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THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF STRESS

An Analysis and Critique of the Stress Process Model**

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The stress process model in the sociological study of stress has changed over the thirty years of its use, developed continually to reflect changes in society and to include intellectual refinement. This paper represents a review that aims to do the same, filling the gaps in the original model with the inclusion of major developments in its structure and new social dimensions. An examination of the model's key components reveals: its causes and manifestations, the intervention of resources that moderate its effects, and its consequences on an individual in terms of mental health and social adversities. In visitation of the dynamics of the stress process, I present a critical analysis that involves an investigation of the findings of research literature while considering recent trends, including the decline of the nuclear family and the influence of non-Western cultures among immigrants and minority groups. Thus, asserted on the case that the considerations undertaken by literature are again at a point requiring intellectual reform, this critique endeavours to articulate an updated, foundational version of the original model and to offer appraisals that could lend themselves as points for further development and study.

Keywords: stress process, mental health, coping, review, sociology

Die soziologische Untersuchung von Stress: Eine Analyse und Kritik des Stressprozessmodells: Das Stressprozessmodell für die soziologische Untersuchung von Stress hat sich in den 30 Jahren seiner Anwendung verändert und stetig weiterentwickelt, um den gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen Rechnung zu tragen und Verbesserungen zu integrieren. Dieser Beitrag ist eine Überarbeitung, die ebenfalls Lücken des Originalmodells füllen soll, indem wichtige Entwicklungen in seinem Aufbau berücksichtigt und neue gesellschaftliche Dimensionen eingearbeitet werden. Die Untersuchung der Hauptkomponenten des Modells zeigt seine Anliegen und Manifestationen, die Intervention von Ressourcen, die seine Auswirkungen mäßigen, und seine Folgen für das Individuum in Bezug auf psychische Gesundheit und gesellschaftliche Widrigkeiten. Anhand der Dynamik des Stressprozesses nehme ich eine kritische Analyse vor, die auch die Untersuchung der Erkenntnisse der Forschungsliteratur umfasst, wobei gleichzeitig aktuelle Trends, darunter der Nie-

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dergang der Kernfamilie und der Einfluss nichtwestlicher Kulturen unter Immigranten und Minderheitengruppen, aufgezeigt werden. Somit versucht diese Kritik, da ich mich darin bestärkt sehe, dass die Erwägungen der Literatur erneut an den Punkt gelangt sind, wo sie einer Reform bedürfen, eine aktualisierte, grundlegende Version des Originalmodells zu erarbeiten und Bewertungen anzubieten, die als Ausgangspunkte für weitere Entwicklungen und Studien geeignet sein können.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Stressprozess, psychische Gesundheit, Bewältigung, Überarbeitung, Soziologie

1. Introduction

Every individual is inevitably immersed in a social environment comprised of his or her memberships in a plethora of different social settings that require interaction with its operations, such as family, work, friends, etc. Stress, therefore, occurs in an instance where the relationship between an individual and his or her environment suffers from a lack of congruity, defined by ANESHENSEL (1996) as a state of arousal resulting from the presence of socio-environmental demands that tax the ordinary adaptive capacity of the individual or from the absence of means to attain sought-after ends (ANESHENSEL 1992). Thus, as PEARLIN and BIERMAN (2013) observe, stress is not a fundamental characteristic of any number of conditions, but arises from dissonance between conditions and an individual's ability to adapt to them. The stress process model is divided into origins, mediators, and manifestations whose understandings rely on that of social relationships (PEARLIN et al. 1981). This paper draws from prominent studies within the sociology of mental health to articulate the dynamics of the stress process in the construction of a sociological paradigm for understanding stress, at the same time critiquing its usage in the literature and highlighting gaps for future research.

In doing so, this paper fundamentally attempts to reassemble the stress process model by integrating major developments in its structure since its original conception by PEARLIN and colleagues (1981). I review a collection of the most prominent articles that have theorised about the model in a way that adds to its structure, excluding the majority of articles that have simply applied (elements of) the model to case studies without attempting to reconceptualise it. What results is an exploration into the original model that expanded its conceptions of stressors – levels of stressors, role strains –, resources – the categories of social support –, and the effects of stressors – the call for multiple-outcome studies of antecedents of mental health problems. Throughout, the manuscript critiques elements of the model's theoretical structure, and suggests areas for future research.

Given the rise of mental health studies purporting to apply the stress process model, ensconced within the rise of the sociology of mental health, this manuscript offers a timely contribution to the literature by clearly articulating a more updated, foundational version of the model that includes key developments to its structure. It should be noted that, in the face of the tens of thousands of studies that reference

elements of the stress process model, my aim is not to build a conclusive profile on the model that includes all of these studies, but to provide a pedagogical tool for mental health researchers to better understand the foundational structure of the model in order to utilise it more completely and articulate deeper dimensions of mental health issues that extend from levels of stressors to multiple-outcomes.

2. Methodology and article selection

In this article, I conducted a critical review, wherein I reviewed sociological studies on the theoretical structure of the stress process model. To this end, my data sources included computerised and manual searches of the literature on the topic. Studies were selected that evaluated the theoretical structure of the stress process model, *excluding* those predicated on ‘applications’ of the model. The massive (and growing) size of the literature on the stress process model indicates the popularity of its application as a theoretical tool, indicating that studies of the stress process model are being heavily structured *by* the stress process model itself (WHEATON 2010). That is, its ‘application’ has become a loanword for predicting or understanding observations of a study in terms of the model – essentially recognising elements of the stress process model (i.e. coping) in the observations. These trends most markedly appeared where the utility of the stress process for understanding stress in other disciplines was documented empirically, such as caregiving and family dynamics (PEARLIN et al. 1997), and, later, ‘the health sciences and other disciplines concerned with family-based care’ (AVISON et al 2010, vii). The exponential surge in research based on the stress process paradigm is visible in the sheer volume of articles that reference the stress process model after 2010 alone (n = greater than 25,000¹), but which shunts the feasibility of conducting a systematic, comprehensive review of the area without mobilising costly human resources or time.

The close associates of Leonard Pearlin and pioneers of the model do not conflict with, but rather corroborate, this assessment (AVISON et al. 2010). In the *Festschrift* for Pearlin (AVISON et al. 2010), the authors admittedly produced essays that elaborate how the stress process model has *influenced* their work. In doing so, they articulated ‘what future lines of inquiry might be and how Leonard Pearlin’s ideas have shaped these new directions’ (AVISON et al. 2010, vii). What resulted were largely reviews of *applications* of the stress process model to elaborate social roles and processes in different contexts, including parenting in late life, socioeconomic environments, and child victimisation (ANESHENSEL 2010; AVISON 2010; BIERMAN 2010; FAZIO 2010; TURNER 2010). I do not attempt to review or provide detailed examples of each application, but rather, I incorporate *only* those parts of their find-

¹ Collectively from the most popular social science and health research databases: JSTOR, PsycINFO, Sociological Abstracts, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Medline, Embase, Social Work Abstracts, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS).

ings that carried implications for the theoretical structure of the original stress process model. The relevant main results were then extracted from studies, which were then summarised and described in terms of their theoretical contribution to the stress process model.

The alternative – a systematic review that does attempt to uncritically scope and incorporate all articles for every application of the stress process model – would hamper the utility of this article as a pedagogical tool for mental health researchers. Already, the concept of stress has suffered misinterpretations in the surge of articles claiming to apply the stress process model. This tendency, according to MCLEOD (2012), consists of *underevaluating the meanings of stress*. Simply collating which topics the stress process model has been or can be applied in would encourage this problematic tendency.

It follows that a critical review is best suited for the purpose of helping mental health researchers appreciate the diverse meanings of stress and formulate their own meanings of stress specific to their study. This is accomplished by providing an overview (i) which avoids the conceptual clutter of mass applications of the framework and (ii) covers the foundational systematic components of the stress process model that resulted from a combination of Pearlin's early program of empirical research and associated original works on resources, social and economic structures, and origins of stress in everyday life and roles in 1981, 1989, and 1999 (AVISON et al. 2010).

3. A hierarchy of stressors: scale and duration

The conditions from which stress can develop, called stressors, must then challenge adaptive capabilities (ANESHENSEL 1996) and require behavioural adjustment (THOITS 1995). Stressors can differ in terms of the duration of their application to an individual. WHEATON (1994; WHEATON et al. 2013) identifies five major types of stressors that position along a continuum between being continuous (occurring on a long-term basis) and being discrete (occurring once or on a short-term basis): chronic, traumatic, nonevents, daily hassles, and life events.

Furthermore, to account for the different overarching levels on which stress can be perceived, WHEATON and colleagues (2013) distinguish three major ones: micro, meso, and macro. Micro refers to exposure on personal levels. Examples include discrimination or divorce, each constituting a stressor with a different extent of effect, chronic versus discrete respectively. It is also on the micro-level that the idea of daily hassles as a stressor presides. It suggests that the troublesome elements of everyday life are in themselves chronic stressors, drawing to attention a specification of a level of social reality often ignored (ANESHENSEL 1992). However, it must be recognised that it incorporates both discrete and continuous forms of stressors, such as misplacing belongings or encountering traffic problems, which are elements that fluctuate unpredictably between the two forms. Thus, this uncovers an important revelation in

the study of micro-level stress: the two forms of stressors are not mutually exclusive in everyday life, but dispels daily hassles as strictly one form of chronic or discrete (ANESHENSEL 1992; WHEATON 1994; WHEATON et al. 2013). This trend is not confined to the micro-level, but is existent on all levels. Furthermore, stressors on any level can still be experienced by or affect an individual and translate to a form of personal stress, one that is internalised and responded to with a personal, emotional reaction.

Meso refers to the range of levels between those in which we are integrated to those delimited by social boundaries like networks, such as the prevalence of neighbourhood crime (more chronic) or even natural disasters (more discrete) that strain these networks. Macro refers to issues concerning larger political entities such as states and nations. Within this level are the stressors affiliated with a larger system, including economic recessions (chronic) and nation-level crises, like the September 11 attacks (discrete). These examples embody and further testify to the ubiquitous presence of both discrete and continuous stressors at any level (ANESHENSEL 1992; WHEATON 1994).

Following the idea that continuous and discrete stressors are not mutually exclusive, one stressor can actually establish the other. Life events and trauma are the most likely candidates for this pattern. Life events (i.e. a divorce) are stressors perceived to be less stressful than traumatic events (i.e. victimisation in sexual assault), defined by circumstances of a severe situation (WHEATON 1994; WHEATON et al. 2013). For example, the trauma from being raped is initially discrete in the event's singular occurrence, but can easily be seen as percolating into an emotional scar or memory that constitutes a continuous or chronic stressor. The interconnectedness highlighted in this example also illustrates the potential causal relationships between stressors, such as trauma becoming chronic, which in turn can become nonevent (THOITS 1983; WHEATON 1994).

Lack of change can be as stressful as change (GERSTEN et al. 1974). Nonevents refer to stressors caused by the lack of something, such as the absence of favourable conditions or of goal attainment. Role captivity, explained later, is an example of this, where a person is not necessarily dissatisfied with their current position but with their inability to obtain a higher goal (WHEATON 1994; WHEATON et al. 2013). Nonevents can also be likened to anticipatory stressors, where the expectation of something that has not or may not even happen causes stress. Thus, following the example of a rape victim, the chronic stressor of an emotional scar can become a nonevent stressor through resilient fear of the recurrence of rape regardless of its likelihood.

Chronic stressors are those that exist on a long-term basis in an individual's life or ongoing difficulties (ANESHENSEL 1992). WHEATON (1997) classifies seven forms of chronic stressors: (1) perceived threat; (2) structural constraints, lack of access to opportunity to achieve ends; (3) under-reward, relational deprivation where outputs are disproportionately lower than inputs or in contrast with others giving the same level of input; (4) uncertainty, desire to have a conclusion when an outcome is not possible yet; (5) conflict, regular and without resolution; (6) demands, where expectations cannot be realised with available resources. This involves the presence of

aversive socio-environmental conditions or the absence of benign socio-environmental conditions, which may include the absence of means for fulfilling aspirations (ANESHENSEL 1996). DRESSLER (1998) identifies three major types of environment-individual discrepancies that are part of this chronic type of stressor: status (disparity between occupation and income), goal-striving (disparity between aspiration and actual accomplishment), and life-style (disparity between consumption behaviour and social class). These three types of discrepancies represent the presence of aversive conditions that prevent individual happiness, reflected in structural barriers inhibiting upward mobility. For example, a worker with an uncompromising manager may be drawn into a status discrepancy if he/she is assigned continual job enlargement (i.e. an expanding variety of tasks) without a similar addition reflected in his/her income. (7) Complexity, number of sources of demands or clash of responsibilities across roles. Following this idea, one of the most important forms of chronic stressors is that of roles and their strains.

4. The role of roles

The importance of life events with respect to the rise of stressors is undeniable, but equal attention must also be assigned to the analysis of social roles. Social roles include a structural aspect that facilitates the stress caused by events. The interest in roles is bolstered by their enduring nature (PEARLIN 1983). Because they themselves are long-term involvements, so too would be the stress that affects them. Life events can cause stress that alters the role of an individual, possibly creating a chronic type of stressor (PEARLIN et al. 1981). For example, job loss can cause stress for an individual, but it may be more prominent if experienced by one who bears the role of a parent. In this instance, the role of parenthood intensifies the stress from job loss with regard to the parent's responsibility to provide for his/her children and family. Furthermore, people attach notable importance to roles and their activities (PEARLIN 1983), as they are socialised to devote themselves to institutional roles that also contribute to society's maintenance. Such is the case with enduring roles like those related to families, occupation, economy, and education (i.e. parenthood, marriage, work etc.). Thus, it is difficult for a person to remain apathetic to stress from within their roles or to that which affects their roles.

Roles also reflect larger contexts in which they are located, offering insight to social arrangements. PEARLIN (1983) uses the example of the occupational role, where the consequences of arrangement, values, and social status in an organisation are revealed through how people are affected by their jobs. The theoretical purchase of viewing roles as *contexts* calls attention to social status, which exists not only as an attribute of the individual, but can be conceptualised as part of 'contextual social inequality . . . as existing across multiple layers of the social hierarchy' (ANESHENSEL 2010, 35: refers to WHEATON & CLARKE 2003).

4.1. The family: an exception

The case of the family is unique, however, in that it has multiple facets related to stress (AU 2017). First, it can be a major source of problems themselves, such as those found in marital or parent-child relations. Second, it is also the location where external problems are shifted to. Third, it serves as the environment in which people relieve their strains. While this idea highlights the family's distinct position, one point of critique on this idea is that it assumes the case of a heterosexual nuclear family. The popularity of the nuclear family is declining, being replaced by trends of common-law relationships and fewer children (FOX & YIU 2009). The appeal of the common-law relationship is in the financial and work autonomies given to each member, where the responsibilities of domestic chores are not administered to women, but divided by negotiation (FOX & YIU 2009). Thus, either member of a common-law relationship share in a sense of equity, reducing the onset of problems experienced in marital relations related to finance or work. Same-sex unions may also fall into this pattern, being without gendered perceptions of roles and responsibilities, and which have grown over the years to now accounting for 0.82% of all couples (*Statistics Canada* 2011). The growing diversity of families includes long-distance families that would also be less likely to align with the three dimensions PEARLIN (1983) suggests, for example where distance prevents access to the physical family, making it less likely to be a place where problems could be transplanted or resolved.

4.2. Role Strain

PEARLIN (1983) identifies six types of role strain, which he defines as simply the hardships and problems experienced through participating in social roles: *(1) problems between an individual and the nature of a role's tasks*. Here the intervention of personal attributes is emphasised. Strains that appear objective actually involve a subjective evaluation component. Stress from work required for a job, for example, is actually dependent on interpretation. Work assigned by others can become role overload, characterised by an overload of work that is not self-chosen, but imposed by others (PEARLIN 1983). A point of critique in response to this is the weighted focus on subjectivity. If stress experienced by an individual not only depends on different factors, but on an innumerable amount of them, then it must be asked whether stress can even be studied. If the stress of each person depends on too many things, then a study of stress should be untenably complex as it points to a plethora of possible routes that cannot be mapped. However, this is not the case. Patterns can be established between the subjective and the objective. Socioeconomic status is a clear example of this, where disadvantaged people consistently encounter more strenuous circumstances that cause more stress than advantaged people due to lack of access to mediator resources and cultural capital (MIROWSKY & ROSS 1999). Thus, as much as subjective interpretations are relevant, there is a correlation between objective con-

ditions and stress (mediated by subjectivity) that represent predictable trends which offer insight to the sources of stress and to potential solutions for them.

(2) *Interpersonal conflict*. This type of strain arises from the relations between people involved in the same role set. Some examples of how this manifests include unequal effort being committed to something, disagreements in values, breakdown in communication, and depersonalisation through absence of appreciation or acknowledgement (PEARLIN & LIEBERMAN 1979). In light of disagreement in values, personal values factor into the arousal of strain via their translation into conflicting practices. This is evident in the case of alienation in a workplace, in which it occurs with those who disagree with supervisors and exhibit low obedience (PEARLIN 1962). The disconnection in values leads to segregation in the workplace.

(3) *Role captivity*, in which a person experiences a discrepancy between his/her current role and a desired one, facilitated through lack of means. It should be noted that the strain arises not from dissatisfaction with current roles, but from the desire to be something else (PEARLIN 1983).

(4) *The loss and gain of roles that demands adaptation*. Gaining a role entails adaptation that may be strenuous, such as having a child and becoming a parent. Following this example however, the strain from the acquisition of new roles may be mitigated by pre-socialisation or preparation for it with classes and learning about child-rearing (PEARLIN 1983). Losses can be more commonly sudden, as with divorce or involuntary job loss, which encompasses trauma or transitions that cause significant stress. PEARLIN (1983) accredits this to a lack of anticipatory socialisation. An argument of critique on this, however, is that anticipatory socialisation may actually shape existing relations and affect the outcome of certain contexts. Expectations of a divorce for example, may influence a spouse's behaviour, creating paranoia over trivial events or causing a decrease in the amount of effort invested (the mentality that 'it's going to end anyway') that may impact his/her partner and marriage. Thus, the outcome may be influenced by anticipatory socialisation, becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

(5) *Role restructuring*, which is brought about involuntarily or with redistribution of status, privilege, or influence and is therefore more stressful than simply gaining or losing roles. A notable example deals with aging and the subsequent shift in responsibilities and behaviours as parents become cared for by their children. Autonomy and reliance are reversed: where the parent was once in charge, the child has now taken over the responsibilities and authority of caretaking. Thus, both parties may become stressed by the change in personal values as their roles become restructured. This point lends itself to underscore a point of critique, the changing nature of stressors in consideration of factors like aging (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013). The stressors a young person experiences are associated with performance in school and finding jobs. That is not to say, despite the lack of recognition, that these roles and their stressors are constant, for they will obviously change over time. Hence, the nature and the identity of a person's stressors both change as he/she ages, constituting role transitions as well as role restructuring.

(6) *Multiple roles and intrapersonal conflict.* Participation in multiple roles may create strains as demands from each collide. Contagion can also be observed within the multitude of roles a person is involved with (PEARLIN 1983). Stress can be proliferated via direct or indirect experience in roles. On the point of direct experience, strains in one role (a job) may stimulate more strains in another role (a marital role). The introduction of technology has further thinned the borders that once segregated a person's social life. For example, communication technologies increasingly enable the expansion of interactions between work and family life where one role's demands can project onto another, a phenomenon called role-blurring (GLAVIN et al. 2011) or spillover to address the lateral extension of stress across roles (THOITS 1995; PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013). Furthermore, a role is often integrated as part of a role set that allows for indirect proliferation (PEARLIN 1983). For example, an occupational office role requires interaction with other roles like administration, clients, staff, etc. Hence, problems in one of these would translate into problems for others, constituting another avenue in which stress can be proliferated.

5. Stress proliferation

Naturally, there are other ways in which stress is proliferated. Stress does not necessarily require direct exposure by a person to be effectuated. It may be transmitted through interaction with social environment and the subsequent projection of problems onto the self. In the example of a rape victim, the stress that a rape victim feels is anticipatory, characterised by fear of precedence or by an event in the future that has not happened or may not happen (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013). To illustrate anticipatory stressors further, AGNEW's (2002) research in criminology details a rise in individuals' fear of being victims of crime following a criminal act inflicted on someone within their social networks. On a larger or macro level, the similar proliferation of anticipatory stressors is assumed by PEARLIN and BIERMAN (2013) to be observable in economic conditions and effects on citizens, where financial strains learned through media (i.e. the hardships associated with recessions) stimulate fear for personal economic outlooks.

This is similar to how stress can be acquired through others via a contagion effect (ANESHENSEL 1996). Stress is often not restricted to a single individual, but imposes on others around them. This contagion effect is more prominent in the context of families, where people experience the effects of stress encountered by those emotionally close to them. COYNE and associates (1987) examined spouses of two groups of depressed patients, where one was in recovery. Though they found that spouses of the two groups were stressed for different reasons, both were stressed regardless and not free from hardship. Their results shed light on the nature of the contagion effect in terms of stress, where stress in one person leads to that in others.

Stress proliferation can also occur across roles in the forms of role-blurring or spillover as previously explained. Stressors that arise from other stressors are called

secondary and primary respectively (ANESHENSEL 1996; PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013). They are not named in light of their significance, but of their chronology (ANESHENSEL 1996). Secondary stressors may arise from primary ones; following COYNE and associates' (1987) work with spouses of patients, a spouse may find the demands of caregiving for patients take away from or interrupt other domains of life.

6. Resources

While a person's social conditions and subjective proclivities may be stressors, they could also be tools for mitigating stress. *Resources* are thus things that are drawn upon in reaction to stress, with the quality of reducing the impact of stressors (ANESHENSEL 1996; PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013; THOITS 1995). However, the nature of the effect of resources can be variable. For instance, according to PEARLIN and BIERMAN (2013), resources may affect the impact of stressors in a beneficial manner (called moderating the effect of stressors) or be themselves influenced by stressors to aggravate the situation (a process that mediates primary and secondary stressors). A resource is not confined to be either positive or negative, but rather depends on circumstances. ENSEL and LIN (1991) illustrate three models that capture the potential relationships between stressors and resources: a stress-counteractive model, where resources successfully offset the impact of stressors; a stress-deterioration model, where stressors gradually reduce resources; and finally, a stress-deterrent model, where there is actually no causal association between stressors and resources. Looking further into the idea of a resource, there are perhaps four that stand out: coping, social support, mastery, and belief systems (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013).

6.1. Coping

Coping has been the most extensively studied resource, a cognitive response to a stressor that prevents the harm caused by it (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013). PEARLIN and BIERMAN (2013) outline possible functions, including avoiding or eliminating the stressor, preventing stress proliferation (secondary stressors), altering the meaning of a situation, or confining the emotional impact. With the case of coping resources, avoidance is one such example of the point mentioned above on the ambivalence of resources. Avoidance is useful for reducing the impact of short-term stressors and generally produce positive psychological outcomes (TAYLOR & STANTON 2007), but in a long-term context, avoidance could translate to emotional suppression, where frustration builds up to a point of aggravated release. Points of critique on the study of coping resources involve PEARLIN and BIERMAN's (2013) assessment that states the social conditions of coping resources have not been investigated thoroughly. For example, while coping resources are effective in moderating stressors, PEARLIN and BIERMAN (2013) pose the case that a form of coping that alleviates personal stress can cause strain in others. A

spouse's choice of avoidance may lead to detached behaviour that impacts his/her spouse and their relationship. Furthermore, the social conditions for which resources work differ, such as the discovery of how coping resources are more effective in the workplace than with individuals (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013).

6.2. Social Support

Social support refers to the functions performed for a person by significant others (THOITS 1995) and is divided into three categories by HOUSE and KAHN (1985): emotional, informational, and instrumental. Found to be inversely proportional to psychological disorders, within these three types of social support are the satisfaction of one's emotional and social needs for affection, identity, security, and assistance (THOITS 1982). Hypotheses for this pattern include the assumption that social support imparts a sense of mattering, where one's identity is important to someone else (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013). A person consequently feels comforted with a sense of identity and of an emotional bond of affection. Another possibility is the legitimating effect of social support that reaffirms the validity of a person's choices or the validity of their feeling stressed. Support from others conveys confidence in identity and esteem, reassuring the person that the stress they experience is reasonable per the circumstances and is not the product of personal defects (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013; THOITS 2011). Yet another potential reason is the actual effect caused by others, where the influence of others has a visible impact on a person's lifestyle or values that mitigate disorders (THOITS 1995). As outlined by THOITS (1995), social support resources in the form of emotional support have been found to directly correlate with mental health and buffer the impact of stressors. It is best measured by the existence of an intimate relationship where greater intimacy means greater efficacy (i.e. spouse or lover is stronger than friendship).

6.3. The Stress of Social Support: Life Changes

However, social support resources, like all resources, may be depleted over time (ANESHENSEL 1996). A person's social group may find the person annoying and distance themselves from him/her, lowering the insulation that this social support would normally provide against stressors. Following this idea, a point of critique is the possible transition of social support from being a resource to an actual stressor. Reduction in social support may not only represent the growing absence of a mediator, but the growing presence of a stressor. While assumptions are commonly made that a person who steadily loses friends is simply more exposed to the original stressors, this presumes that this person is indifferent to this loss. In other words, this trend of losing friends itself may become an actual new stressor for the person through the act of self-attribution (ANESHENSEL 1996) such as ruminating on self-depreciative

thoughts like ‘why am I so pathetic that I lost my friends?’. This self-prescribed trait of being pathetic could then cause the person to retreat from seeking social support, heightening the deleterious effects of the original stressors.

Three further points should be noted: first, social support resources may not be used even if available. For instance, males usually do not have as strong ties with a social circle as females do, per societal norms surrounding a man’s image of independence and strength (TURNER & LLOYD 1999). Secondly, in light of a previous point of critique on the change in stressors caused by aging, an adherent point of critique holds that any likewise alterations in available resources must also be recognised. As a person ages, the nature of their resources change in addition to that of their stressors. This is particularly evident in the case of social support, where a person’s social circles and connections diminish over time as they age, causing a subsequent drop in availability of social support resources. Children also become part of the social support that is available to aging parents, further underlining the role reconfiguration in the inversion of dependence and autonomy between children and parents in the process of aging. Lastly, just as a person’s coping resources can be detrimental to others (as with the example of someone becoming more avoidant in his marriage, thereby affecting his spouse), so too can social support resources cause more problems for others. A person may choose to draw from a form of social support that in itself is problematic by nature. Participation in a subculture that endorses illicit activities for example, creates disorder on a larger scale. The appeal of a deviant subculture is in the creation of a domain that allows for new opportunities to obtain the prestige, recognition, and satisfaction which a person might not otherwise receive in other areas of life (DOWNES 2011). For example, a person could join a drug-user or gang community to achieve a sense of escapism or empowerment, regardless of any damage to the larger community.

6.4. Mastery

Mastery refers to the individual perception of ability to handle stress (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013). A common variable affiliated with mastery is socioeconomic status, where the higher a person’s socioeconomic status is, the more education and occupational background and prospect he/she would have, and consequently the higher his/her sense of mastery (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013; SCHIEMAN & PLICKERT 2008) would be. Thus, personal control may at times be less associated with individual characteristics and more with availability of privileges in higher statuses (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013). It should be emphasised that this positive correlation between mastery as a resource and socioeconomic status is shared by all moderating resources (MIROWSKY & ROSS 1999; THOITS 1995; TURNER & LLOYD 1999) simply due to the advantageous background a higher socioeconomic status affords that better facilitates progression in society than a lower one (i.e. more cultural capital such as better education, better job prospects, more finance for endeavours).

There are four ways in which mastery is assumed to lessen the effect of stressors: first, the threat from particular stressors are perceptually minimised or neutralised, following which secondly, the reduced threat contributes to a sense of self-confidence in abilities to overcome the stressors (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013). Thirdly, mastery has been found to encourage social learning and flexibility that improve the probability of effective behaviour rather than escape behaviour in addition to learning to prevent the occurrence of stressful events (ANESHENSEL 1996; SEEMAN et al. 1988; TURNER & LLOYD 1999). Lastly, it is indicated that a sense of control reduces the impact of stressors via promoting problem solving in their consequences (TURNER & LLOYD 1999; PEARLIN et al. 1981).

Resources, like stressors, are not independent of one another. Findings by GREEN and RODGERS (2001) suggest that social support resources influence and are influenced by mastery. Their studies following low-income African-American mothers revealed that social support resources can add to a person's sense of self-efficacy, where higher perceived support contributed to higher self-efficacy and less perceived stress. The reverse was also found to be true. Higher self-efficacy led to perceived higher social support, thereby enabling people to actually reach out and establish this social support. Connections can therefore also be made between other resources, such as a greater sense of control (self-efficacy) leading to better coping strategies. For example, a person believing in their own power to influence the situation may create more confidence to manage their emotions.

6.5. The Stress of Mastery: Delusion

An argument of critique on mastery as a resource can be made on the premise of its ability to be beneficial or deleterious. The question must be posed that at what point does mastery become delusion? A sense of control in moderation may be beneficial for the reasons described above. Having a low sense of control could be less insulative against stressors, where a person believes he/she is incapable of overcoming the stressor and thus not only is impacted more in terms of mental health, but also stops putting effort into resolving problems, believing in a fatalistic future (i.e. 'if I'm going to fail anyway, why should I try?') (ANESHENSEL 1996; WHEATON 1980). More interestingly however, having too much mastery could establish the conditions for deleterious effects. When a person with a high sense of control encounters a stressor beyond the scope of his expectations, the impact is suddenly more intensified than it would be for a person with a lower mastery. For instance, a person who firmly believes in the stability of his/her job would face more trauma and require more adaptation to a job loss than a person who wanted or expected to quit anyway.

6.6. Belief Systems

Belief systems comprise hierarchical systems of values and meanings (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013). A hierarchical system of importance can help assuage the effect of stressors through a misalignment between reality and perceived importance. Perhaps most notably in institutionalised systems like religion, faith and devotion to ritual are paramount, creating less strain in the case of a student's receiving a poor grade (reducing its potency as a stressor). Under religious determinism, a person is reassured that everything is planned and will be good, leading him/her to more willingly strive to overcome stressors.

6.7. The stress of belief systems: clashes against immigrant culture

However, conversely, a belief system can amplify the effects of stressors if important values and reality align. In a culture with a heavy emphasis on education, the case of a poor grade for a student would be aggrandised in the stress it inflicts on the student. To rehash the interconnectedness of resources, belief systems may create the conditions for a social support system. In the case of an institutionalised religion, membership in the institution enables social integration and access to social support that could improve mental health and buffer the effects of stressors.

An additional critique on the topic of resources, though also applicable to much of the study of the stress process model, is the lack of focus on minority groups, specifically those with recent immigration histories (NOH & AVISON 1996). The majority of research is done under the premise of a Western culture assumed to be inherently understood by and manifested in individuals. However, this neglects the minority that exists in North America which does not come from a world with similar features (i.e. Europe), but from a place that embodies a different culture and history. In the case of social support and other resources, the question of where an immigrant tends to seek this out if at all must be asked and investigated. Furthermore, the stressors an immigrant faces are likely to include more chronic ones, such as language barriers, adapting to lifestyles and cultures, and potentially discrimination (NOH & AVISON 1996).

Drawing from an excerpt on roles, role restructuring is also different for the immigrant as it occurs at a much earlier stage for immigrant parents, the consequences of which, in terms of social relations within and without the family, should be further studied. A minority culture and associated beliefs must also be evaluated in terms of whether it acts or can act as an adequate buffer for never encountered stressors in North America (AU 2015). For example, social support and its exchange may be perceived more positively in cultures rooted in collectivism or interdependence (GREEN & RODGERS 2001). However, culture may work against a person's benefit by stifling the enactment of coping resources. Korean immigrants, for instance, do not readily seek out mental health support from fear of the stigma associated with it

by their culture (NOH & AVISON 1996). In this case, regardless of the perceived availability of resources, culture has affected the perception of the resource itself. Extrapolating from the discussion on the impact of immigrant culture, second generation immigrants comprise another level of inquiry on the link between culture and stressors, who, as the children of first generation immigrants, are immersed in two different cultures at home and outside in society. The subsequent friction thus experienced by the second generation immigrant (if at all), for example, in personal beliefs, relationships with the family, or influences on resources, lends itself as a point for further study.

Another distinction between a Western individualistic culture and a minority collectivistic culture draws on the form of social support that a person seeks out. SAGRESTANO and colleagues (1999) found that a collectivist culture, such as African American and Latino, advocates social support by the family more than an individualistic culture, such as the Western one. Conversely, Western or white people report more social support from friends and social circles, as well as having more friends (more expansive networks) than do African American or Latino people (SAGRESTANO 1999). However, the latter typically report higher quality in the interactions they have, albeit fewer (VEGA 1995).

Explanations for this can include: first, differing levels of comfort with the idea of dependency. The favouring of family for the minority as a source of social support could be based on cultural-historical roots in co-habitation of multi-generational and/or extended nuclear families. Furthermore, the socioeconomic conditions that instituted the need for co-habitation simultaneously fostered the need for interdependency in physical, financial, and emotional support. This contrasts with the Western culture, individualistic in its disapproval of dependence and focusing instead on the importance of independent success. Thus, culture not only affects the perception of social support itself, but can delimit or influence the form of social support that a person chooses to draw from. Ultimately, the effects of culture can be beneficial or deleterious in relation to coping resources, the mapping of which constitutes a point requiring further study.

7. Effects of Stressors

7.1. Single and Multiple Outcomes

Stressors must invariably be studied in terms of their effect on an individual. As previously established, stressors challenge adaptive capabilities, causing strenuous experiences that inflict damage to mental, well-being, behavioural, and/or social aspects. Thus, stress arises when this strain is internalised by a person, whereby the damage or disorder it inflicts can be measured by a study of its psychological, physical, and behavioural manifestations (PEARLIN 1989), and, as was discussed throughout this paper, its influences on social aspects.

Psychological consequences of stress most commonly refer to mental health outcomes. These are all possible consequences of the aforementioned stress-deterioration model or stress-deterrent model, where stress eventually erodes or is unaffected by available resources (ENSEL & LIN 1991). If a person is unable to manage stress, he/she may suffer from a loss of confidence, identity, affection, and sense of control. Through this, they may be led to believe they are alone, unwanted or unimportant, and incapable of overcoming difficulties or succeeding. Such thoughts, characterising the traits of anxiety, anger, and depression (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013), can translate into a frustration towards the self and surrounding social conditions and can thrust people into a stasis of unhappiness made perpetual not only by their circumstances but also by their emotional responses.

Much focus of stress research has been dedicated to single-outcome studies of the social antecedents of mental health problems (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013). It should be noted that, as some researchers have pointed out previously, the act of equating mental health effects of stress with specific disorders may misrepresent 'the power of stressors and of group differences in reaction to stress' (PEARLIN & BIERMAN 2013), while shifting the concentration of stress outcomes disproportionately to mental health in neglect of other areas (ANESHENSEL 1996).

7.2. Physiological Stress: A Critique

Physical consequences of stress follow a pattern of physiological alertness and exhaustion, outlined by the biological stress model which WHEATON and colleagues (2013) describe as lacking in the necessary considerations of context, experience, and social ramifications. This critique does not deny the existence of a physiological or even psychological impact, but rather illustrates the importance of the social aspects of stress. Furthermore, the biological response to stress is constant. For example, whether a person suffers a breakdown from a divorce, an uncompromising boss, or bankruptcy, the breakdown entails the same chemical and hormonal responses regardless of the source of stress. Since the biological response is unchanging, it acts solely as a consequence of stress and, thus, not as a factor in the determination of stress.

Behavioural patterns can also obviously emerge from the stress experienced by a person. Perhaps most commonly, this includes behavioural practices of escapism such as alcohol or substance abuse. For example, high powerlessness and low mastery have been found to lead to heavier drinking habits (SEEMAN et al. 1988). Other patterns may include delinquency or deviance, as described previously by a person's pursuit of social support from participation in deviant subcultures.

Social consequences of stress, as outlined previously, can include the six forms of role strains (PEARLIN 1983): problems between individuals and nature of tasks, interpersonal problems, intrapersonal problems and multiple roles, role captivity, gain/loss of roles, and role reconfiguration. Furthermore, the newfound effect of role blurring with innovations in technology causes the lateral expansion of stress and can

influence a person's performance in each role. The social aspect also includes the stress influence on resources such as social support, the potency of which can be mitigated or bolstered by underlying social conditions like socioeconomic status. Thus, the social aspect is arguably the highest level of analysis in stress research, so much so that the other aspects fall under its influence and are interactions within this larger framework (i.e. mental fortitude can be a product of cultural capital garnered from socioeconomic status).

Hence, the dynamics and causes of stress cannot be evaluated solely based on mental health outcomes, and neither can it be understood to be found simply within biological or chemical components of the body. They must be assessed in conjunction with the social aspect, for while these two constituents are important, they cannot be allowed to overshadow the higher-level social framework of the roots and indications of stress and stressors that sets the stage for analyses on lower levels, as this paper has tried to demonstrate.

8. Conclusion

The stress process model is an adept framework that enables the mapping of stress on multiple levels. It provides an interpretive understanding of stress in different contexts and under the influence of different domains. However, there are intellectual gaps in the framework that stem from the introduction of new trends and lack of connections within research literature. Here I have offered a critique of the established model in light of such considerations based on its dynamics captured in key components: the different types and levels of stressors, their implications in context of roles, the means of their proliferation, the interventions with which a person responds to stress, and the subsequent effects of stress on a person in terms of mental and social impact.

Using role-blurring or spillover, a final point of counsel can be proffered on the focus adopted by the stress process model. Perhaps the most common interpretation of the effects of stress is understood in terms of mental health (ANESHENSEL 1996). The interruption of one role by another carries implications beyond mental health, like how the duties of a caregiver for a spouse may tax performance in one's work environment. Thus, that stress constitutes a link between health and work or social performance illuminates an untapped potential of the stress process model as a tool for broader examinations of social life and its issues. I trust, therefore, that this critique addresses the underlying need for a refinement of the model with the induction of appraisals that develop or highlight necessary points of development for future study.

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