

Mother Matters: Making It vs. Satisfaction in the Lives of Women Raising Young Children in Low-Income Environments

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Research Questions

Main Research Question:

How do women raising young children in poverty make meaning of their well-being?

Analytic Question:

How do social and psychological factors at each level of the social ecology influence risk and resilience in the lives of these women?

Mixed-Methodology

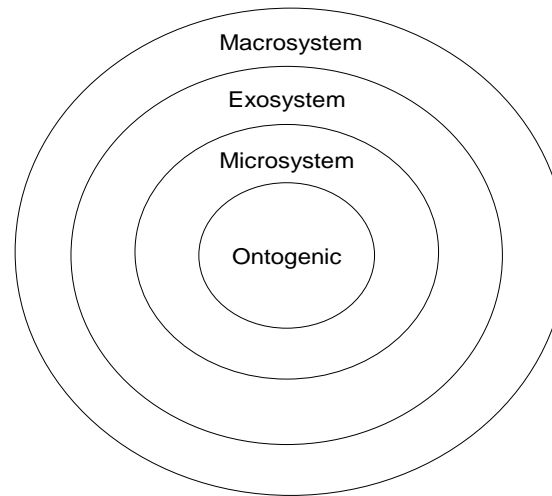
- Phase 1: Interview 17 women raising young children in poverty to understand how they make meaning of their own well-being?
- Phase 2: Using findings of initial phase, develop a quantitative model to explore the relationships between various ecological influences and life satisfaction and “making it”. Administer measures to 90 women.
- Phase 3: Re-interview 17 initial participants to clarify, understand, explore the hypotheses that emerged from the quantitative data analysis. The particular emphasis of this phase was to uncover processes, understandings, policies, etc. that might help better understand the relationships posited by the quantitative model.

Theoretical Framework

Ecological-Transactional Model of Development

**Macro-system: Race, Poverty,
Gender Stereotypes**

**Exo-system: Social Supports
and Community Violence**



**Micro-system: Close
Relationships
And Parenting Attitudes**

**Ontogenic: Coping Skills, Mental
Health, and Academic Achievement**

Findings

- These women seem to assess their well-being along two distinct dimensions: “making it” and “satisfaction.”
- Participants link the idea of “Making It” to survival. “I’m just making it to get what me and the kids need.” “I’m surviving.” “Me and my kids are still living, getting what we supposed to get, eating.”
- The extent to which one feels she is able to provide for her children seems to be the most important indicator of “making it.” “Just knowing me and my kids is alright, and I’m not in need of anything.” “I’m doing better now because I know that I have something my child will have a home base around.”
- Those who seem to be “making it” best indicate that a lack of financial stress contributes to their positive self-assessment. “Financially I feel safe. I have my job. I support myself and my children.”
- Making It does not involve comparison to other women.

Findings

- Satisfaction is second dimension of well-being, and references the extent to which one's current life measures up to individually and socially constructed notions of success, resulting in feelings of happiness or contentment. "I'm trying to be who I am..this is what's going to make me happy, because I'm not here." "I'm not satisfied at all...Sometimes I feel like I let them [my children] down because I haven't accomplished some of my goals."
- One's level of satisfaction seems fundamentally grounded in her ability to navigate expectations and social comparisons. "Everybody's looking at us, expecting us to be perfect...I've become image conscious. I'm constantly scrutinizing myself."

Phase 2 Findings

- Ego-strength was the only “significant” predictor of Maternal Functioning among this sample, accounting for 47.6% of the variance in the outcome. Ego Strength is a measure of one’s feelings of adequacy with regards to interpersonal relationships and parenting. Consistent with Phase 1 findings: assessment of functioning is much related to how well one feels she’s providing for her children. (The total score on the PSI was the outcome variable in this analysis and ego-strength was measured by the CAP ego-strength sub-scale.)
- Relative poverty, perceived safety of one’s community, experiences of one’s romantic friend, family, and best friend, and depression were all significantly associated with life satisfaction in a multiple regression model. Together, these variables accounted for 66.7% of the variance among participants in this study. (Life satisfaction was measured using a composite variable constructed utilizing principal components analysis.)

Dynamic Nature of Risk and Resilience

- Working Outside of Home (social isolation and lack of social support)- "Torn between two worlds."
- Social Policy
- Peer Relationships- "Eating each other alive"
- Romantic Relationships
- Racism and Class Discrimination (internal and external)
- A return to independence: stigmatization as a rationale for self reliance— a source of both risk and resilience

Implications

- Important to understand how particular influences are actually functioning in an individual's life, and how the participant is valuing the influence.
- Important to take an ecological perspective when "assessing" in order to capture the dynamic influence of factors.
- Limitations of a Middle-Class notion of success
- Satisfaction Matters