The Components of Multilevel Engagement Theory

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Abstract

This article presents the components (i.e., assumptions, concepts, and propositions) of the Multilevel Engagement Theory. Raza provided specific examples to describe the components of the theory and discussed these components in relation to the existing literature. The components of Multilevel Engagement Theory are also discussed in relation to three contemporary theories (i.e., family systems theory, feminist theory, and social exchange theory) to demonstrate similarities and differences between the Multilevel Engagement Theory and the other theories used in mainstream research. The author provided examples from his graduate level course assignments to further explain the components of Multilevel Engagement Theory and demonstrate the use and application of this theory. The Multilevel Engagement Theory considers culture and diversity as the central aspects to the understanding of family relationships and functioning and provides researchers with a comprehensive conceptual framework to conduct research on contemporary families, understand multilevel phenomena, and explain complex real-life situations.

Keywords: multilevel engagement theory, culture and diversity, multilevel influences, developmental, sociocultural, and historical context, family relationships and functioning, components of a theory, and theory validity

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Introduction

In this paper, the author discussed the components (i.e., assumptions, concepts, and propositions) of Multilevel Engagement Theory in relation to the existing literature. The author also provided specific examples and empirical evidence to support his arguments on the components of this theory. Raza defines a theory as follows: “A theory is a conceptual framework of interrelated concepts, terms, and ideas, which are grounded in certain assumptions and inform specific propositions to conduct research, understand relevant phenomena, and explain real-life situations.” The Multilevel Engagement Theory considers culture and diversity as the central aspects along with the multilevel influences and developmental, sociocultural and historical contexts for understanding complex relationships and functioning among individuals, groups, and families in societies around the world. The Multilevel Engagement Theory provides researchers with a comprehensive and inclusive theoretical framework and a unique theoretical lens to study families in diverse societies and cultures globally (Raza, 2023a).

According to the Multilevel Engagement Theory, there are three engagement levels, such as the proximal level, the influential level, and the holistic level (Raza, 2023a). Different individuals, families, groups, and/or organizations are situated at each of these engagement levels. For instance, families, local organizations, support groups, schools, social activists, etc., are situated at the proximal level. Media (e.g., print media, electronic media, social media, internet, etc.), funding agencies, and/or public state or federal level institutions, which are responsible to form policies and programs are situated at the influential level. Culture (e.g., individualistic, collectivistic, and evolved cultures) and diversity (e.g., gender, ethnicity, race, class, disability, language, religion, sexual orientation, immigration, and place of residence) are situated at the holistic level. These individuals, families, groups, and/or organizations have reciprocal relationships with each other within and between the engagement levels (Raza, 2022). Additionally, these engagement levels also have reciprocal relationships with each other. The dynamics of these individuals, families, groups, and/or organizations and their reciprocal relationships within and between the engagement levels change over time and are influenced by developmental, sociocultural, and historical contexts (Raza, 2021a). Hence, family relationships and functioning are influenced by the reciprocal interactions among individuals, families, groups, and/or organizations in society within and between these engagement levels, which may change over time and is influenced by developmental, sociocultural, and historical factors (Raza, 2021a).

The Multilevel Engagement Theory has similarities with contemporary theories, which are used in mainstream research. This theory also has its unique stance because it considers culture and diversity as the central aspects to the understanding of family relationships and functioning along with multilevel influences and developmental, sociocultural, and historical contexts, which provides researchers with a holistic and culturally inclusive theoretical framework to study complex family relationships and functioning among contemporary families in diverse societies and cultures around the world. Hence, the Multilevel Engagement Theory makes a unique contribution in the existing literature.

The purpose of this paper is to provide the audience with specific descriptions and examples of the components of Multilevel Engagement Theory to expand their understanding of this theory. The author discusses its components in relation to the existing literature with specific
examples and details to demonstrate the scientificness and utility of the Multilevel Engagement Theory in research and science. The following is the Research Objective of the current study: The objective of this paper is to describe the components of Multilevel Engagement Theory.

**The Multilevel Engagement Theory**

Figure 1 (set out on the following page) provides a visual representation of the Multilevel Engagement Theory. There are three engagement levels (i.e., proximal, influential, and holistic) of the Multilevel Engagement Theory. Different individuals, families, groups, and organizations are situated at each of the engagement levels.

These individuals, families, groups, and organizations within and between the engagement levels have reciprocal relationships with each other. For instance, families living at the proximal level have reciprocal relationships with other individuals, families, groups, and organizations situated at the same as well as different engagement levels (i.e., influential and/or holistic engagement levels). The three engagement levels also have reciprocal relationships with each other. The dynamics of these individuals, families, groups, and organizations and their reciprocal relationships with each other within and between the engagement levels (i.e., the proximal, influential, and holistic levels) change over time and are influenced by developmental, sociocultural, and historical contexts.

**Methodology**

The current study used qualitative research methodology and secondary data from a graduate level course to demonstrate the application and empirical evidence of the components of Multilevel Engagement Theory. Students were enrolled in a graduate course at a large-scale public university, Midwest, United States over the Spring 2023 and Summer 2023 semesters. In this course, students learned contemporary theories and research on today’s families in the area of family science and human development. The author created and shared different videos with students on each theory discussed in this course. There was a specific learning objective or purpose for each video. For instance, a video was recorded to introduce the fundamental ideas of each theory, such as main assumptions, concepts, and potential propositions. The author explained in this video the major assumptions, concepts, and propositions of a theory, how these components are related, consistent, and support each other, how a theory fulfills different functions, such as to describe and organize a phenomenon, integrate various pieces of information to make sense of it, predict human behaviors or certain family/social phenomena, uncover essential insights and hidden events and processes, and makes a value contribution to advance scientific knowledge. Similarly, a second video was recorded to demonstrate the use of theory in conducting research with different methodologies, such as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The author explained and demonstrated how each theory can be used to drive and develop relevant hypotheses.


**Figure 1: The Multilevel Engagement Theory**

![Diagram of Multilevel Engagement Theory]

*Note: S-TIME = Sociocultural time; H-TIME = Historical Time*

and research questions, predict the associations between variables/concepts, explain research findings, and deductively used to develop qualitative themes. Further, a third video was recorded to demonstrate the use and application of theories in real-life situations and personal experiences. The author used video clips from TV shows/movies and explained those situations presented in the video clips by using each theory as a theoretical lens. The author explained how a theory can be used as a lens to interpret and understand real-life situations. Moreover, the author created three different assignments for students to use and apply each theory that they learned in this course including the Multilevel Engagement Theory. These assignments included the real-life application of theories, theories and personal experiences, and final theory presentation and reflection. Specific rubrics were provided for each assignment.

In the real-life application of theories, students used the Multilevel Engagement Theory to explain a real-life situation presented in a video clip. Students used a video clip from a movie, song, show, cartoon, etc., and explained the situation presented in the video clip to demonstrate a
real-life application of Multilevel Engagement Theory. Students selected two specific concepts from Multilevel Engagement Theory, described those concepts, used them to explain the video clip, explained the relevance of those concepts in relation to the situation presented in the video clip, and the relationship between the two concepts. In the theories and personal experiences assignment, students described their personal experiences by using Multilevel Engagement Theory as a lens. Students explained how Multilevel Engagement Theory helped them to understand and reflect on their personal experiences. The instructor provided specific questions for this assignment and students expanded on their personal experiences and self-reflections with respect to those questions. In the third assignment of theory presentation and reflection, students used Multilevel Engagement Theory, described its components, the relevance of theory in understanding today’s families, relationships between the concepts and different components of the theory, and the application of Multilevel Engagement Theory to research and real-life situations. No primary data was collected from the students who were enrolled in this course. Consequently, no approval was required from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to carry out the current study. Brief descriptions of all three assignments are provided in the appendices (please see Appendices A, B, and C). Additionally, the author chose three contemporary theories (i.e., family systems theory, feminist theory, and social exchange theory) and discussed the similarities and differences between the contemporary theories and Multilevel Engagement Theory to further demonstrate the scientificness, utility, and empirical application of Multilevel Engagement Theory in the areas of theory and research.

Results

The section explains the components of Multilevel Engagement Theory with specific examples and details. The author chose a few assumptions, concepts, and propositions of Multilevel Engagement Theory and described them. To review additional details on the components of Multilevel Engagement Theory, please refer to the author’s (2023a) article entitled “The Multilevel Engagement Theory”. The author also provided evidence from his course assignments to demonstrate the use and application of Multilevel Engagement Theory. Specific definitions of each concept of the theory are also provided.

The Components of Multilevel Engagement Theory

The Multilevel Engagement Theory offers a multilevel and inclusive theoretical framework, which consists of interrelated ideas and concepts, such as family, community, culture, diversity, etc. (Raza, 2023a). The author defines a theory as follows: “A theory is a conceptual framework of interrelated concepts, terms, and ideas, which are grounded in certain assumptions and inform specific propositions to conduct research, understand relevant phenomena, and explain real-life situations.” The Multilevel Engagement Theory helps to understand and explain the relationships and functioning of individuals, families, and groups based on their reciprocal rela-
tionships with each other within and between the engagement levels, and how these relationships within and between the engagement levels change over time and are influenced by developmental, sociocultural, and historical contexts. Hence, the Multilevel Engagement Theory provides researchers with a conceptual framework of interrelated ideas and concepts to understand and explain family relationships and functioning in societies around the world.

The following section provides evidence from students’ assignments who were enrolled in a graduate course at a large-scale public university, Midwest, United States. Students chose different concepts from Multilevel Engagement Theory to explain real-life situations presented in video clips. One student chose the concepts of family and vulnerability to explain a scene that the student took from “This is Us Show” for the Real-Life Application of Theories assignment and described the interconnectedness between these concepts of Multilevel Engagement Theory and their real-life application. As this student stated, “I chose family and vulnerability because they are so closely related to each other. Each family is different, and each person has their strengths and their downfalls. I believe family is typically a great support when one of their members is struggling with a vulnerability.” The above description illustrates that each family member is different from one another who brings their vulnerability and resources into the family, which determines a family vulnerability. Families can decrease their vulnerability by empowering each member who collectively works together to increase/strengthen each other’s resources and decrease/minimize vulnerabilities, consequently, the entire family will experience a healthy functioning over time. The above evidence shows an interconnectedness of two concepts (family and vulnerability) of Multilevel Engagement Theory and their real-life application.

Another student chose the concepts of family and culture to explain a scene that the student took from “The Modern Family Show” for the same assignment and demonstrated the relationship between these concepts and their real-life application: As this student stated:

I think these concepts go together well because as a Family, you typically have a specific culture based on where you live or your race and ethnicity. It's important to remember that some families have members that all have different cultures as seen in this clip. Especially in blended families where adoption takes place, we can see multiple cultures celebrated by one family group. I chose these two concepts because they were seen so clearly in this specific clip and I liked how this clip demonstrated how different families can have multiple people of different cultures.

The above description also demonstrates the generalizability of Multilevel Engagement Theory as it explains the relationships, experiences, and dynamics of diverse families (e.g., blended families). Research shows that almost 40% of US families are stepfamilies, and among these families, at least one partner brings a child from a previous relationship and forms a stepfamily (McCarthy, 2021; Smart Stepfamilies, 2021). It is also evident that almost 1,300 new stepfamilies are formed every day in the United States (McCarthy, 2021; United States Bureau of Census, 2022). Given the growing diversity in family structure and culture, such an inclusive and multilevel theory, which considers culture and diversity as the central aspects to the understanding.
of family relationships and functioning can play an important role in uncovering, describing, and explaining the experiences of diverse families adequately.

Another student chose the concepts of family and diversity to explain a scene that the student took from “The Disney’s Encanto Movie” for the same Real-Life Application of Theories assignment and described the interconnectedness between these concepts of Multilevel Engagement Theory and their real-life application. As this student stated:

These two concepts are related because even in a family where everyone grew up together, each family member is different and diverse. Diversity is an umbrella term that can mean many things, which is why families can be so other. These two concepts were best suited for this clip because they are the show that is abundantly showcased in this clip.

The above description illustrates that although family members live together as a single-family unit, each family member is unique and different from one another. Each family member has their own qualities and needs, which makes these individuals and the entire family unique and diverse. It is worth mentioning that diversity is not only race, gender, and/or ethnicity, there are several other areas of diversity, which make individuals unique and different from one another and shape their experiences in society, such as disability, sexual orientation, religion, education, income, etc.

The above evidence shows the scientificness (i.e., the interrelationship between the theory’s concepts) and empirical evidence (the relevance and effectiveness of the theory in explaining real-life situations) of Multilevel Engagement Theory. In the above statements, family, culture, and diversity were quite prominent and influential, which were the fundamental factors in shaping the relationships, experiences, and functioning of individuals, families, and groups in society. These concepts (i.e., family, culture, and diversity) are also the core concepts of Multilevel Engagement Theory. Therefore, the Multilevel Engagement Theory considers culture and diversity as the central aspects for understanding family relationships and functioning in diverse societies around the world.

There are three main components of a theory, such as assumptions, concepts, and propositions (Smith & Hamon, 2017; 2022). Assumptions are the author’s beliefs that she/he values and thinks to be true. Since the Multilevel Engagement Theory considers culture and diversity as the central aspects along with the multilevel influences and developmental, sociocultural, and historical contexts for understanding complex relationships and functioning among individuals, groups, and families in societies around the world, the author believes that diversity (e.g., gender, ethnicity, race, class, disability, language, religion, sexual orientation, family structure, immigration, and place of residence) and culture (e.g., individualistic, collectivist, and evolved) are inevitable for every society, which are quite positive and healthy for societies. It is evident that diverse individuals, families, and groups are growing and emerging in societies around the world including the United States (Olson et al., 2021). These families have unique structures and experiences (Mendenhall et al., 2019). Family members have dynamic,
complex, and reciprocal relationships with each other in contemporary families (Raza et al., 2023b). Raza states, it is worth mentioning that although the assumptions of a theory are taken for granted or believed to be true by the author, they need to be consistent and aligned with the relevant literature. They should contain a rationale, make sense, and are clearly connected with the concepts and propositions of theory. The above discussion regarding the interconnectedness between the Multilevel Engagement Theory’s concepts and their real-life application also illustrates how diverse families and cultures are growing and emerging in contemporary societies as presented in the video clip of the “Modern Family Show”. It is worth mentioning that today’s families are not only influenced by their own relationships and functioning among the family members, but their experiences are multifected and multilevel, which also change over time and are influenced by developmental, sociocultural, and historical contexts (Raza, 2023a). Hence, Multilevel Engagement Theory is grounded in these assumptions.

The second component of a theory is “concepts.” Concepts are the terms and ideas, which are the core of a theory and help to build the theory (Smith & Hamon, 2017, 2022). Each concept of a theory has a specific and clear definition. These concepts guide researchers to conduct their research studies on any relevant phenomenon that they are interested in. Researchers can use these concepts/terms and their definitions in their research to conduct different types of research studies, such as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2014; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2022). These concepts are aligned with the assumptions and propositions of a theory (Raza, 2023a).

The Multilevel Engagement Theory has many concepts with a few concepts being discussed here. The first concept is “Culture.” Culture is defined as people’s relevant and meaningful ways of living life which include people’s beliefs, values, and practices, and determine people’s behaviors and interactions with others and their perceptions and meanings that people associate with those behaviors and interactions.” The second concept is “Diversity” which is defined as the areas of diversity such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, disability, language, religion, sexual orientation, family structure, immigration, and place of residence, which makes individuals unique and different from one another and shapes the experiences of individuals, families, and groups in society.

These two concepts (diversity and culture) are related to one another, relevant to the theory, and aligned with the assumptions of Multilevel Engagement Theory. For instance, gender is an area of diversity. Individuals have distinctive experiences in different domains of their life including family, community, workplace, and society based on their gender. Men and women earn different income even though they have the same skills and education (Olson et al., 2021; Raza et al., 2021b). Although the division of labor among couples have become less unequal compared to the past, women still perform more childcare and labor-intensive work (Raza et al., 2012; Raza et al., 2019). Moreover, individuals, couples, and families practice different cultures (e.g., individualistic culture in which an individual takes the priority over the family and social group, collectivistic culture in which a family takes a priority over individuals, and evolved culture in which both individuals and families take a priority). Some cultures are more traditional than others. In traditional cultures, men gain more power, authority, and influence over women due to their gender, whereas in nontraditional cultures, gender relationships are relatively equal or egalitarian (Raza et al., 2023b). Hence, individuals’ gender also plays an important role in shaping their
experience and these experiences may vary from culture to culture (Raza, 2017; 2018b). It is worth mentioning that due to the growing diversity and culture, gender is no longer a dichotomous category, instead it is a continuum and there are many categories exist on this continuum, which also make individuals’ experiences different from one another in society (Trump et al., 2019). The above discussion demonstrates the interrelationships of these two concepts (diversity and culture) of the Multilevel Engagement Theory.

Similarly, another concept is “Family Relationship”. A family relationship is defined as a close emotional and/or physical interconnectedness between family members, which changes over time and is important for the well-being and development of each family member and the stability and functioning of the entire family. Additionally, “Family Functioning” is defined as a family quality or condition when family members form and/or maintain positive interactions and balanced relationships with each other and effectively utilize their resources and minimize their vulnerabilities which strengthens a family and increases its members’ capacity/ability to effectively deal with any expected or unexpected events that cause stress or bring additional demands for the family to preserve a healthy family equilibrium. Healthy and positive relationships increase emotional and physical interconnectedness among family members, which strengthens a family and improves family functioning. On the other hand, a healthy family functioning ensures positive interactions and balanced relationships among family members who effectively utilize their resources and minimize their vulnerabilities to deal with any expected or unexpected events that cause stress or bring additional demands for the family to preserve a healthy family equilibrium. Thus, both family relationships and functioning are interrelated concepts of the Multilevel Engagement Theory.

“Resources” are defined as any tangible or intangible means, strengths, and/or support including the personal, interpersonal, and/or group-level resources, which maintain and improve the well-being and development of individuals, families, and/or groups in society. Finally, “Vulnerabilities” are defined as any situation, condition, exposure, and/or experience, such as exposure to hardships, tough life situations, and/or negative experiences including personal, interpersonal, and/or group-level vulnerabilities, which increase the risks of lowering the well-being and development for individuals, families, and/or groups in society. Healthy families have more resources and less vulnerabilities or they effectively utilize their resources and manage/prevent potential vulnerabilities. Consequently, they experience a greater level of well-being and development. Raza defines “Development is a process, which accompanies with growth, change, and stability that individuals experience during different stages, such as childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood, middle and older age, and in various domains, such as biological, social, psychological, emotional, etc., of their life, which provides them with satisfaction and supports their survival. Further, Raza defines “Well-being is a state, feeling, and/or experience of happiness, satisfaction, and quality of life during different stages, such as childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood, middle and older age, and in various domains, such as biological, social, psychological, emotional, spiritual, etc., of life with a continuous potential and success to ensure people’s better functioning in the family, community, and society.” As a result, individuals experience positive and healthy relationships and functioning in their family.

Further, individuals and families may vary in terms of their resources and vulnerabilities due to their culture and diversity. Their resources and vulnerabilities may look different based on
their culture and diversity. For instance, people who practice a collectivistic culture, they seek their strengths through family connections and support, whereas individuals and families who practice individualistic culture invest on their personal growth and development to strengthen themselves. In evolved culture, people focus on individual growth and also connect with the family and social groups for support and strength (Raza, 2023a). Consequently, individuals and families experience unique relationships and functioning due to the varied amount, nature, and effects of their resources and vulnerabilities and due to their culture and areas of diversity they belong to. The above discussion illustrates the interrelationships of the concepts (i.e., resources, vulnerabilities, family relationships, and functioning) of Multilevel Engagement Theory.

The third component of a theory is “Propositions,” which are the statements that illustrate the relationships between the concepts of a theory (Smith & Hamon, 2022). The Multilevel Engagement Theory also has many propositions, a few of them are discussed here. Family relationships and functioning are influenced by their reciprocal relationships with individuals, families, groups, and organizations within and between the engagement levels. This proposition illustrates the relationship between the two concepts of Multilevel Engagement Theory (i.e., family relationships and family functioning). The proposition also relates to the engagement levels and states how the engagement levels (proximal, influential, and holistic levels) play an important role in affecting the relationships and functioning of individuals, families, groups, and organizations through their reciprocal relationships with each other within and between the engagement levels. The second proposition is: Families contain and experience resources and vulnerabilities from each of the engagement levels. Hence, those families who gain new resources and/or strengthen existing resources and decrease existing vulnerabilities and/or prevent new potential vulnerabilities experience healthy family relationships and functioning over time. The second proposition shows the relationships between many concepts, such as resources, vulnerabilities, family relationships, family functioning, and time. It also discusses the role of engagement levels in creating or determining resources and vulnerabilities for individuals and families. Individuals and families who strengthen their existing resources, gain additional resources, and prevent from new potential vulnerabilities while decreasing existing ones are likely to experience healthy relationships and functioning over time compared to their counterparts. Another proposition is: Families’ positive interactions and balanced relationships invite additional resources and decrease vulnerabilities for them within and between the engagement levels. This proposition states the relationships between resources, vulnerabilities, and family relationships. Those family members who experience positive and balanced relationships are more likely to create or invite additional resources and decrease vulnerabilities, which also improves their family functioning compared to the other families. The above discussion demonstrates the consistency, links, and relationships among the assumptions, concepts, and propositions of the Multilevel Engagement Theory. Additional information on the components of Multilevel Engagement Theory can be found in Raza (2023a) article.

Discussion

The current paper presents a description of the components (i.e., assumptions, concepts,
and proposition) of Multilevel Engagement Theory. The author selected a few assumptions, concepts, and propositions of the Multilevel Engagement Theory and discussed it with specific examples and details. A demonstration regarding the consistency and relationships between different components of Multilevel Engagement Theory illustrates the scientific nature of this theory. It is worth mentioning that Multilevel Engagement Theory is in the process of further empirical testing and future studies will share evidence on the empirical testing of this theory in research. This article expands the understanding of this theory for the audience by linking it with the literature and contemporary theories, which may also help instructors and researchers to teach this theory in their courses along with other mainstream theories and use it in research. Following is a discussion on the existing theories and how they are aligned with Multilevel Engagement Theory. The author chose a few theories for the discussion.

The fundamental assumption of family systems theory is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and a couple of its concepts are system, subsystems, and boundaries (Goldenberg et al., 2017; Smith & Hamon, 2022; White et al., 2019). Since the author believes that the family provides more accurate and comprehensive information about their members when it is studied as a whole or one system, hence, family is defined as a system, such that if one member is affected, consequently, the other family members and the entire family system is affected (Carlson et al., 2018; Mabetha et al., 2023; von Bertalanffy, 1968). Moreover, there are subsystems in the family and each subsystem has its own boundary, which determines the flow of information into and outside of the subsystem (Goldenberg et al., 2017; Smith & Hamon, 2022). For instance, a subsystem of parents determines which information needs to go out and should be shared with their children, and which information needs to come into their subsystem from outside of it. Subsystems and boundaries of a family affect each other and determine how a family functions as a system. Hence, one of the propositions can be, those families which have healthy subsystems and clear boundaries are more likely to function well as a family system compared to their counterparts.

Similarly, one of the main assumptions of feminist theory is that gender is a socially constructed concept (Gilligan, 1982; Raza et al., 2023c; Smith & Hamon, 2022). Since the author believes that gender is different from sex (e.g., sex is a biological assignment at the time of birth, whereas gender is a social assignment of roles, behaviors, and expectations for men and women based on their gender) and because gender is socially constructed, it is not real, instead, society created it through social processes and interactions to assign social meanings to femininity and masculinity. Consequently, men and women are expected to perform different roles and behaviors based on their gender. Concepts like sex, gender, categorization, stratification are defined and included in this theory, such that since gender is socially constructed, some qualities (e.g., strong, aggressive, logical, etc.) are labeled as “male,” whereas other qualities (soft, nice, sensitive, etc.) are labeled as “female” for men and women. Moreover, society gives more value to those qualities, which are considered as “male” and less value to those qualities which are considered as “female” (Raza et al., 2023c). As a result, males receive additional advantages compared to females due to having those qualities which are perceived more valuable in society (Brubaker, 2021; Raza, 2017; Rice, 2021). This process of categorization and stratification create disparities between men and women based on their gender, which is not real but socially constructed by society and its institutions maintain and perpetuate it (Few-Demo & Allen, 2020; Raza, 2018a, 2018b). Hence, the feminist
theory assumes that women’s experiences are central to the understanding of families and society (Raza et al., 2023c; Smith & Hamon, 2022). Therefore, one of the propositions can be, women experience more challenges in the family and society compared to men based on their gender. It is worth mentioning that gender is considered as a continuum in contemporary societies and individuals who belong to different categories which exist on a gender continuum, have distinctive experiences in the family and society (Olson et al., 2021).

Likewise, one of the major assumptions of social exchange theory is that individuals are motivated by their self-interest (Cuesta et al., 2022; Meira et al., 2021; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Since the author (people who developed social exchange theory) believes that individuals’ self-interest takes priority and plays an important role in determining their decision whether they stay or leave a relationship with another person, the concepts of costs, rewards, and profit are discussed and included in this theory (Smith & Hamon, 2017; 2022). The rewards are benefits and pleasure that people receive from a relationship, whereas costs include any investments, opportunity costs, or direct resources that individuals exchange with the other person in the relationship. So, those individuals who receive more rewards and pay fewer costs in their relationship gain profits. Hence, one of the propositions can be: Those individuals who experience a joyful relationship where they gain more rewards and pay fewer costs are more likely to stay in the relationship compared to those individuals who are not happy with their relationship and pay more costs than rewards. It is worth mentioning that there are other factors which can influence people’s decision to either stay in the relationship or leave it, such as individuals’ commitments, investments, motivation, etc.

As mentioned earlier, a few theories are selected and discussed for the purpose of this article and most of the theories follow the same structure and pattern. The current examination of the existing theories in relation to the components of Multilevel Engagement Theory illustrates consistency and similarities between Multilevel Engagement Theory and the other mainstream theories (e.g., family systems theory, feminist theory, social exchange theory) in terms of their components (i.e., assumptions, concepts, and propositions). Although the Multilevel Engagement Theory has some similarities with contemporary theories, which are used in mainstream research, Multilevel Engagement Theory takes its unique stance by considering culture and diversity as the central aspects to the understanding of family relationships and functioning along with multilevel influences and developmental, sociocultural, and historical contexts. Consequently, the Multilevel Engagement Theory makes its unique and substantial contribution to the existing literature by guiding researchers and other groups of audience to conduct research, understand relevant phenomena, and explain real-life situations.

**Conclusion**

The Multilevel Engagement Theory offers an inclusive and multilevel theoretical framework to study, understand, and explain family relationships and functioning in different cultures and societies around the world. It has three components, such as assumptions, concepts, and propositions. The theory demonstrates consistency and similarities when it is compared with the other contemporary theories and simultaneously, The Multilevel Engagement Theory makes a unique contribution in family science and human development and other relevant disciplines due
to its central focus on culture and diversity along with multilevel influences and developmental, sociocultural, and historical contexts for understanding family relationships and functioning in different cultures and societies around the world. The theory is broad enough that can be applied to different cultures and societies globally and it is narrow to an extent that can be operationalized and measured in empirical research.

**Limitations**

There are a few limitations of Multilevel Engagement Theory, which are discussed in this section. First, the Multilevel Engagement Theory is a new theoretical framework, hence, additional testing through empirical research in different cultures and societies with diverse population is required to show the validity and reliability of this theory. Second, the Multilevel Engagement Theory encourages researchers to study multilevel influences on families which change over time and are influenced by developmental, sociocultural, and historical contexts with central focus on culture and diversity, which may bring some challenges for researchers regarding operationalization and measurement. Finally, the Multilevel Engagement Theory is developed by a diverse scholar, which promotes family culture and diversity as the central aspects to the understanding of family relationships and functioning in contemporary societies around the world, thereby, may likely face challenges to become a part of mainstream theories. Despite these limitations, the Multilevel Engagement Theory has its strengths and uniqueness and stands alongside with contemporary theories with its central focus on culture and diversity.
References


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Raza


Appendix A

Real-Life Application of Theories: The Multilevel Engagement Theory

1. Find a video clip (e.g., Movie, T.V. show, Song, Cartoon) and explain that video clip by using two concepts of the Multilevel Engagement Theory. Upload the video clip or share a direct link to the video along with your initial response. If the video clip is long, then identify the time and situation of the video that you explained by using the concepts of Multilevel Engagement Theory. Provide a description of the video clip you choose in your response to the first discussion question.

2. Describe the two concepts of Multilevel Engagement Theory that you chose for this discussion.

3. Use the first concept to explain the situation presented in the video clip.

4. Use the second concept to explain the situation presented in the video clip.

5. Discuss how the concepts you chose are related to each other, why did you choose them, and how did they best explain the video clip compared to the other concepts that you did not select?

6. What did you learn from this assignment?
Appendix B

Theories and Personal Experiences: The Multilevel Engagement Theory

1. Briefly describe the Multilevel Engagement Theory. What resources and vulnerabilities do you experience at the individual, couple, and family levels?

2. Which of the engagement levels do you experience these resources and vulnerabilities from? How?

3. How do these resources and vulnerabilities affect your family relationships and functioning?

4. How have these resources and vulnerabilities and their effects on your family relationships changed over time and have been affected by developmental, sociocultural, and historical contexts?

5. What did you learn from this assignment?
Appendix C

Theory Presentation and Reflection: The Multilevel Engagement Theory

1. Describe at least two assumptions, two concepts, and two functions of the theory.

2. Explain the linkages between the concepts and assumptions.

3. Discuss relevant research and the theory’s application to research with references.

4. Apply the concepts to real-life situations with specific examples.

5. Discuss your personal experience with respect to the theory’s application.

6. Use visual aids (e.g., flowcharts, graphs, tables, pictures etc.) to effectively demonstrate the theory, its application to research, real-life situations, and your personal experiences.

7. Provide your overall reflection on the theory and its application in research and real-life situations.

8. What did you learn from this assignment? Provide a precise conclusion of the assignment.

9. Review two other classmates’ presentations and provide them with your constructive, critical, and descriptive feedback.

10. Include complete references.