toward their goals of social change. However, because of the stigma created from the last 100 years, they still unconsciously viewed themselves as inferior, even though in truth they were (and are) not. Ron, Bird, and Kumasi came from the neighborhood in which the Crips originated. They witnessed the change from the Crips standing up for their inalienable human rights into defending themselves against and punishing the “inferior” individuals (the Bloods)—individuals that hailed from the same own ecological systems (to be examined in the next paragraph).

So what makes up Ron, Bird, and Kumasi’s ecological systems? I’ll tell you one thing: they were very similar to both the Crips *and* the Bloods. To start, I’ll examine their microsystems. Each of the boys acknowledges their mothers to some extent, so I can surmise that their families were very important. They also discussed school, so I can add that to the list. I will also add a category for “clubs” to the microsystem. “Clubs” will represent Boy Scouts, Gentlemen’s Clubs, gangs, and any other extracurricular activity they may or may not have mentioned in the documentary. Finally, I will include a subcategory for friends (which would represent each other and the members of their clubs) and neighborhoods (because that is where they spent most of their lives).

Next, it is within the mesosystem where we see the subcategories of the microsystem interacting. The boys were friends because they were from the same neighborhood—invisible boundaries caused by social stigma toward their race created invisible barriers that prevented them from bonding more with other neighborhoods. They also bonded over their struggle to affiliate themselves with organized clubs and inevitably banded together to create their own fraternities, groups, and clubs.

Thirdly, the exosystems of the three friends are important factors in the inevitable creation of the Crips and Bloods. Even though the boys grew up in south-central Los Angeles and were more or less contained to the area on a regular basis, the presence of the Caucasian neighborhoods surrounding them and the fact that their “ghetto” was located in the richest city of the richest state in the United States of America surely affected them.

Finally, the macrosystem looks at the socio-culture of the residents of south-central Los Angeles, California. They are primarily Black/African-Americans and other minorities. The socioeconomic status is also quite low. Though the three boys discussed Christian religions, there was not enough evidence to surmise their (or that area’s) faith/religious groups. A final piece of the macrosystem, that I did not mention in the term’s earlier introduction, was the effect of media on individuals. I personally have a lot of issues with media and using it as a source for information. However, even I cannot deny the power it holds over people. The media during the time of these three boys’ youth was tumultuous in terms of the depiction made about their race and ethnicity. Black/African-American males were considered dangerous, criminal, and lacking morals and ethics. It would be ridiculous to assume that that representation by the media *did not* affect the lives of the three friends or anyone else. Good point to make

To conclude, we can utilize stories like the one told by Ron, Bird, and Kumasi, as well as others, to understand the various aspects of small systems and how they affect each and every one of us in such large, impactful ways. Whether it be a theory based around chaos or a systematic outline of our everyday interactions, understanding smaller systems is important in order to understand the bigger picture. As Human Service professionals, we can use this understanding to approach groups that are part of systems both similar and different than our own. It also teaches us to be empathetic—because we understand that there are aspects outside of a victim or abuser’s control. During this quarter, our class learned about the differences between “remediation” and “amelioration.” To remediate is to put a “band-aid fix” on an issue (cover it up, create a temporary fix), whereas ameliorate is to get rid of the source of the issue (focus on ending the stigma that creates gangs instead of removing drugs and weapons). In our fields, we will be faced with making choices to ameliorate and remedy situations faced by our clients. May the story of Ron, Bird, and Kumasi remind us that you can’t have one or the other. Both are necessary.

Very nice job with this paper overall. Good idea to choose the things to focus on. There are a lot of connections you can make between both theories and the gangs. You start to talk a bit about your own connections to the characters in the documentary, although a little bit more connection to yourself would be great. As noted there are some typos to watch for but otherwise nicely written. It has been great having you in class this quarter and I look forward to getting to know you more throughout the year. Thank you for all of your work.19/20

References

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