

SOCIAL FACTORS AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

WEDNESDAYS 4:10-6:00PM

Room/Building: IAB 253

Office hours:

Wednesdays, 2:30–3:30pm

DR. ANGELINA LIPMAN

dr.angelina.lipman@gmail.com

<https://blockingthenoise.com/>



PLEASE NOTE:

*Email us to arrange
alternative office hours
if those posted do not work
with your schedule.*

OVERVIEW

Who we are is not formed in isolation but created by the relationships we hold, the environments we move through, the histories we have inherited and the systems we inhabit. This course invites you to take a deeper informed look at the many dynamics that influence what it means to be human.

Through the lens of research, we will explore how these influences shape mental health across the lifespan. At the same time, we will turn inward reflecting on how, even within complexity and challenge, we can learn to navigate with greater clarity, cultivate resilience, and intentionally build well-being.

The goal of this course is twofold: to provide an opportunity for personal growth yielding a life with greater balance, purpose, and happiness and to present the ways in which we can support others hence contributing to a society where well-being is not the exception, but the foundation.

WHAT TO EXPECT

We will read and discuss empirical research and contemporary perspectives on the role of social factors in healthy and unhealthy outcomes across the life course with a particular focus on the late adolescent and adult years. Throughout the semester there will be a consistent focus on how knowledge can be translated into action.

THE IMPACT OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Examine how empirical research can be used to promote both personal and societal well-being. This course will explore the ways in which scientifically validated findings can effectively help navigate life's roadblocks, cultivate healthy and fulfilling relationships as well as create sustained happiness while also considering how this knowledge is applied and integrated into society to ensure that its benefits are accessible to all.

INTERPLAY BETWEEN SOCIAL FACTORS AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

We will investigate the immediate and long-term effects of chronic and traumatic stressors originating outside the family (e.g., natural disasters, chronic poverty, community violence, war, racism, social exclusion, incarceration, involvement with the justice system) and inside the family (e.g., family violence, divorce, substance abuse, parental psychopathology).

The course emphasizes an ecological systems and life-course developmental approach to understanding adaptive and maladaptive behavior. This approach argues that how a specific event or experience influences the onset or course of personal or interpersonal difficulties depends on a person's coping resources, both personal and contextual (e.g. social support), and developmental history, and on how the stressor combines and interacts with other influences in the person's life. A theme throughout the course is a perspective on societal obligation to support the health and well-being of individuals throughout their life as well as on the obligations of individuals for their own and others' wellbeing.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Demonstrate an understanding of current research paradigms and methodological approaches.
- Critically analyze course material and evaluate alternative perspectives.
- Apply psychological research to issues of:
 - Individual development across the lifespan
 - Societal well-being and justice
 - Social policy
- Participate actively in class discussions (participation will be reflected in the final grade)
- Complete all assignments.
- Reflection journal entries must be completed prior to each class session (we will discuss in class)

ATTENDANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY

- Students are expected to notify the instructor in advance of any absence.
- Students are responsible for obtaining all missed materials and information.

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Reflection Journal (20%)

Purpose: The reflection journal is designed to help you connect course concepts to your own experiences and to develop greater awareness of how social factors influence your thoughts, emotions, and well-being.

Format & Length:

- 1 entry per week
- Approximately 200-500 words
- Informal writing is encouraged (first person is appropriate)

Each entry should include:

1. Connection to Course Material

- Briefly identify one concept from class (e.g., social support, stress, stigma, identity, environment)

2. Personal or Real-World Reflection

- Describe a moment, experience, or observation from your week that relates to this concept.

3. Insight

- What did you notice or learn?
- How did social factors influence this situation?
- How can the readings in class change your automatic response?
- What would it look like to navigate this situation with more clarity, intention, or resilience?

Evaluation:

- Completion and thoughtfulness
- Evidence of engagement with course concepts

DEADLINE: Weekly assignment due Mondays at 5pm before Wednesday's class.

Personal Change Project (30%)

Purpose: This assignment invites you to apply course concepts to your own life by exploring how change happens. Identify one meaningful area for personal growth and experiment with making an intentional shift. Use research discussed in the class to design your method of change.

STEP 1: Identify Your Focus

Choose one area of your life you would like to change or improve. This should be something you feel comfortable sharing in class (e.g., managing stress, reducing procrastination, improving sleep, setting boundaries, limiting social media, increasing connection).

STEP 2: Understand Your Starting Point

Briefly reflect on:

- Why does this matter to you?
- Where are you in the Stages of Change (e.g., contemplation, preparation, action)?
- What roadblocks (stress, habits, environment, expectations) may be getting in the way?

STEP 3: Test Phase (2 week minimum)

- Implement one small, realistic change. The goal is not perfection, but awareness and effort.
- Document Your Experience: You may choose how you track or document your experience:
 - Written reflections
 - A short video diary
 - Voice notes
 - A creative format (visual map, timeline, etc.)

(assignment continues)

STEP 4: Reflect on the Process

Consider:

- What worked? What was challenging?
- How did your environment or social context influence your progress?
- Did your stage of change shift?
- What did you learn about yourself?

Final Submission Options (choose one):

- A 2–3-page reflection paper
- A 3–5-minute video or audio reflection
- A creative presentation (visual, slide deck, or another format approved by instructor)

Class Component:

You will share a brief (3-5 minute) summary of your experience with the class.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Thoughtfulness and self-reflection
- Clear connection to course concepts (Stages of Change, social influences, dynamics in psychopathology)
- Effort and engagement in the process (not success of the change itself)
- Creativity and clarity of presentation

DEADLINE: October 28th In Class Discussion

TED Talk Assignment: Psychopathology, Society, and Change (30%)

Purpose: This assignment asks you to apply course concepts to a real-world societal challenge. You will explore how social factors influence mental health and well-being and propose a meaningful policy or societal change. You will present your ideas in the form of a short, engaging “TED-style” talk. This is an opportunity to connect research to real-world impact and to use your voice in a meaningful way.

Topic Selection & Outline

Select a societal issue connected to course themes.

- Submit your topic (2–3 sentences) and brief outline for approval.

Include:

- The issue you plan to explore.
- A brief idea of the change you may propose.

Your outline should include:

- The issue you are addressing.
- 1–2 course concepts you will apply
- Key points explaining the problem.
- Your proposed solution or policy change.

Format:

- 4–6 minutes
- No reading directly from a script (notes are allowed)
- Clear, engaging, and accessible to a general audience
- Clear explanation of the issue
- Connection to psychological research or course concepts
- A specific, thoughtful proposal for change

Evaluation Criteria

- Understanding of Course Concepts
- Application to a Societal Issue
- Clarity and Feasibility of Proposal
- Organization and Delivery
- Creativity and Engagement

DEADLINE: Nov18th, Dec 2-9th In Class Presentations

Final Paper Assignment: Social Influences, Well-Being, and Action (20%)

Purpose: This final paper invites you to integrate course concepts by examining how social factors influence personal and societal well-being. You will consider how research can be translated into meaningful change at a broader, societal level. This assignment is an opportunity to connect knowledge with action thinking not only about how we understand the world, but how we might thoughtfully contribute to improving it.

ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS (Choose One)

OPTION 1: Course Topic Analysis

Select a topic we have explored in class.

- Explain the topic using course concepts and research.
- Analyze how social factors (e.g., environment, culture, systems, relationships) influence this issue.
- Discuss the implications for individual and societal well-being.
- Propose a thoughtful policy, institutional, or societal change that could improve outcomes.

OPTION 2: Personal Connection & Reflection

Select a topic from the course that resonated with you personally.

- Reflect on how this issue connects to your own experiences or observations.
- Analyze how social factors have influenced this experience.
- Connect your reflection to course concepts and research.
- Propose a policy, institutional, or societal-level change that could better support individuals facing similar challenges.

Paper Requirements

- Length: 4–6 pages
- Include at least 2–3 course readings.

Evaluation Criteria

- Understanding of Course Concepts
- Application of Research
- Depth of Analysis of Social Influences
- Clarity and Thoughtfulness of Proposed Solution

DEADLINE: December 14th

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

As students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when completing your work; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student. Failure to meet these standards may lead to a failing grade.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

SEPT. 9TH • SHAPING THE MIND

How do social, developmental, and historical factors shape the emergence and experience of psychopathology?

PLEASE NOTE:

Some content may change before semester starts. Make sure to check back in August for updates. Happy Summer!

- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In Lerner, Richard M [Ed]; Damon, William [Ed]. (2006). Handbook of child psychology (6th ed.): Vol 1, Theoretical models of human development. (pp. 793-828). US: Wiley.
- Elder, G. et al. "Ch. 1: The Emergence and Development of Life Course"
- Freud, S. (1910). *The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis* (Lecture I). In *The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis*. Read Lecture I only. Available through Classics in the History of Psychology: <https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Freud/Origin/origin1.htm>
- Piaget, J. (1964). *Development and learning*. In R. E. Ripple & V. N. Rockcastle (Eds.), *Piaget Rediscovered* (pp. 7–20). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.
- Skinner, B. F. (1953). *Science and Human Behavior*. New York: Macmillan. Read Chapter 1, "A Science of Human Behavior."
- Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Eight Ages of Man*. In *Childhood and Society*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Social Learning Theory. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. (Chapter 1)
- **Media:** Waldiner, R. "What makes for a good life" TED Talk https://www.ted.com/talks/robert_waldinger

SEPT. 16TH • THE SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS

What does science reveal about living a happier life?

- Gilbert, D. (2006). *Stumbling on happiness* (Chs. 1–3). Alfred A. Knopf.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5–14.
- Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95(3), 542–575.
- Diener, E., Suh, E. M., Lucas, R. E., & Smith, H. L. (1999). *Subjective well-being: Three decades of progress*. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125(2), 276–302.

(Sept 16th readings continue on next page)

- Diener, E., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). Very happy people. *Psychological Science*, 13(1), 81–84.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Happiness, flow, and economic equality. *American Psychologist*, 55(10), 1163–1164.
- Brooks, A. C. (2023, April 13). *How to build a life: What happiness research really says*. *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/13/opinion/happiness-research.html>
- Lipman, A. (2025). *Blocking the noise: A roadmap to happiness* Chapters 4–5 (Acceptance and Forgiveness).

SEPT. 23RD • HALF FULL OR HALF EMPTY?

The Science of How We See the World

- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 218–226.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Wilson, T. D., & Gilbert, D. T. (2003). Affective forecasting. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 35, 345–411.
- Beck, A. T. (2005). The current state of cognitive therapy: A 40-year retrospective. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62(9), 953–959.
- Hofmann, S. G., et al. (2012). The efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy: A review of meta-analyses. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 36(5), 427–440.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (1972). Learned helplessness. *Annual Review of Medicine*, 23, 407–412.
- Dweck, C. S. (2008). Mindsets and math/science achievement. *Child Development Perspectives*, 2(1), 47–54.
- Brown, B. (2006). Shame resilience theory: A grounded theory study on women and shame. *Families in Society*, 87(1), 43–52.

SEPT. 30TH • FIXED OR FLEXIBLE

Can people change and how do we know they have?

- Prochaska, J. O., DiClemente, C. C., & Norcross, J. C. (1992). In search of how people change: applications to addictive behaviors. *American psychologist*, 47(9), 1102.
- Underhill, Stefan, “Did the man I sentenced to 18 years deserve it?”, *New York Times* (2016).
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/24/opinion/sunday/did-i-sentence-a-murderer-or-a-cooperative-witness.html>
- Senghor, “Why Your Worst Deeds Don’t Define You” TED Talk
https://www.ted.com/talks/shaka_senghor_why_your_worst_deeds_don_t_define_you
- Dweck, C. S. (2008). Can personality be changed? The role of beliefs in personality and change. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 17(6), 391-394.
- Dweck TED talk https://www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve
- Walton, G. M., & Dweck, C. S. (2009). Solving social problems like a psychologist. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4(1), 101-102.
- Gilbert, D., “The psychology of your future self” TED Talk:
https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_you_are_always_changing
- *Required Listening*: Santos, L. (Host). (2024, July 1). *Why We Sabotage Our Future Selves* [Audio podcast episode]. In *The Happiness Lab*. Pushkin Industries. Stream for free on the [Official Pushkin Episode Page](#). (Run time: 28 minutes).

OCT. 7TH • FEARFUL OR FEARLESS

How do we perceive threat, respond, and adapt?

- Hofmann, S. G., Ellard, K. K., & Siegle, G. J. (2012). Neurobiological correlates of cognitions in fear and anxiety: A cognitive–neurobiological information-processing model. *Cognition and Emotion*, 26(2), 282–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2011.579414>
- Phelps, E. A., & LeDoux, J. E. (2005). Contributions of the amygdala to emotion processing: From animal models to human behavior. *Neuron*, 48(2), 175–187. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2005.09.025>
- Beck, A. T., Emery, G., & Greenberg, R. L. (1985). *Anxiety disorders and phobias: A cognitive perspective*. Basic Books. Chapters 1 and 5.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>

(Oct 7th readings continue on next page)

- Smith, J. (2024, October 12). Why are we so afraid all the time? *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/>
- Doe, J. (2025, March 12). How to calm an anxious brain. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/12/well/mind/anxious-brain.htm>
- Lipman, A. (2025). *Blocking the noise: A roadmap to happiness* Chapter 9 (Fear).
- **Optional:** Downey, G., & Feldman, S. I. (1996). Implications of rejection sensitivity for intimate relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70(6), 1327–1343. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.70.6.1327>
- **Optional:** Mendoza-Denton, R., Downey, G., Purdie, V. J., Davis, A., & Pietrzak, J. (2002). Sensitivity to status-based rejection: Implications for African American students' college experience. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(4), 896–918. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.83.4.896>

OCT. 14TH • BORN OR BUILT

How does personality develop across the lifespan?

- McAdams, D. P., & Olson, B. D. (2010). Personality development: Continuity and change over the life course. *Annual review of psychology*, 61, 517-542.
- Parker-Pope, T. “How to Build Resilience in Midlife”
- Freitas, A. and Downey, G. “Resilience: A Dynamic Perspective”
- Stern, Y. “What is cognitive reserve? Theory and research applications of the reserve concept”
- Kivipelto, M and Håkansson, K. “A Rare Success Against Alzheimer’s” *Scientific American*
- McAdams, D. and McLean, K. “Narrative Identity”
- Steinberg and Scott, “Less Guilty by Reason of Adolescence: Developmental Immaturity, Diminished Responsibility, and the Juvenile Death Penalty”
- **Optional:** Beck, J. “Life’s Stories: How do you arrange the plot points of your life into a narrative can shape who you are—and is a fundamental part of being human”
- **Optional:** Adler, J. et al, “Research Methods for Studying Narrative Identity: A Primer”
- **Optional:** Hooker, K. and McAdams, D. “Personality Reconsidered: A New Agenda for Aging Research”

OCT. 21ST • RESEARCH AND REALITY

How does good science translate into real-world change?

- ☐ Travis, J., Western, B., & Redburn, S. (Eds.). (2014). *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*. National Academies Press. READ CHAPTER 12
- ☐ Legewie & Fagan 2019, Aggressive policing and the educational performance of minority youth. *American Sociological Review*.
- ☐ Benko, Jessica (2017) The radical humaneness of Norway's Halden Prison. NYT, Oct 23.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/29/magazine/the-radical-humaneness-of-norways-halden-prison.html>
- ☐ Michelle Alexander: The New Jim Crow. (The Nation)
- ☐ "Are prosecutors the key to criminal justice reform?". The Atlantic.
- ☐ James Forman (2012). Racial critiques of the New Jim Crow
- ☐ **Media:** TED Talk: Foss, A. "A Prosecutor's Vision for a Better Justice System"
https://www.ted.com/talks/adam_foss_a_prosecutor_s_vision_for_a_better_justice_system
- ☐ **Media:** The Spirit of Justice: Michelle Alexander in conversation with Angela Davis at Riverside Church. [Spirit of Justice: Angela Davis and Michelle Alexander](#)
- ☐ **Optional:** Pfaff, J. (2017) *Locked in: The True Causes of Mass Incarceration and How to Achieve Real Reform*. Basic Books Publishing. INTRODUCTION & CHAPTER 6 (selections will be posted on course site)
- ☐ **Optional:** Alexander, M. (2012). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*

OCT. 28TH • DISCUSS PERSONAL CHANGE PROJECTS

NOV. 4TH • PUNISHMENT OR RESTORATION

How do our systems of justice shape the individual and society at large?

- ☐ Williams, T. “After the Pain, a Change to Meet and Forgive” <http://nyti.ms/2hQ1YmS>
- ☐ San Quentin Restorative Justice program <http://www.insightprisonproject.org/>
- ☐ Maruna, S. “Desistance and restorative justice: it’s now or never”
- ☐ Sered, D. “Young Men of Color and the Other Side of Harm: Addressing Disparities in our Responses to Violence”
- ☐ Wilson, C. and Bastidas, E. “Positive Criminology: A catalyst for change?”
- ☐ Coppola, Federica (2019). Valuing emotions in punishment: An argument for social rehabilitation with the aid of social and affective neuroscience. *Neuroethics*.

NOV. 11TH • KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

How can psychological science shape public opinion and policy?

Readings to be noted as date gets closer.

Guest Speaker: TBD

NOV. 18TH, DEC. 2ND, & DEC. 9TH • TED TALK IN CLASS PRESENTATIONS

PLEASE NOTE:

*Some content may change
before semester starts.
Make sure to check back
in August for updates.
Happy Summer!*

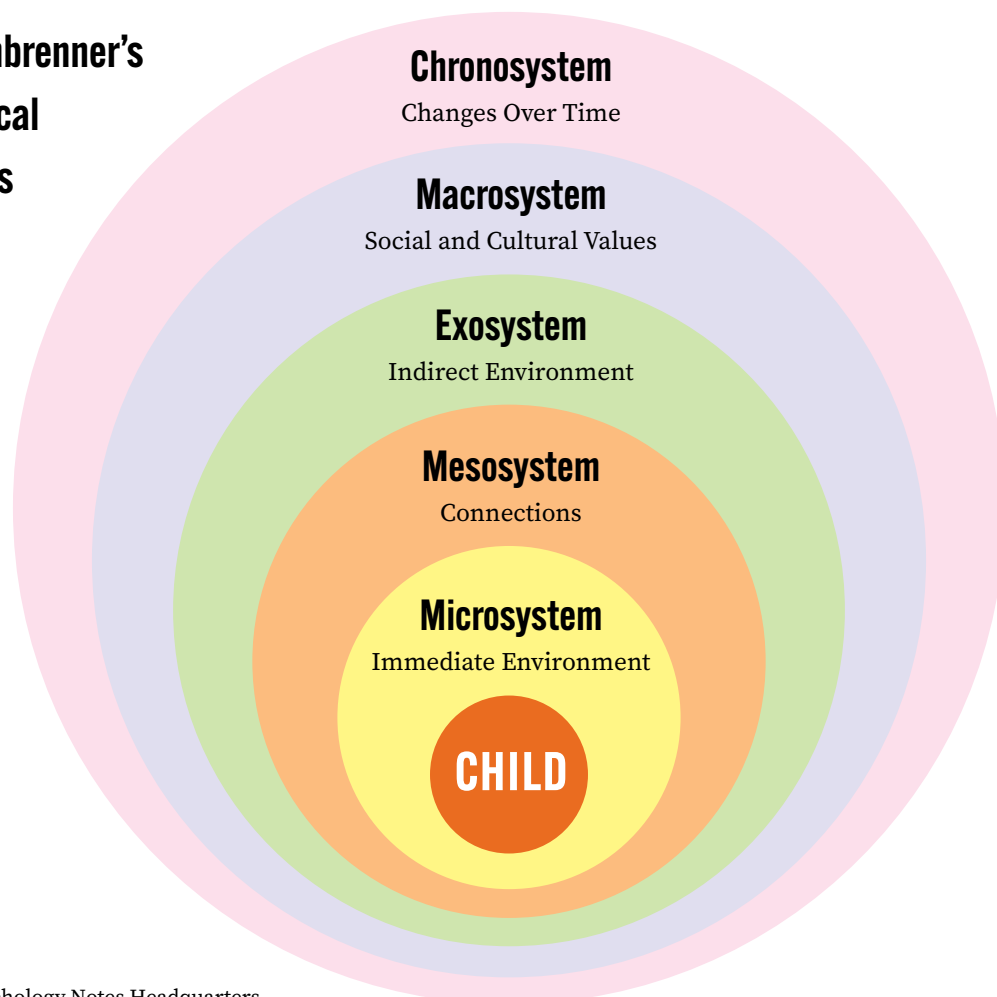
WHAT IS BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY?

American psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner, formulated the Ecological Systems Theory to explain how the inherent qualities of children and their environments interact to influence how they grow and develop. The Bronfenbrenner theory emphasizes the importance of studying children in multiple environments, also known as ecological systems, in the attempt to understand their development.

According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, children typically find themselves enmeshed in various ecosystems, from the most intimate home ecological system to the larger school system, and then to the most expansive system which includes society and culture. Each of these ecological systems inevitably interact with and influence each other in all aspects of the children's lives.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model organizes contexts of development into five levels of external influence. These levels are categorized from the most intimate level to the broadest.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



THE BRONFENBRENNER ECOLOGICAL MODEL: MICROSYSTEM

The Bronfenbrenner theory suggests that the microsystem is the smallest and most immediate environment in which children live. As such, the microsystem comprises the daily home, school or daycare, peer group and community environment of the children.

Interactions within the microsystem typically involve personal relationships with family members, classmates, teachers and caregivers. How these groups or individuals interact with the children will affect how they grow.

Similarly, how children react to people in their microsystem will also influence how they treat the children in return. More nurturing and more supportive interactions and relationships will understandably foster their children's improved development.

One of the most significant findings that Urie Bronfenbrenner unearthed in his study of ecological systems is that it is possible for siblings who find themselves in the same ecological system to experience very different environments.

Therefore, given two siblings experiencing the same microsystem, it is not impossible for the development of them to progress in different manners. Each child's particular personality traits, such as temperament, which is influenced by unique genetic and biological factors, ultimately have a hand in how he/she is treated by others.

THE BRONFENBRENNER ECOLOGICAL MODEL: MESOSYSTEM

The mesosystem encompasses the interaction of the different microsystems which children find themselves in. It is, in essence, a system of microsystems and as such, involves linkages between home and school, between peer group and family, and between family and community.

According to Bronfenbrenner's theory, if a child's parents are actively involved in the friendships of their child, for example they invite their child's friends over to their house from time to time and spend time with them, then the child's development is affected positively through harmony and like-mindedness.

However, if the child's parents dislike their child's peers and openly criticize them, then the child experiences disequilibrium and conflicting emotions, which will likely lead to negative development.

THE BRONFENBRENNER ECOLOGICAL MODEL: EXOSYSTEM

The exosystem pertains to the linkages that may exist between two or more settings, one of which may not contain the developing children but affect them indirectly nonetheless.

Based on the findings of Bronfenbrenner, people and places that children may not directly interact with may still have an impact on their lives. Such places and people may include the parents' workplaces, extended family members, and the neighborhood the children live in.

For example, a father who is continually passed up for promotion by an indifferent boss at the workplace may take it out on his children and mistreat them at home.

THE BRONFENBRENNER ECOLOGICAL MODEL: MACROSYSTEM

The macrosystem is the largest and most distant collection of people and places to the children that still have significant influences on them. This ecological system is composed of the children's cultural patterns and values, specifically their dominant beliefs and ideas, as well as political and economic systems.

For example, children in war-torn areas will experience a different kind of development than children in peaceful environments.

THE BRONFENBRENNER ECOLOGICAL MODEL: CHRONOSYSTEM

The Bronfenbrenner theory suggests that the chronosystem adds the useful dimension of time, which demonstrates the influence of both change and constancy in the children's environments.

The chronosystem may include a change in family structure, address, parents' employment status, as well as immense society changes such as economic cycles and wars.

By studying the various ecological systems, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is able to demonstrate the diversity of interrelated influences on children's development. Awareness of the contexts that children are in can sensitize us to variations in the way children may act in different settings.

For example, a child who frequently bullies smaller children at school may portray the role of a terrified victim at home. Due to these variations, adults who are concerned with the care of a particular child should pay close attention to his/her behavior in different settings, as well as to the quality and type of connections that exist between these settings.