

Development in middle childhood

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Development in Middle Childhood Middle childhood has many dimensions which affect the individual growth and development. Dimensions are biological, psychological, and social development. Also, a child's environment, such as school or home, can affect the individual growth and development. To help aid the understanding of individual growth and development, there are various theories one can apply to middle childhood. These theories allow one to examine each dimension uniquely. To help demonstrate the many dimensions of middle childhood is the book *All Over but the Shoutin'* by Rick Bragg (1997). He writes a memoir about his life growing up poor in the South and the path he traveled down that led him to become a highly acclaimed journalist for the New York Times. Rick Bragg describes his family, nuclear and extended, as extremely poor white Southern people. He grew up living mostly in a shack with his mother, two brothers, and grandmother. Bragg's extended family had a strong presence which was shown by supporting his mother, him, and his brothers throughout his childhood. His mother signed up for welfare because she knew she could not earn enough money to clothe, feed or care for her children with her job. He described his mother was headstrong and loving. She demonstrated this by protecting her sons from the effects of poverty. Occasionally, his father, who is part Native American and a viscous drunk, came around to take his family to a new home. Bragg's life consisted of social factors such as poverty, domestic violence, abuse, and alcoholism which affect the developmental growth. In addition, his interactions in his environments play a pivotal part in the development of himself. Further, the use of theories helps to reflect the developmental stage of the middle childhood. Bragg's

memoir Multigenerational Impact Family support and kinship plays a important role in the development of the children's behavior and their success in both academic and non academic settings. Bragg exclaims the reason why he enjoyed his childhood was because of his mother's family kindness and help. His uncles became his solid male figure in his life. They would represent a father figure in his life. His Aunt Jo and Uncle Ed would take him and his brothers to drive in movie theater, to the hotdog stand, to their basket ball practices and games, and occasionally a trip to the ice cream store. Also, as Bragg got older, his uncle gave him and his brothers' jobs in his company. His family members would make quilts for them or pass down clothes for the children to wear. He is connected to events of familial history which shaped his childhood (Charlesworth, Wood, & Viggiant 2008). He inherits family ideologies from the previous generation and current generation. For example, his mother taught him " not to give a damn when it hurts" and " every life deserves certain amount of dignity no matter how poor or damaged the shell that carries it" (Bragg 1997 p. xx-xxi). It was this ideology that helped Bragg push for what he wanted to do with his life. Without these ideologies of his mother he might not have traveled the path he went down. According to literature, children in middle childhood learn how they respond to the events and people around them, and what they expect from themselves and others are profoundly influenced by their relationships in their environment of the homes in which they live (Shonkoff & Phillips 2000). A family systems approach disputes that in order to understand a family system one must look at the family as a whole and not as individuals (Family Systems, n. d.) Family systems theory looks at the

internal working of a family like hierarchies, boundaries, equilibrium, to name a few. Information in a family system is passed through feedback loops. Bragg's family would evident negative feedback loop (Kaslow, Dausch, & Celano 2003). For example, homeostasis in his family has been hinder by domestic violence. The feedback loops pass information through the subsystems, which contains an individual of a family either by generation, gender, interest, or function that have boundaries (Kaslow et al 2003). It is evident in Bragg's family there are boundary impairments due to the lack of communication between family members. Finally, Bragg's family structure is maintained through roles, specifically dysfunctional roles because of the poverty, domestic abuse and alcoholism that was present. In addition, historical events, culture, and social structure often influences children through their family systems (Charlesworth et al. 2008). To address external events, along with family dynamics that affect the family, the use of the ecological perspective would apply. The ecological perspective looks at reciprocal exchange between the environment and the person, adaptations to the environment, strength to do something about the environment, and coping strategies of an individual (Professor Arvin Bains, class notes, September 22nd, 2009). Bragg grew up during a time when racism was at its peak in America. He writes about the beating of African Americans as a common occurrence and burning the buses of the Freedom Riders. As a result, he threw rocks at the young African American boys until his family was helped by an African American family. He learned that what other Southern people thought of poor Southern people. He was embarrassed by the teacher calling out free lunch in school, he wore hand-me downs clothes

where the shirts showed off his navel and his pants were hemmed lopsided. Further, the feminist theory looks at the power inequalities in families and outside of families. He witnessed an unhealthy relationship that contained abuse and alcoholism between his mother and his father. To add to his life, he also grew up on welfare and charity donations. Psycho-Social Factors A child's readiness to deal with challenges and opportunities that becomes present in his or her life is shaped by their prior experiences (Charlesworth et al. 2008). To provide understandings of psychological and social development are Jean Piaget, Eric Erikson, and Lawrence Kohlberg. Each theorist has a particular view of a child's development during middle childhood. Piaget's middle childhood developmental stage is called concrete operational which explains children think logically. Erikson describes this developmental stage a time where children need to acquire skills, gain knowledge, and accomplish tasks to develop an industry ego, otherwise the child will develop an inferiority ego. Finally, Kohlberg The majority of children in poverty are white while African Americans and Latinos populations are overrepresented (Charleworth et al. 2008). " In fact, poor was all she ever witnessed, tasted, been" (Bragg 1997 p. 25). Rick Bragg describes his family, nuclear and extended, as extremely poor white Southern people. He grew up living mostly in a shack with his mother, two brothers, and grandmother. His mother signed up for welfare because she knew she could not earn enough money to clothe, feed or care for her children with her job. Single mothers and their children face disadvantages compared to intact families (Eamon & Zuehl 2001). One disadvantage is poverty. Poverty can affect a child's development in all areas (Charlesworth et al. 2008). Bragg's mother did

everything she could for her children so their quality of life inched up a little. Resulting from his mother's unselfishness and ability to absorb the bad, her children were able to enjoy their childhood to a certain extent.

Developmental theorist, Jean Piaget, could help explain reasons Bragg perceived his middle childhood as enjoyable. Piaget's concrete operational stage states children reasoning becomes more logical while staying at a concrete level while the principle of conservation is learned (Charlesworth et al. 2008). In other words, children think logically, not abstractly, operations are associated with personal experience, and they have the ability to classify groups (Lin 2002). Bragg demonstrated thinking logically specifically in how he perceived his world. He recalls never giving it much thought why his mother ate last. He did not think abstractly to understand the reason she ate last was due to poverty. It was not until the latter end of his middle childhood when he was transitioning into adolescence did he realize the reasons why his mother did the things she did. Another example is when he received a pink Easter basket but he did not notice the color was not blue. He was just happy to get an Easter basket. Bragg did not know he should be ashamed of "free" lunches at school or dump diving for treasures at the local dump. His inability to think abstractly and his mother enduring the bad had protected him. These factors blocked him from the harsh realities of his life. Another disadvantage is cited in research by Eamon and Zuehl (2001) explains families that are headed by a single mother their children are more likely to experience socioemotional problems (McLanhan 1997)). Bragg writes about him and his brothers' aggressive behaviors that they exhibited during middle childhood. One possible explanation of their aggressive behaviors could be

the absence of their father (Eamon & Zuehl 2001). The absence of Bragg's father did not help the family. Instead, the absence hindered them. His father was not there to provide the proper support in terms of emotions, intellect, and financial. Pan and Farrell (2006) cite McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) research on not having a father to divide up responsibilities and help in raising a child, single mothers are more likely to spend less time having meals with their children, monitoring them, and helping with their homework (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Bragg's mother worked all day in the cotton field, ironing people's clothes and various other jobs because her husband did not give money to clothe or feed the children. It left her with no option except to work as much as she could in order to feed and clothe her children. As a result it hindered her ability to provide her sons with the proper supervision which could have led to their aggressiveness. Extensive research (Eamon & Zuehl 2001; Pan & Farrell 2006) report single mothers experience psychological and life stressors along with chronic strains. The research (Eamon & Zuehl 2001; Pan & Farrell 2006) shows this could lead to less effective parenting, harsher punishments, and maternal depression. However, this did not seem apparent in Bragg's mother. He exclaims his mother half-heartedly whipped him which was not effective. She did not seem depressed. His mother's personality was exceptionally strong which allowed her accepted the chronic strains and life stressors.

(ABUSE/ALCOHOL) Occasionally, his father, who is part Native American and a viscous drunk, came around to take his family to a new home. The school system becomes pivotal during the middle childhood stage. The child will have to navigate a system that is different from his or her family.

Charlesworth et al. (2008) state the school environment may shape a child's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. The theorist Erikson (1958) explains children during middle childhood have a developmental task: industry versus inferiority. If a child can build up a sense of competence to become proficient in skills, gain knowledge, and accomplish tasks he or she develops industry (Erikson 1958). If a child does not become proficient in skills, have knowledge or accomplish tasks, he or she will feel incompetent (Erikson 1958). Bragg learned in school the separation of children according to their socio-economic status. For example, he was placed in a reading group with people of his kind or explains to his classmates and teachers the reason why he lived with his grandmother was related to his father's absence. As a result, teachers and the principal displayed how the school system mirrors the community of the South which was ran by old-money white Southerners who treated others below them as beggars. This view was carries into the school system by recognizing Bragg and his brothers' rank in society and reinforcing it in the school. One key example Bragg (1997) presented was his brother Sam was told to sweep the floors, clean the bathrooms, and shovel coal into the furnace to earn a free lunch. Even though Bragg had to endure hardships in school, one would think he would develop an inferior ego. However, I think he was still able to complete the ego development task of industry and gain a sense of self-competence. He might not have received the support to accomplish the developmental task of industry through academics because of the school's view of treating poor students mirrored the community view of the South. One example which provides evidence of industry ego is his participation on the middle school

basket ball team. He described himself as a “ shooter" (Bragg 1997 p. 95). It gave him pride and glory when he shot the basket ball further from the net. Bragg (1997) recalls a game when the coach motioned for him because he needed a shooter. He paints a picture of the most beautiful shot he or the people in the stands ever saw. Bragg’s involvement in a sport could have provided him success in building competence and esteem. To parallel Erikson’s idea of industry versus is achievement goal theory’s idea of task orientation versus ego orientation (Moran 2004). Task orientation is interested in skills learning, mastery of challenges, and self-improvement (Moran 2004). In contrast, ego orientation is interested in a person who compares self to the achievements of others (Moran 2004). Being part of the basket ball team allowed Bragg to acquire skills, such as communication with teammates, team cohesion, deliberate practice of technical skills, and motivation, that he needed to become competent in. His participation on the basket ball team allowed him to feel as an equal player in a system that sees him as beggar. Another hypothesis of Bragg’s participation on the basket ball team was a form of social approval which would be due to extrinsic motivation. Research in sport psychology explains extrinsic motivation as a person who is involved in a task for external factors (Moran 2004). Bragg might have joined sports to seek approval from faculty and students in his school and perhaps his family. Perhaps Bragg thought sports could be a way out of poverty or a way to show others even if one is poor he or she can still achieve great things. In addition, Bragg compares himself to the other players when he describes himself as a shooter. This key skill of shooting allowed him to think he was superior in his ability. A result of this could have

lead to develop competence and ego oriented motivation. Further, if Bragg lacked the skills he would not have an ego orientation motivation which could have lead to feelings of inadequacy where he might have developed a task orientated motivation. If Bragg did not participate on the basket ball team he might have developed an ego of inferiority. He would have felt incompetent compared to his peers. This could have led to Bragg seeing life as dismal which could have turned into depression or substance abuse.

Biological Development An obvious aspect of middle childhood is physical development. During this developmental stage, children go through a period of slow growth until they interject with a process called puberty. Before divulging into puberty, the period of slow growth can be related to Freud's stage of latency. Freud describes latency as a period of calmness where the child's sexual desires lessen, the superego develop (Charlesworth et al 2008) and an interest in cultural values, roles, and skills become dominant (Ohrenstein 1986). Bragg (1997) did not mention sexual development. He did mention playing outside with his brothers and was hungry to read which further his development. He was playing and acquiring skills during this time when play and physical activity is essential for growth (Ohrenstein 1986). In addition, Bragg was learning values and roles. For example, when Bragg was a young boy he learned that a " man who wouldn't fight, couldn't' fight was a pathetic thing" (Bragg 1997). As a result, he and his brothers were " like our father, his father, his brothers, we fought with our fists (Bragg 1997). He was learning the acceptable roles and the proper values of a poor white Southern boy. Puberty brings many biological changes which brings significant differences between boys and girls when they reach the onset of

puberty (Eccles1999). Girls will experience growth in height and breast development approximately eighteen month before boys reach puberty (Eccles 1999). Boys develop in area such as height and genitalia (Charlesworth et al. 2008). Maturation can impact the development of social and psychological growth. For example, if a girl develops early this could affect how she is perceived or feels. Bragg (1997) notes his experience during middle childhood which is typical of boys around the age of ten through twelve. In addition, there is also a difference cross cultures. It is interesting to note African American girls have the earliest onset for puberty while their African American counterparts have the latest onset of puberty. If Bragg was African American how would have differed in physical development? Would he have a different perception of himself and others? How would his play and physical activity shape his development (Ohrenstein 1986)? This stage is important to the development of an individual. Puberty can affect a child perception of self and how he or she is treated by peers and adults (Charlesworth et al 2008).