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SWK314/514 Human Behavior in the Social Environment

Professor Barker

Response Reflection: Week 7

1) What is the main contribution of systems theories to social work practice? Conflict theories to social work practice? Symbolic interactionism to social work practice?

Systems theories acknowledge that micro to macro-based levels are connected. They cover micro, mezzo, and macro factors. Systems theories contribute to social work practice because it recognizes person in environment. This is really helpful for social workers because it enhances our understanding of the entire context of person in environment. "Behavior doesn't just happen in a vacuum." It helps formulate assessments for the social worker like ecomaps for example, which help associate the relationships between people and their environments.

Conflict theories contribute to social work practice because it helps us "understand conflict and inequality between persons, ideas, groups, social classes, and larger social structures." It also help us understand power structures and how they impact the individual. Conflict theory acknowledges how a powerful group can affect another group with less or no power. It helps formulate assessments oppression and vulnerability in the client. Conflict theory would suggest that change doesn't come from the individual level. Oppression comes from societal pressures. IT mainly contributes to the formation of policy. Conflict theories are very helpful at the macro level.

Symbolic interactionism contributes to social work practice by demonstrating the relationship between the individual and society. Symbolic interaction enhances our understanding of self as a social process and not an individual process. It also offers an alternative view on deviance, forcing us to look outward into society. Symbolic interactionism would say that the social interactions that people have help people develop into who they are. Intervention plans for individuals and small groups are useful at the micro and mezzo levels.

2) If you were to approach the Case of Calvin using a systems theory perspective on human behavior, what would your focus be? How would you understand what's happening in Calvin's situation?
Calvin, age 15, is a Black male who lives with his 70-year-old grandmother in a one-bedroom apartment in a NYCHA unit in Harlem (he sleeps on the couch). Calvin is 6 feet tall and weighs 250 pounds. His mother is a substance user who is in and out of Calvin's life and his father is incarcerated on a drug-related conviction. Calvin has not seen his father or had much contact with him since his incarceration 3 years ago. Although Calvin is a "C" average student, he enjoys creative writing and excels in that area. Calvin's grandmother brings him to the community mental health center after he is suspended from school for physically fighting with another student. Calvin says that the other student was "picking on my best friend" and that he was just sticking up for the friend. Calvin's grandmother is concerned about how "angry" Calvin seems to be, and states that she is worried for her own safety since her health is frail.

If I were to approach the Case of Calvin using a systems theory perspective on human behavior, my focus would be on Calvin's environment. I would look at all levels from micro to mezzo, to macro. Some of the things I'd take note of are his living conditions (tiny space), who he lives with (his grandmother), where he lives (Harlem), how involved his parents are (father not around and mother is battling a drug addiction), the school he goes to and more.

3) What about from a conflict theory perspective? How does your focus shift?

If I were to approach the Case of Calvin using a conflict theory perspective on human behavior, my focus would be on the macro level. I'd look at his socio-economic background and policy that are currently in place that may be doing Calvin an injustice.

4) How might symbolic interactionism apply to Calvin?

If I were to approach the Case of Calvin using symbolic interactionalism, my focus would be on the micro level. Some of the things I'd look at are the stigmas that may be attached to Calvin. Why does one fight identify him as "angry?" I'd look at what he believes about himself. I feel like this approach is much more personal.