

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Where there is no vision, the people perish. Proverbs 29:18

(as cited in Banathy, 1991)

The findings of this study have been broad in scope and have led to many possibilities for implementing research and guiding educational areas of the field of CT. In conclusion, the proposed theoretical framework and its implications to the CT literature will be discussed. An evaluation of the integrated theoretical framework and model will be given. Recommendations for future research in the area of the systems perspective and human development, particularly within the field of CT, will be given. And, a summary of the research study will end this document.

Metatheory was the focus of this research, a study of theories. The goal of this study was to develop a theoretical framework and visual model that integrated the systems theory perspective from multidisciplines (i.e., human development, developmental psychology, educational psychology, family therapy) and the current theories (i.e., human ecology, cognitive theory, cultural theory, symbolic interaction) used in the field of CT. The results of this study supports Vaines (1983) from the Human Resources field, which includes CT, that the systems perspective may be used as a tool to address dynamic, complex human-environment issues. Vaines said systems theory “has the potential to both organize and illustrate complex ideas in more precise and explicit ways. And since home economics is a complex and sophisticated idea, systems theory applied to systems frameworks can be used to better reflect the field’s multi-faceted and interrelated concepts” (p. 90).

The developed theoretical framework shows how researchers in the field of CT can adopt a holistic perspective, for research and educational practice, enabling researchers to address dynamic, complex societal issues. Within the model, the principles of human development are incorporated into research methodology in the field of CT in order to address complex human problems such as body image and eating disorders in women. The findings of this study were used to develop an expanded theoretical

framework and model to be used in the field of CT. The study expands the concepts of human ecology presently used in a limited manner in the field (Fratzke, 1976; Maher & Sontag, 1986; Olson, 1982; Pederson, 1984; Sontag, 1985-86; Sontag & Bubolz, 1996, Sontag, Bubolz, & Eicher, 1993).

Evaluation of the Integrated Theoretical Framework and Model

Two evaluation frameworks (i.e., Lieber & Stiegel, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were integrated to evaluate the developed theoretical framework and model of this study. Four questions were posed based on combining the four central criteria for a well-constructed grounded theory--fit, understanding, generality, and control--as proposed by Strauss and Corbin and the four areas for evaluating theory--the purposes of theory, the credibility of theory, the utility of a theory, and theoretical development as composed by Lieger and Stiegel. These are used as a basis for reflecting on and evaluating the proposed theoretical framework and model.

The first question is, *Are the theoretical framework and model understandable and do they serve the purposes of theory—that is does it organize and clarify observations, explain the phenomena as it was identified in the data, provide understanding of the subject matter, and generate new ideas and research?* A grounded theory research design was used for the study to insure that phenomena were explained as identified in the data. The theoretical framework and Human-Environment Systems model are understandable to professionals familiar with systems theory and social psychological theories, based on review by the auditor of this study and the peer-checker of the systems theory perspective. The observations of the human-environment unit are organized and clarified by the statements of the theoretical framework and the concepts of human biological and psychological subsystems, social, cultural, and natural environments existing in space and time are shown visually by the model. The structure of the theoretical framework with the domains, categories, and sub-categories provide an organization from broad topics to specific concepts.

The theoretical framework and the model serve the purposes of theory. The discussion of body image and eating disorders of females illustrates how the theoretical

framework and model explains and gives interpretations that guides a researcher to use a holistic perspective to view the interaction of a female with her own biological and psychological systems and the social, cultural, and natural environments. The domains and categories of the theoretical framework allow the researcher to review the concepts embedded in the problem and to draw upon information from the theories in many fields.

The discussion of the relationship, process, organization, and outcomes of systems and specifically the human-environment unit provide an understanding of the subject matter for a research problem. For example, when applied to the issue of body image and eating disorder, the theoretical framework provides an understanding of the relationship, process, organization, and outcomes of the social, cultural, and natural environments on a female. For example, the theoretical framework directs the researcher to investigate the female's values that guide her decisions and behaviors, and her biological and psychological subsystems. In addition, the Human-Environment Systems model depicts what factors, especially those related to clothing and appearance management behaviors might co-contribute to a negative body image in problems of eating disorders. Using this expanded, holistic perspective could aid in generating new ideas and research to old and new problems. For example, the problem of eating disorders could be studied by an interdisciplinary research team in a series of studies that addresses the interaction of the multiple systems, when tracking a group of females over time.

The second question asked was, *Are the theoretical framework and model credible, and do they provide control with regard to action toward the phenomena being studied?* The methodology of this research was a grounded theory approach that formulated concepts that were identified in the data into domains, categories, and sub-categories. These theoretical elements of the framework are supported and credible because the theoretical framework and model fit the reality of humans and the world as researchers presently know and describe it in the literature. This conclusion is based on induction from diverse data. The research questions that proposed the relationships between the concepts were identified and derived from the data on the theories that were reviewed. Agreement with this question in the evaluation is also supported by the auditor

and peer checker and who concurred that the theoretical framework and model were consistent with the root disciplines and understandable in the integrated form.

The theoretical framework and model also provide control with regard to action a researcher would take in perceiving and researching human-environment problems and situations. For example in the issue of body image, due to the guidance of the theoretical framework a researcher would view the problem with a holistic perspective of the dynamic, complex relationship and coaction between a female and her environment that was impacted by the dimension of time. Investigation of the research issue would be guided by the four domains and the hierarchy within each domain to provide a comprehensive investigation.

The third question is, *Are the theoretical framework and model useful and are they abstract enough to apply to a variety of contexts related to the phenomena that is studied?* The theoretical framework and model was designed to give a general, abstract visual representation of the theoretical concepts of a holistic, systemic view of the human-environment unit. The focus is on the human-environment unit instead of the human component or environment component singly. The theoretical framework provides broad domains with definitions in language that context specific, in order to apply to a variety of contexts and problems related to the human-environment systems. The broad domains become more specific when explained through the categories and sub-categories. For example, this perspective could be used for studying the role of clothing and appearance in legal cases. A holistic approach could also be used to study the relationship of school uniforms and optimal learning and the reduction of behavioral problems, including violent acts. Researchers in the CT areas of economics and trade, consumer behavior, apparel design, merchandising and even textile science of could apply this theoretical framework and model. An example of the use of this theoretical framework is in the area of consumer behavior where a cognitive approach is used extensively, but where several interacting systems are involved with the act of buying, selling, and using consumer products. Also, in the manufacturing area there are human, textile science, technology, and business systems composing dynamic, complex

phenomena that require non-simplistic solutions to problems. The proposed theoretical framework and model could be used to explore non-simplistic solutions to problems.

The framework and model has many concepts and ideas that can be applied and tested by use in research of human-environment questions. For example, the formation of a female's body image can be explained by the interplay of the multiple systems over time. Individual differences contribute to the absence or development of eating disorders. These statements can be applied and tested in future research. Present day society is composed of dynamic, complex interaction between humans and the environment. This holistic theoretical framework and model are appropriate to this time in our society and its complex needs, as illustrated by the discussion of the complex societal problem of eating disorders in females. Researchers in many fields use and recognize the worth of a holistic perspective to address the complexity of our current societal problems.

The fourth question asked was, *How can the theoretical framework and model be improved or further developed?* The developed theoretical framework and the visual model for this study are part of a qualitative exploration of a broad range of material and ideas. The theoretical framework and Human-Environment Systems model serve as merely a beginning. As new understandings and new visualizations of complex phenomena are realized, modifications and changes could be made to the theoretical framework and model. The visual model can be improved by further exploration into 3-D modeling. In developing the visual model, the confines of 2-D drawing and presentation do not represent reality as accurately as desired, but for the present it acts as a visual guide to the theoretical concepts. Further development and modifications to the visual could be made as other visualization techniques and technical tools are developed.

Limitations

A limitation of this research study is the bias of the researcher. Due to the qualitative design of this grounded theory study, the domains that were identified in the data and the interpretations of the concepts that composed the theoretical framework were influenced by the subjective views of the researcher. Also, documents in the natural sciences were not studied in depth.

Another limitation was the limitation of a 2-D model in representing complex phenomena. The exploratory nature of a qualitative study allows and encourages a continuation of the development of the proposed ideas and model.

Future Research Recommendations

Future research studies can use and test the concepts of the developed theoretical framework and Human-Environment Systems model. The theoretical framework and Human-Environment Systems model can be used to research the issue of body image and eating disorders in females. The perspective could also be applied to other questions in the social psychological area of CT, as well as research questions in the other areas of CT. Future research methodology for studying the use and testing of the theoretical framework could use interviews, participant observation, and surveying researchers. Future studies could also expand the depth regarding humans and the natural environment.

Kaiser, Dallas, DeJonge, and Rhodes (1985) identified theoretical development as part of the mission for the future of CT. Damhorst (1991) stated that the stages of theory building found currently in CT was Stage 1—Demonstration and Description, Stage 2—Problem Solving, Stage 3—Application of Theories from Supporting or Related Fields and urged an emphasis on Stage 4--Development of Existing Theories and Stage 5--Development of New Theory. This study is part of Stage 5 in the theory building process, and this researcher developed a new theoretical framework to be used in CT. Future research in the field of CT with this theoretical framework can further validate and revise this framework and work for the development of additional new theory. Within Stage 5, researchers can continue to discuss and consider alternate and interdisciplinary methods of conducting research. CT can benefit from integrating the knowledge of human development and the ideas of the systems theory perspective to its current theories and practices, as a profession that focuses on human needs and to fulfill the mission of the College of Human Resources of improving human quality of life.

Summary

This study began with an exploration of the relationship of objective and subjective thinking, and the search for a balanced relationship. The researcher further contemplated the implications this relationship has to the human experience and systems theory in general. The statement of the problem in this research study was that humans are not simple but dynamic, complex systems—both objective and subjective beings in an environment with both objective and subjective reality. For optimal human development, a balance between these realities was sought. This complexity of human systems and the difficulty in solving human-environment problems prompted the question of, What multidimensional theoretical framework would address this complexity and provide an expanded view for research and education in the field of CT? A grounded theory research approach was used to discover the domains that were identified in the systems theory perspective as well as the theories currently used in the field of CT. Those domains were integrated to develop a theoretical framework and Human-Environment Systems model for use in research and educational practices. A discussion of body image and eating disorders in females illustrated the use of this theoretical framework and model in the social psychological area of CT. An evaluation was given of the theoretical framework and Human-Environment Systems model and future recommendations for research were given.

The desire to study human development in more depth began this quest. It was central to my studies and to the investigation of the currently used theories in CT. Adding the dimension of a systems perspective to the field of CT created a framework to provide a holistic view to address the dynamic, complex human issues that challenge this researcher and the discipline, in general. Heraclitus of Ephesus described the dynamic, complex nature of our stream of life:

*You cannot step into the same river twice;
for fresh water is for ever flowing towards you.*

(as cited in Bertalanffy, 1952, p. 123).