

RESEARCH FINDINGS- LOW INCOME SINGLE MOTHERS

KEYS SUMMIT

June 25, 2019

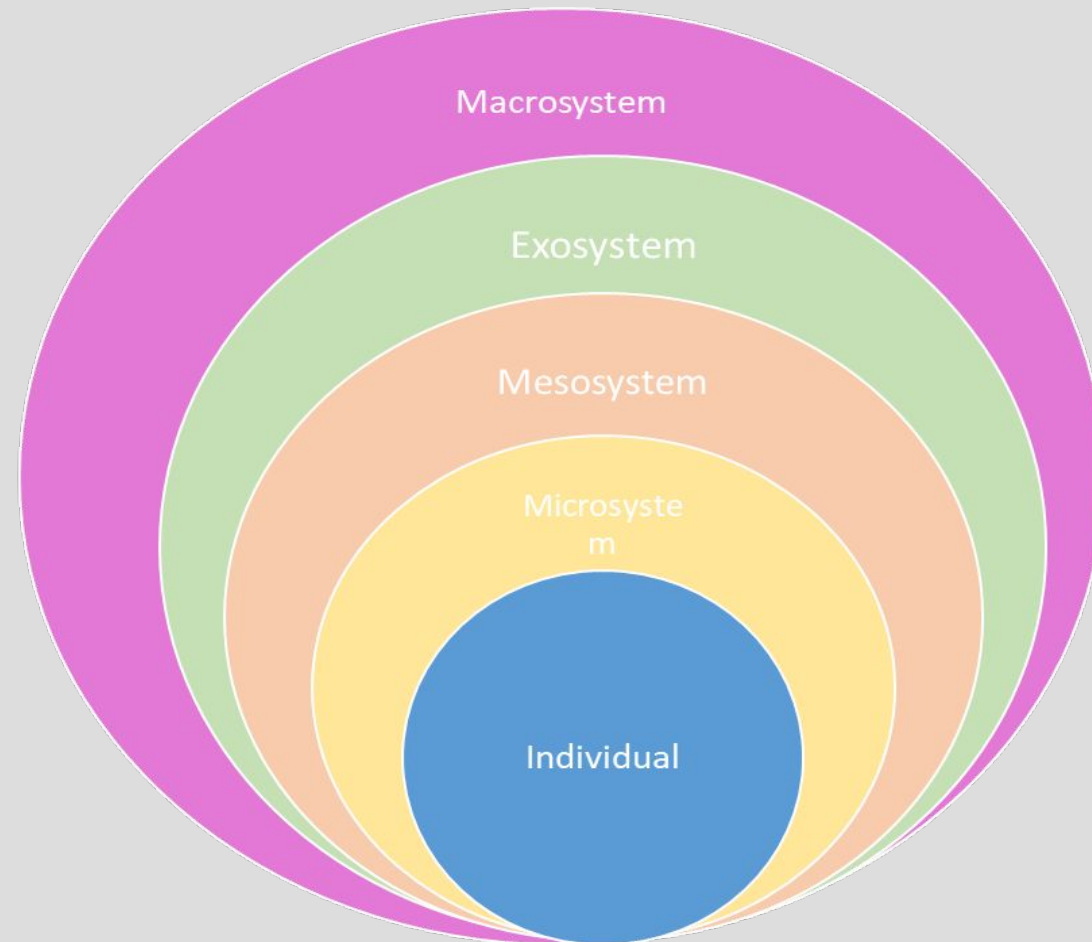
STUDY OVERVIEW: THE FACTS

- The community college is the access point for many nontraditional students, especially single-mothers (NCES, 2016).
- Nontraditional students, especially single student mothers, are a growing population on college campuses, especially at the community college level (Huelsman & Engle, 2013; Nelson, Froehner, & Gault, 2013).

STUDY OVERVIEW: PURPOSE

- To gain a better understanding of the experiences of single mothers attending two community colleges in Pennsylvania that have been noted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research as being supportive of student parents.

FRAME WORK: BRONFENBRENNER (1979) HUMAN ECOLOGY MODEL



STUDY OVERVIEW: METHODS

- Two Community Colleges in PA
- Qualitative Study- semi-structured interviews

RESULTS

- Overarching themes:
 - The participants pursued postsecondary education in hopes of obtaining a degree that would provide them with a career that could support their family.
 - The participants' children presented barriers to their mothers' education; however, they are also the primary motivator of the participants' persistence and success.
 - The single student mothers in this study created support systems. If they did not have family, then they built other networks, often from members within the institution.
 - Public assistance and financial aid were necessary to the participants' success. However, the single student mothers in this study did not want to utilize public assistance because they found it burdensome to secure and emotionally taxing.

PERSONAL RESOURCES

- Desire for a better life
- Time management and Organization
- Self Care

DESIRE FOR A BETTER LIFE

- Safety and security
- Not having to depend on public assistance
- The ability to have them participate in activities
- Making their children proud.
- Their desire to provide was stronger than their feelings of sadness or stress

“I wouldn't be back in school if it wasn't for my baby. It wouldn't have happened at all. It wasn't even in the plan for the future. I kept saying I'd go back to college, but never happened. I'd be like, I'll just go eventually. I'll go eventually...I wake up, I see the smiling face looking at me, and I'm like, if I don't get off of welfare, she's gonna want for everything.” - Ariel

“I have sad, but hopeful, feelings because other people have more time to spend with their kids. I feel like my kids, nine and ten, are at a crucial age where they understand a lot. They miss their mother. I wish I had more time, but I always try to talk to them and just let them know why I'm doing this... When I talk to my kids they be like, "It's okay, Mom. We understand, you want a better life." I always think about that, like all of their dreams at the end.” - Annie

TIME MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION

- An essential skill
- Structured schedules
- Varied by participant based on age of children
 - Younger children > maximize time that children were in daycare or sleeping
 - Older children > more responsibility given in the home

“I wake up at 3 a.m., I start studying, I finish at 6 a.m. I cook their breakfast for them, and they wake up, they eat. I'm trying to put on clothes and everything. Then I take the bus at 8, and I'm here at 8:30, and we have class at 9. I take class from 9 to 11. Then I work from 11 to 2. Then I'm trying to learn driving, so I drive one hour or two hours, then I go ... I take my kids from the day care, go back to the house, cooking, cleaning, and doing everything. Then ... Like trying to put them to bed at 9, before 9, and studying from 9 to midnight. This is my day.”-
Fatima

SELF- CARE

- The women in this study understood the importance of tending their mental health.
- They utilized the counseling services at the college and professional services outside of the college

“That's huge for me. I have to always be in touch with my emotional and mental health. I do take anti-depressants, and I've done that since I started recovery, and I just try and do things that make me happy, make me feel good about myself, like swim classes for my son, like I try to be sociable. I try to take the girls to the fair. That stuff makes me feel good.” – Lauren

SUPPORT SYSTEMS, SUPPORTIVE OTHERS, AND CAMPUS SUPPORTS

Challenging

- Admissions and Enrollment Process
- Financial Aid

Helpful

- KEYS
- Support Networks
- ACT 101
- Campus Resources

ADMISSIONS, ENROLLMENT, AND FINANCIAL AID

Single student mothers in this study struggled with Admissions, Enrollment, and Financial Aid

- Process was complex and confusing
- Misinformation was given
- While the participants considered admissions and financial aid to be barriers to their access and persistence through college, other programs were supportive of their persistence and helped them through the barriers.

KEYS

- The KEYS program is a state funded program administered at community colleges that assists student parents who are eligible to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits.
- This program was critical.

- “My KEYS advisors definitely helped me the most at school. I remember Mary keeping my son in her office one day so I could go to class. And she was just like, “Oh, it's a baby. Okay. I guess I'll keep him in my office for now.” So, I think they're very encouraging. “- Lori
- “I'm in this program called the KEYS Program where they help single-mother students. They help us to be successful in college. That has been the biggest impact and chance for me. I started with the KEYS this semester. I been with them a month, and they have been very helpful with any support. One of my advisors in the KEYS Program, her name is Christa. She helps me out a lot.” - Naomi

SUPPORT NETWORKS

- The single student mothers in this study built support networks.
- KEYS was often the impetus for a support network.
- If the single mothers in this study did not have strong family support, then they utilized their peers, faculty, staff, and friends to support them.

“Upon going to some of the meetings, I did run into a few mothers that I actually went to high school with, who our kids are around the same age. They know each other and have played with each other before. It helps. It does. I really think it does help. Especially ... I know it's for the single parents and those that are trying to really get through school. It's that extra push. If you don't have the family support or the home support, then you still have the school support, which is great.” – Laura

FACULTY

- Served as an integral piece of the participant's support network.
- Acted as confidantes.
- Referred to other resources.
- Recognized student mothers as both student and mother.
 - Extended deadlines
 - Allowed children in classroom

“My paralegal 101 professor. She saw I was having a hard time and she referred me to KEYS, to see if I could get resources because I missed like two of her classes due to appointments with welfare. She was my one day a week class. I wasn't allowed to miss more than three... I had just moved, and I didn't have daycare secured yet...so ...yeah, I just took her (her child) to class.” - Ariel

ACT 101 AND CAMPUS RESOURCES

- ACT 101
 - State funded program to assist academically or financially disadvantaged student through postsecondary education.
 - Provides academic support
- Campus Resources
 - Counseling
 - Tutoring
 - Library resources
 - Childcare

SOCIETAL FACTORS

- Public Assistance Programs
- Federal and State Educational Programs

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

- The support from these programs made it possible for the low-income single student mothers to attend postsecondary education.
- However, none of them wanted to have to utilize public assistance.
 - Negative perceptions
- They found it complex and frustrating.

“It is hard, especially for people who just started to file. My favorite (sarcastic tone) was when I first filed, I walked into the office, seven months pregnant, and I was like, I need help with assistance. I got an appointment for cash (TANF), and I walked in and the lady was like, “You can walk ten miles to the bus stop.” I looked down, I looked up, I looked down again. I’m like, in what world can a pregnant woman walk ten miles to the bus stop? She just shrugged her shoulders and she said, “Here’s a paper to get waiver for the work program.” I’m like okay. I’m still wondering where in the world I can walk ten miles to the bus stop.” – Ariel

FEDERAL AND STATE PROGRAMS

- The low-income single student mothers received Pell funding and state financial aid.
- Federal Work Study was also helpful for many of the single student mothers in this study.
- Many of the participants utilized their student loans to help assist with the cost of living.
- FAFSA was often noted as being confusing.
- Many of them had to submit additional documents.
- State application was different from FAFSA

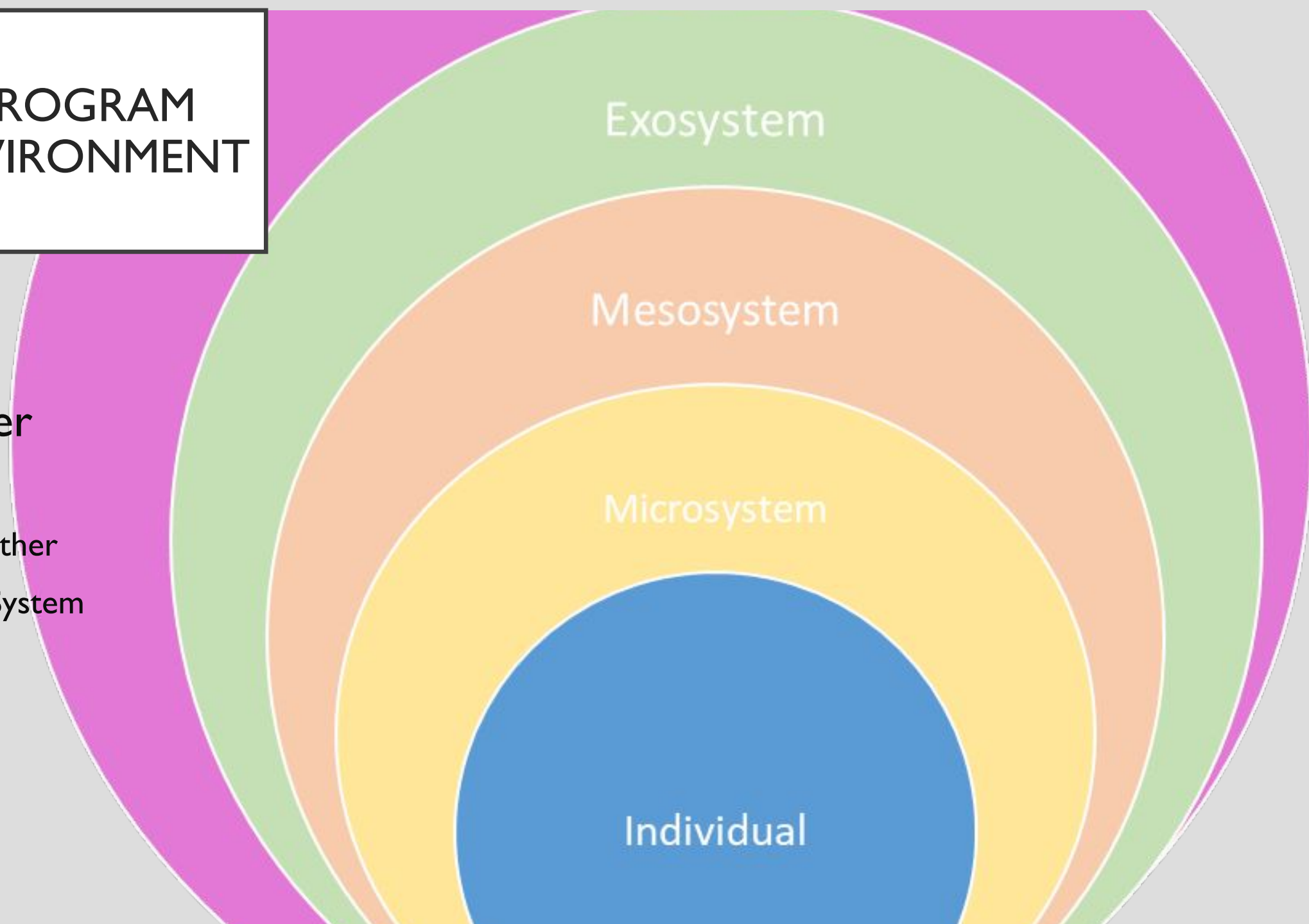
Results in Relevance to Research and Best Practice

This section explains how the results fit into the Human Ecology Theory, compares them against past research, suggests recommendations for future research, policy, and practice.

THE KEYS PROGRAM AND THE ENVIRONMENT

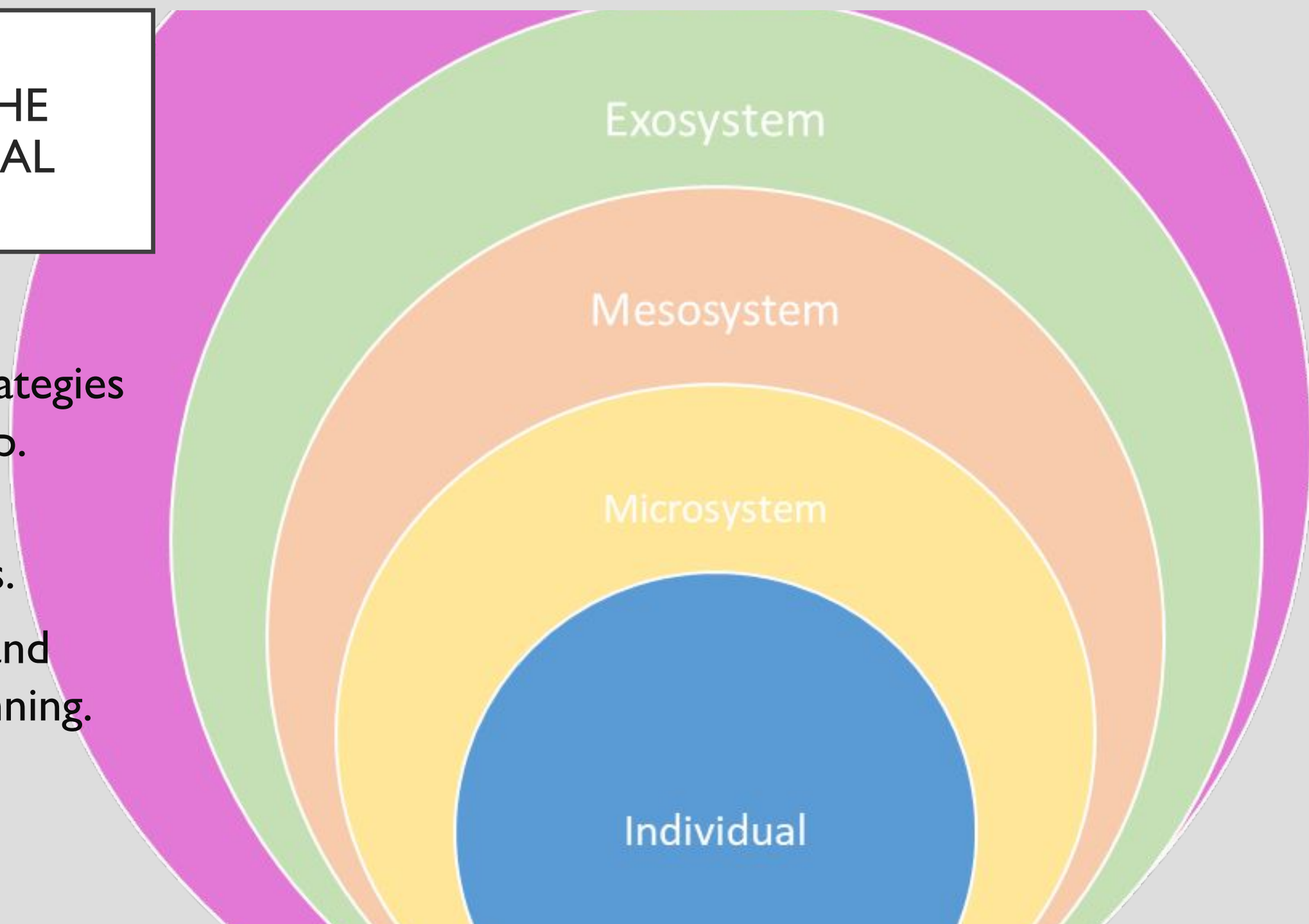
- Bronfenbrenner
PPCT

- Single student mother
- Micro and Meso System
- Exosystem
- Macrosystem



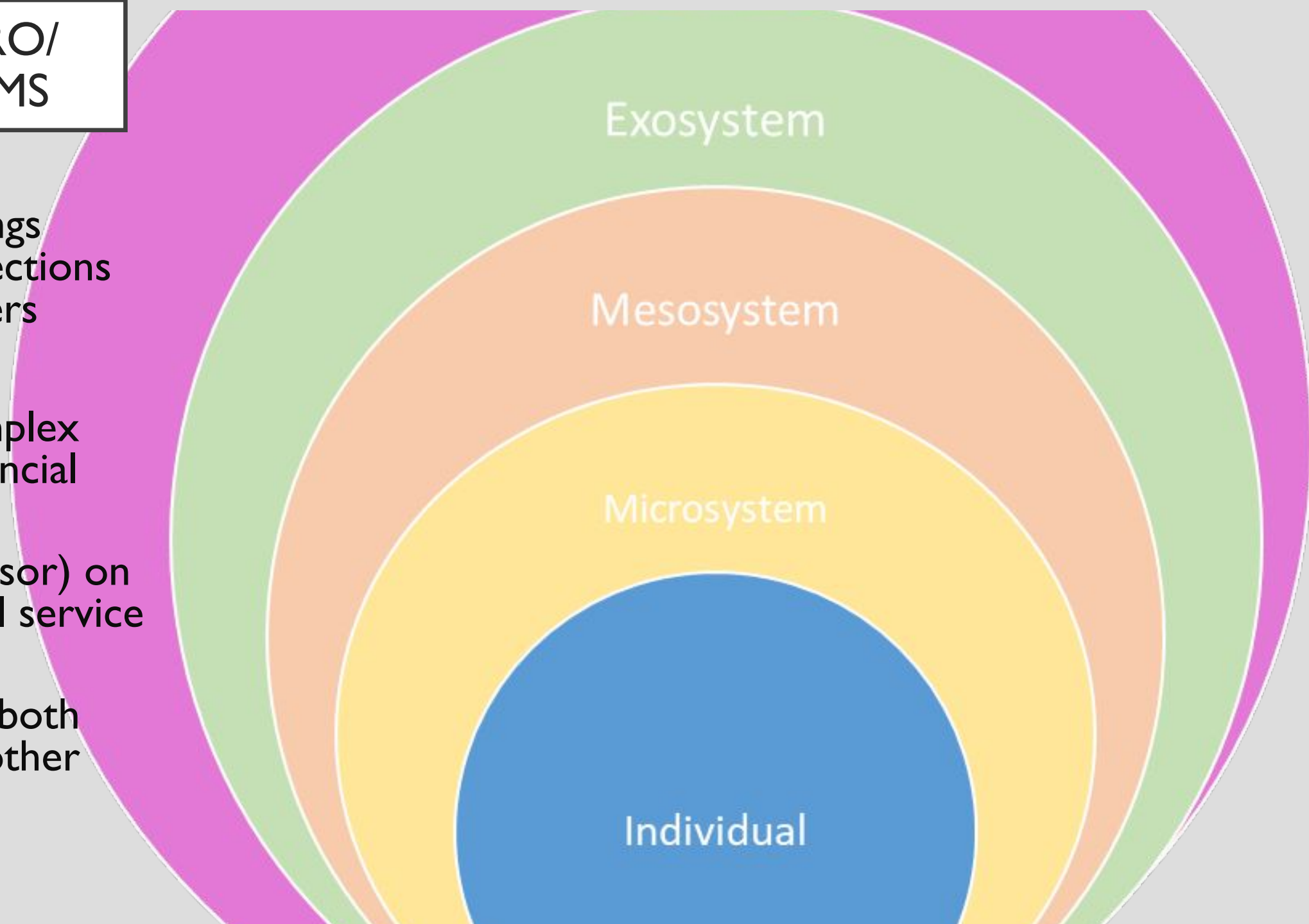
KEYS & THE INDIVIDUAL

- Tools and strategies to ask for help.
- Resources to combat stress.
- Goal setting and academic planning.



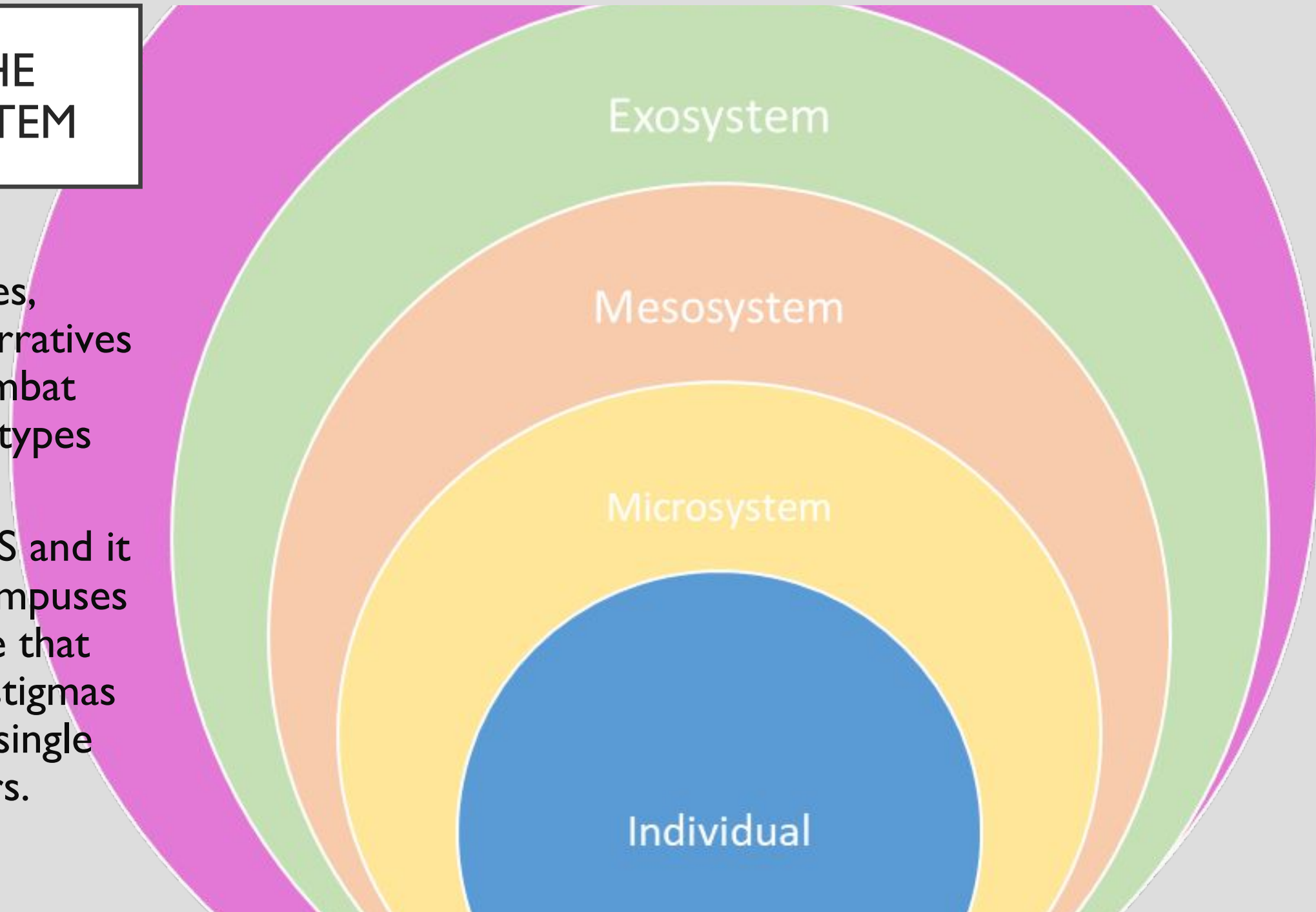
KEYS & MICRO/ MESOSYSTEMS

- Monthly meetings provided connections to other mothers
- Study groups
- Guides for complex processes (Financial Aid)
- Facilitator (advisor) on campus > social service agencies
- Recognition of both student and mother



KEYS & THE MACROSYSTEM

- Program updates, reports, and narratives shared help combat negative stereotypes and stigmas.
- Success of KEYS and its presence on campuses create a climate that challenges the stigmas of low-income single student mothers.



IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Comprehensive support program
- Professional development
- Emergency Assistance Funds

- Comprehensive Support Program
 - Support group > could be virtual
 - Strong partnerships between college and social service agencies.
 - Career first, academic planning
 - Work-study
 - College and Financial Aid Knowledge

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

State Level

- The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania should continue funding the KEYS Program.
- Policymakers should explore the options of opening the KEYS program to all single parents (mothers) who qualify for the Pell grant.
- Streamline state aid application
- Review of subsidies, especially childcare
- Other states should investigate similar programs

Federal Level

- Review the impacts of the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act of 1996, and its alignment with training the American population for 21st century jobs.
- Reduce redundancy and inefficiency within current welfare system.
- Simplify the FAFSA process.

Copy of Complete Dissertation and References:

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED587249>

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