

USE OF THEORY IN CHILD SOCIALIZATION RESEARCH*

Burhanettin KESKİN**

Abstract : This article examines the use of explicit theory in empirical studies on child socialization. Twenty-seven empirical studies published in the last 10 years on child socialization were examined regarding authors' use of theory. A computerized database search was conducted to obtain articles by using several databases. Findings of this study indicated that 63 percent of the empirical studies employed theory explicitly. Common theories used explicitly in the studies were ecological theory and socio-cultural theory. Concerns about authors' citation practices in studies that employed theory explicitly were discussed. A suggestion for future researchers is to utilize theories explicitly to assist readers to obtain an extensive perception of the study (Coleman & Ganong, 1990) and the topic being examined.

Key Words: Child socialization; theory; use of theory; explicit use of theory; usefulness of theory

I. Introduction

Social and developmental psychologists have long been giving an immense amount of attention to socialization of children. The family has been perceived as a key means for socialization, despite the fact that it is only one of the several sources/agents (such as school, peers, the media, the legal system, the cultural belief system etc.) that play a role in the process of socialization of children (Arnett, 1995; Maccoby, 1992). Socialization is a "process by which the individual learns to become social, a member of society" (Hyman, 1973, p. 529). The main goals of socialization process are: (a) having control over impulse and an understanding of right and wrong, (b) preparation and implementation of social roles including job-related roles, gender roles, and parental roles, (c) endorsement and preservation of what is considered to be imperative, appreciated, respected, and lived for (Arnett, 1995). Socialization comprises the transmission of cultural values, norms, and contents. Socialization and its consequences rest on the particular culture, the components of the society, and environment that individual lives in, and the individual's characteristics (Clausen, 1968). Socialization requires attaining habits, aptitudes, values, and rationales allowing children to (a) shun unacceptable

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** Dr., Atatürk Üniversitesi, K.K.Eğitim Fakültesi, Okul Öncesi Eğitimi ABD

behaviors that disturb the operation of others in the social groups (b) work so that they can provide financial support for themselves as well as for their families (c) establish and maintain compact relationships with other members of the society (d) be capable of raising children when it is their turn (Maccoby, 1992).

From the very beginning of the process of establishing the society, a measure of agreement among the society's members has been needed. It is the communication that enables the agreement necessary for the creation of the society. Through the communication process, common symbols, and norms are attained. Because of the fact that social requirements are not stable over time, learning continues for people of all ages (Clausen, 1968a). Socialization does not only involve children or immature, it also involves adults. Every lasting relationship involves reciprocal anticipation and expectations. For example, in the family context, parents socialize children; on the other hand, parents become socialized by learning through intimate give-and-take between themselves and the children (Mayer, 1970). According to empirical studies, the way children are socialized is compatible with parents' cultural values, actions, and socioeconomic status (Zayas & Solari, 1994). Culture is conveyed through family practices. To a certain extent, parenting practices abide by the role obligations that culture determines for the family. These role requirements are learned through parents' own experiences in relation to socialization (Arnett, 1995).

Concerning the socialization of children, it is important to recognize that even though culture that surrenders the family has a great influence on the socialization practices of the family, parents or the primary caregivers have the strongest influence on the child. The common cultural expectations can be adjusted by the parents in accordance with their personal inclinations. Positive reinforcements are given to children for their proper actions and corrections are given when their actions do not fit the family values (Arnett, 1995; Berry, 1998).

Socialization has been examined via utilizing several theories (e.g., ecological theory, social learning theory, and symbolic interaction theory). The importance of employing theory in research has been discussed by many researchers in terms of several aspects. Theory is an explanation that is related to 'fact' or 'data' (Homans, 1964; Klein & White, 1996). Without a conceptual framework, a theory cannot exist (Klein & White, 1996). "*Theorizing is the process of systematically formulating and organizing ideas to understand a particular phenomenon. A theory is the set of interconnected ideas that emerge from this process*" (Doherty, et al. 1993, p. 20) (italics in original).

Klein and White (1996) stated the functions of theories. For instance, theories make research findings possible to be accumulated and systematized. Theories also organize research findings into consequential groupings. Theories provide ideas in a

more precise way compared to daily language and offer guidance for researchers to improve and examine hypotheses. Another function of theories is the prediction of the future. That is to say, propositions of a theory must be applicable to future occurrences.

Advantages of employing explicit theory are twofold according to Coleman and Ganong (1990). First, assisting readers to perceive the study from an extensive perspective and second, making it easy for readers to evaluate the basis of study design.

A. Current Study

The purpose of this study was to examine which theories are utilized explicitly in the studies on child socialization. Robila and Taylor's (2001) study design and some of the research questions were followed in this study. Research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What are explicit theories used within the empirical research on child socialization in academic journals?
2. If theory is used, is it mentioned in the abstract of the study?
3. How are explicit theories being used in empirical studies on child socialization?

B. Methodology

In the current study, three research questions mentioned above were investigated by conducting an analysis of articles. A computerized database search was conducted by using several databases (e.g., JSTOR, PsychInfo, Social Science Abstract, and Sociological Abstracts). In this quantitative study, the analysis consisted of reviewing of empirical articles in terms of their use of theory. Articles were chosen in terms of following criteria:

1. Only empirical studies were chosen. Meta-analyses and literature reviews were excluded.
2. Studies that contained 'socialization' and 'child' or 'children' in their titles were chosen. The reason for that is to eliminate studies that were not directly about socialization of children.
3. Studies that published between 1994 and 2004. Ten years is considered to be an adequate period of time to study use of theory explicitly in recent research (Robila & Taylor, 2001).

Twenty-seven empirical studies were found. Each theory was counted only once per article. If an author used the term "theory" or another terms that serve similar goal as theory (such as perspective, view etc.) to present research questions, to explain the topic being examined or to interpret research findings, then it was coded as "theory." By doing so, it was aimed to make an inclusive investigation of

use of “theory” in studies as much as possible (Pettigrew & McKechnie, 2001).

C. Results

Twenty-seven empirical articles were reviewed. Sixty-three percent of the studies (17 out of 27) utilized theory explicitly while 37% of the studies did not use theory explicitly. Only two studies mentioned theory in their abstracts.

Table 1. Explicit Theories Employed in Empirical Studies

Theory/Perspective Employed	Number of Empirical Studies Employing Each Theory
Attachment theory	1
Authoritarianism	1
Collective socialization theory	1
Ecological theory	5
Epidemic perspective	1
Imitation theory	1
Intercultural transformation system theory	1
Intercultural communication theory	1
Internalization model	1
Language socialization theory	1
Problem-behavior theory	1
Social disorganization theory	2
Social learning theory	2
Socio-cultural theory	4
Social cognitive theory	1
Socialization of affect model	1
Traditionalism	1
Theories of the etiologies of conduct problems and depression	1

Common theories used explicitly in the studies were ecological theory and socio-cultural theory (see Table). One of the most common theories utilized explicitly was ecological theory. This theory, proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1986, 1989), based on the belief that in order to understand development it must be studied in terms of everyday environment in which children are raised. In other words, development should be studied not only by examining the home

environment but also schools, neighborhoods, and communities in which development occurs. Understanding development requires an examination of wider social and cultural systems in addition to immediate environment of the child (Bukatko & Dahler, 1998). Farabutt, Walker and MacKinnon-Lewis (2002) examined racial socialization in a specific ecological situation. Using ecological theory, the authors were able to examine racial socialization messages in a comprehensive way (e.g., communication, warmth, negativity, child monitoring, and involvement).

Another theory which was mostly used by researchers was socio-cultural theory (e.g., Aukrust, 2004; Portes, Cuentas, & Zady, 2000; Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2003). Vygotsky is generally known as the founder of socio-cultural theory (Mahn, 1999), which is based on the belief that learning is an open ended process which occurs from involvement in collective activities, cultural tools, interaction, interpersonal relationships, and social practices not from progressive developmental alterations taking place within the person (Renshaw, 1998 as cited in Lim & Renshaw, 2001; Lim & Renshaw, 2001). Tenenbaum and Leaper (2003) utilized socio-cultural theory to examine the parent-child conversation about science. By referring to Vygotsky (1978) and Wertsch (1991), Tenenbaum and Leaper state that children's learning occurs in social interactions by internalizing parental verbal communications. Children's future behaviors are guided by these parental verbal communications. Utilizing socio-cultural theory allowed the authors to examine this topic extensively. The authors state that children can develop scientific concepts and think about science at a more profound level by listening to their parents' cognitively demanding conversations about science. The authors underline the different effects of socio-cultural factors on scientific problem solving skills of boys and girls. For example, if parents utilize more cognitively challenging language with boys compared to girls, as a consequence, scientific problem solving skills of boys and girls will be different.

Social disorganization theory was commonly used theory in studies examined in this study. Social disorganization refers to a situation in which a society that is incapable of appreciating the general value system of its members (such as ethics and morals) and incompetent at sustaining efficient social control over its members (Bursik, 1984; Kornhauser, 1978 as cited in Sampson & Groves 1989). Social disorganization theory proposes that "the particular characteristics of disadvantaged neighborhoods inhibit processes that promote conventional behavior in both adults and children" (Brody et al. 2001, p. 1232). Another theory that was commonly used in the studies examined in this current study was social learning theory. This theory sustains that the possibilities resulted from people's deeds in certain situations are observed by individuals and then this information is employed to make a plan about

how to act in a comparable situation (Bandura, 1973, 1977). In accordance with social learning theory, instead of simply copying people's actions, individuals imitate deeds that lead positive consequences and generate pleasing outcomes. It is improbable for a person to perform a deed if it will not have a positive consequence (Simons, Lin, & Gordon, 1998). Brody et al. (2001) utilized social disorganization theory and social learning theory to explain influences of disadvantaged neighborhood on deviant behaviors of children. The authors found that deviant behaviors represented by children who live in disadvantaged social environment decrease when the level of collective socialization is higher. Also, nurturant parenting style was found to be negatively associated with children's relationship with deviant peers. By utilizing both theories (social learning theory and social disorganization theory), the authors were able to expand their research questions which resulted in examining the topic in a broader perspective (i.e., the effects of nurturant parenting on children's learning process and the effects of disadvantaged neighborhood on children's deviant behaviors).

D. Discussion

It is appealing that almost forty percent of the studies that were examined in this study did not utilize explicit theory. Regarding the studies that employed theory explicitly, there are some concerns about authors' citation practices. Some of the following concerns are also mentioned by Pettigrew and McKechnie (2001). First of all, only two studies mentioned theories they utilized in the abstract. However, it is important to use theory in the article's abstract in terms of helping researchers when searching for articles in databases. For example, it would make easier for a researcher who wishes to find articles that examine socialization of children in terms of ecological theory, if the theory is mentioned in the abstract. Second, authors sometimes do not provide proper bibliographic references for the theories they refer to. Third, authors frequently mentioned or used many different theories in a single study. This makes it difficult for a reader to interpret the results as each theory has a unique way of approaching and explaining the issue. For example, in a single study following theories/perspectives were mentioned; ecological theory, socio-cultural theory, and social cognitive theory. Fourth, authors frequently do not provide enough information about the theory they used. A reader may gain an inadequate understanding of the theory if it is explained using only one or two sentences and is not mentioned again.

The authors that did not employ theory explicitly in their studies may have examined the topic limitedly as theories offer an extensive view point to approach the subject matter. For instance; Caughy, Randolph, and O'Campo (2002) in their study titled "The Africentric home environment inventory: An observational measure of the racial socialization features of the home environment for African American preschool children" did not utilize any theories explicitly. In their study, the authors explained an observational measure as regards to racial socialization characteristics of the home

environment. The scale used by the authors for observational measure of the racial socialization had some of the following items: Black artwork in the home, Black religious or other figures, pictures of family members, and African fabric/print clothing. Because symbolic interaction theory perceives socialization as “the process by which we acquire the symbols, beliefs, and attitudes of our culture” (Klein & White, 1996, p. 95), it would have been interesting to use symbolic interaction theory in Caughy, Randolph, and O’Campo (2002)’s study to examine how these figures, pictures and other symbols affect children’s racial socialization.

It is appealing that none of the studies examined in this current study utilized conflict theory to approach child socialization. Especially, with regard to racial socialization, employing conflict theory might be useful because some of the research on racial socialization focus on racial conflict which can be examined extensively by conflict theory. According to conflict theory, conflict is prevalent in social groups and it is unavoidable between social groups. Because conflict theory entails the examination of the techniques to keep the groups from confrontations (Klein & White, 1996), it would be useful to employ this theory in research on racial socialization to provide possible solutions to racial conflicts.

The educational importance of this study is at least twofold. First, the results reported in this study may provide helpful hints for researchers to have a better understanding of the importance of employing theory explicitly in their studies. Second, the common mistakes when employing theories reported in this study may lead future authors to avoid these mistakes or shortcomings.

It would be useful for future researchers to utilize theories explicitly to assist readers to obtain an extensive perception of the study (Coleman & Ganong, 1990) and the topic being examined.

Özet : Bu makalenin amacı çocukların sosyalizasyonu ile ilgili ampirik makalelerde teori kullanımını incelemektir. Çocukların sosyalizasyonu ile ilgili son 10 yılda yayımlanmış 27 ampirik makale, yazarların teori kullanımı açısından incelenmiştir. İlgili makaleleri bulmak için birçok veri tabanı, bilgisayar yardımıyla araştırılmıştır. Bulunan ampirik makalelerin %63’ünde açık bir şekilde teori kullanıldığı tespit edilmiştir. Açık şekilde en yaygın olarak kullanılan teorilerin ekolojik teori ve sosyo-kültürel teori olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Kullanılan teorileri açıkça ifade etmekle ilgili meseleler bu makalede ele alınmıştır. Gelecekte yapılması muhtemel araştırmalar için okuyucuların ilgili çalışmalar hakkında geniş bilgi elde edebilmeleri amacıyla araştırmacıların kullanacakları teorileri açıkça ifade etmeleri tavsiye edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çocukların sosyalizasyonu; teori; teori kullanımı. açık şekilde teori kullanımı; teorinin faydaları

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