

# PSYC 335

# Developmental Psychology I

Session 4 – Theories in Developmental Psychology-  
Part II

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# Session Overview

- In this session, the focus will be on Bame Nsaŋ's Social Ontogenesis that was developed based on the West African context. This session seeks to discuss the rationale behind the theory, the stages of human development according to Bame Nsamenang, and how the theory helps us to understand the changes in human development in the West African context.

# Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Basic assumption of Social Ontogenesis
- Stages of development/personhood in the African context
- Cultural content of intelligent behaviour
- Implications of Social Ontogenesis

# Reading List

- Nsamenang, A. B. (2006). Human ontogenesis: An indigenous African view on development and intelligence. *International Journal of Psychology*, 41 (4), 293–297.
- Nsamenang, A. B. (2000). Indigenous approaches to developmental research. In J. G. Miller, *Indigenous approaches to developmental research: An overview* (pp. 1–4). International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development Newsletter, 1, 37.
- Nsamenang, A. B. (2015). *Ecocultural theories of development*. International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.

Topic One

# **BASIC ASSUMPTION OF SOCIAL ONTOGENESIS**



# Biography of Bame Nsamenang

- Born on August 23, 1951 in Kitiwum, Kumbo in Cameroon
- Earliest education in Cameroon
- Bachelor's degree in Nursing and Master of Education in Guidance and Counseling at the University of Ibadan
- Ph. D. in Clinical Child Psychology and received that distinction in 1984
- As a Fogarty fellow, Bame studied and lectured at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development for 3 years at Bethesda, Maryland, U.S.A. from 1987 – 1990
- He was a scholar in residence at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, CA

# Motivation for theory development

- Inadequacy of existing theories
  - Theories he had studied and the conclusions made by the theorists could not be validated in his environment, nor could the schema or stages advanced by certain theorists fit his experience
  - Euro-American ethnocentrism are presented as being applicable to all of human diversity
- Differences in cultural emphasis on development:
  - Western cultures emphasize **academic, technological, or cognitive modes of social integration**, especially African cultures place primacy on **socio-affective socialization**
  - He posits a theory that is based on **socialization** and a **collectivistic** rather than **individualistic** frame of reference

# Motivation for theory development

- ▶ Socialization is **not organized** to train children for **academic pursuits** or to become individuals outside the ancestral culture but organized to **teach social competence** and **shared responsibility** within the **family system** and the **ethnic community**
- The need for a theory on human development that gives more attention or as much attention to the **surroundings** in which a person is developing.



# NsaŵeŶaŶg's research

- Set out to discover how the Nso children acquired cultural competence, with supportive evidence in other parts of Africa
- **Nso** are a people of the Bamenda Grassfields in Northwest Region of Cameroon.
- Three distinctive patterns emerged
  - 1) observation and imitation,
  - 2) attention to the themes of prototypic (model) stories
  - 3) co-participation in major activities, especially within the peer culture (peer mentoring)
- His conclusions affirm that Nso children are active in their own socialization, emphasis of which is based on obedience and social responsibility not on verbalizations and individuality

# Basic assumption of Social Ontogenesis

- An African worldview visualizes phases of human cyclical ontogenesis of **systematic socialization**
- Knowledge is not separated into **discrete disciplines**
  - but all strands of it are interwoven into a common tapestry
  - learned by children at different developmental stages who participate in the cultural and economic life of the family and society.
- Traditional African education **does not divide domains** of knowledge such as agriculture, economics, arts, science etc.
  - Instead, it **integrates knowledge** about all aspects of life into a single curriculum.
- In principle, children are rarely instructed or prodded into what they learn, but discover it during participation.
- The curriculum is arranged in sequence to fit into different milestones of development that the culture perceives or recognizes.



# Basic assumption of Social Ontogenesis

- Human development is partly determined by the **social systems and ecology in which the development occurs** and by **how the human being learns and develops**
- Development is transformation in the individual brought about by participation in cultural activities.
- Child development is viewed as a process of gradual and systematic **social integration**.
- As children are initiated into and actively engage in cultural life, they gradually and systematically **individuate** into and assume particular levels of personhood, identity, and being.

# Basic assumption of Social Ontogenesis

- Within the African worldview, human beings need **other humans** and **social responsibility** to individuate adequately and attain full personhood
  - The social ontogenetic paradigm is premised not on an **independent** or autonomous frame but on an **interdependent** or relational script
- Social ontogenetic thinking **does not exclude nature**; it assumes that biology supports social ontogenesis
- Social ontogenesis addresses how, throughout development, children are co-participants in social and cultural life

# Definition of terms

- **Sociogenesis** is defined as individual development that is perceived and explained as a function of social (socially observed markers and culturally perceived tasks), not biological, factors.
- **Development** is defined as the acquisition and growth of the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional competencies required to engage fully in **family** and **society** (Nsamenang, 2005)
- **Individuation** is the process by which the human being comes to a sense of self and personal identity in search of individuality.

Topic Two

# **STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT/ PERSONHOOD IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT**



# Stages of development/personhood in the African context

- An African worldview envisions the human life cycle in three phases of selfhood (Nsamenang, 1992)
- Each is characterized by a distinctive developmental task, *defiŷed || i thiŷ the f̄a w̄e || ođk of the Đultuđēs p̄diŷa d̄ilLsoĐio-* affective, developmental agenda.
- West African ontogeny recognizes three basic dimensions of personhood
  - First there is a **spiritual self-hood** beginning at conception or perhaps earlier in an ancestral spirit that reincarnates and ending with naming ceremony;
  - the **social self-hood**, the experiential phase of personhood extends from naming until death (which is more acceptable in old age) and develops through seven stages:
    - Period of the **newborn, social priming, social apprenticing, social entrée, social internment, adulthood, and old age and death** (Nsamenang, 1992,
  - the **ancestral self-hood** that follows biological death



# Stages of social selfhood

- **Stage 1:** Period of the Newborn (*Neonate*)
- **Core features:** Identified by happiness for the safe arrival, the gifts, and the projections regarding his/her future
- **Developmental tasks:** The naming ceremony, names determined on the basis of historical and circumstantial factors—transcendent, character-evoking, expectation-laden
- **Expected outcomes:** projects the kind of socialized being the neonate should become



# Stages of social selfhood

- **Stage 2: Social priming (*infancy*)**
- **Core features:** Infancy period. Pre-social
- **Developmental tasks:** Social priming such as smiling, crying, teething and sitting up
- babies are cuddled and teased to smile along with adults
- parents and other caregivers offer infants food items and playthings, and lure them both verbally and through  $\hat{Y}o\hat{Y}| \text{edd} \hat{a}l \text{ } \hat{D}o\hat{w}\hat{w}u\hat{Y}i\hat{D}atio\hat{Y}$  to  $\hat{d}etud\hat{Y}$  the gifts.
- **Expected outcomes:** preliminary step toward induction  $i\hat{Y}$ to the  $\hat{s}had\hat{i}\hat{Y}g \hat{a}\hat{Y}d \hat{e}d\hat{D}ha\hat{Y}ge \hat{Y}o\hat{d}\hat{w}\hat{s}$  that  $d'o\hat{Y}d \hat{s}id\hat{l}i\hat{Y}gs$  and the entire social system together

# Stages of social selfhood

- **Stage 3:** Social apprenticing (*childhood*)
- **Core features:** Social apprentice, novice
- **Developmental tasks:** Initiated into social roles. The principal developmental task is to recognize and rehearse social roles that pertain to three hierarchical spheres of life: **household, network, and public.**
- **Expected outcome:** The delegation of responsibility for care and socialization of younger children to preadolescents and adolescents serves the function of **priming the emergence of social responsibility.**

# Stages of social selfhood

- **Stage 4:** Social entrée (*puberty*)
- Core feature: social entrée
- Developmental task: Appearance of secondary sex characteristics. May attend initiation ceremonies
  
- **Stage 5:** Social internment (Adolescence)
- Core feature: Pod'atio a so Dialized i ted ship
- Developmental tasks: Social induction. Preparation and training for adulthood

# Stages of social selfhood

- **Stage 6: Adulthood (*Adulthood*)**
- Core feature: adulthood
- Developmental task: Marriage and responsible parenthood. Seniority increases with the birth of each child.
  
- **Stage 7: Old age and death (*Senescence*)**
- Core feature: Old Age
- Developmental tasks: Grand parenting. Epitome of social competence. Offspring living with the blood in them

Topic Three

# **CULTURAL CONTENT OF INTELLIGENT BEHAVIOUR**



# Cultural content of intelligent behaviour

- Cognitive development is depicted as the unfolding of the **abilities to generate the knowledge and skills** with which to responsibly and increasingly **engage with the world**.
- Markers of intelligent behaviour of Africans:
  - Ability to **capture shared routines and participatory learning** rather than in completing school-based instruments
- To **train responsibility**, parents and caregivers allocate chores to children or send them on neighbourhood errands (Ogunaike & Houser, 2002).
- In Zambia, for instance, adults keep some mental tally of the proportion of errands that a given child performs  
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the child is.



# Cultural content of intelligent behaviour

- In the short term, this attribute is used to choose which child to send on another such errand.
- In the long-term, episodes of a child's adaptive behaviour of children feed into a history of that child's social competence; indeed, of their responsible intelligence.
- An **evaluative criterion** with which **African parents** determine intelligent behaviour is **social responsibility** (Mundy-Castle, 1974).
- Some parents use evidence that a child has **ability to give and receive social support**, and **notice and attend to the needs of others**, as markers of mental and general developmental level (Weisner, 1987).

Topic Four

# IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL ONTOGENESIS





# Implications of Social Ontogenesis

- Learner brings to the learning environment prior learning skills—frames of references from the past (and/or concurrent) culture that affect the learning process
- The instructor would do well to know as much as possible about the cultural background and socialization of the learner(s) in order to effectively teach
- Applications of these ideas are helpful when creating settings for development. Besides the universal needs of children, the **need to belong** is highlighted by this theory.
  - So, in early childhood care and education centers and schools, there is the need to capitalize on the African family practice of childrearing practices that create zones of proximal development to redesign curricular content, learning spaces, and pedagogic approaches.



# Sample Question

- Compare and contrast NsaŵeŶaŶġs Social Ontogenesis with BdoŶfeŶdġeŶŶeġs Ecological Systems Theory

# References

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