

The influence of microsystem on Shuri's character development in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. A study of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory

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Abstract

This study analyzes the influence of the microsystem on Shuri's leadership identity formation in Black Panther: Wakanda Forever. The film, produced by Marvel Studios and directed by Ryan Coogler, portrays Shuri's transformation from a scientist to the Queen of Wakanda. This study applies Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, focusing specifically on the microsystem as the closest environmental system influencing individual development. This study used a qualitative descriptive method. The data were collected from dialogues and scenes that demonstrated Shuri's direct interactions with significant figures such as Queen Ramonda, Okoye, and Nakia. The findings reveal that Shuri's leadership identity is shaped by emotional exchanges, role transitions, and reciprocal interpersonal interactions within her microsystem. The study concludes that leadership identity in the film is constructed through social developmental processes rather than being an innate characteristic of the leader.

Keywords: Ecological Theory; Leadership Identity Formation; Microsystem; *Wakanda Forever*

INTRODUCTION

Literary works are not limited to written forms, such as novels, poetry, or drama, but also include visual and audiovisual media, such as films. Films serve not only as entertainment but also as a medium that reflects human experiences, social realities, and psychological conditions. As stated by Hassan, film is a complex artistic form that integrates narrative, visuals, sound, and emotion to deliver layered meaning (10). Through elements such as narrative structure, symbolism, and characterization, films convey meaning in ways comparable to literary texts, making them relevant for literary and critical analysis.

The connection between literature and psychology is close, as both disciplines aim to understand human behavior and mental processes. In literary studies, psychological approaches are useful for exploring characters' motivations, emotional struggles, and personal development. Bordwell and Thompson explain that film functions as a reflection of social reality while simultaneously shaping it, allowing audiences to engage with the story both emotionally and intellectually (29). Therefore, films can be considered an important medium for interdisciplinary analysis between literature and psychology.

One film that reflects strong psychological and social complexity is *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022), directed Ryan Coogler. The story centers on Shuri, the princess of Wakanda, who experiences deep emotional loss after the death of her brother, King T'Challa, followed by her mother, Queen Ramonda. These experiences significantly influenced her emotional condition, identity formation, and sense of responsibility. Her journey represents a process of psychological transformation shaped by grief, social expectations, and the demands of leadership.

To understand this development, this study applies Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Human Development, particularly the concept of the microsystem. Bronfenbrenner explains that the microsystem refers to the closest environment in which individuals experience direct interactions, such as family and significant relationships. Within this environment, individuals

develop values, behaviors, and identities through meaningful emotional interactions. In the film, Shuri's microsystem includes her relationships with Queen Ramonda, Okoye, Nakia, and other members of Wakanda, which are central to shaping her character.

Previous studies have demonstrated the relevance of ecological theory in analyzing the character development. Qoirunnisa Dewi (2024), for instance, showed that environmental systems significantly influence identity formation in literary works. Similarly, Imtihani (2015) applied ecological theory to examine psychological development in films, highlighting the role of both immediate and broader environments. However, studies specifically focusing on the microsystem's role in shaping leadership identity remain limited.

Bronfenbrenner also emphasized the concept of bidirectional processes, suggesting that individuals are not passive recipients of environmental influence but actively interact with and shape their surroundings (22). This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding character development, as it highlights the dynamic relationship between individuals and their environment. In this study, Shuri's character development can be understood as the result of continuous interactions within her microsystem.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how the microsystem contributes to Shuri's character development in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. The analysis focused on her interactions, emotional experiences, and social roles within her immediate environment. This study is expected to contribute to literary and psychological studies by demonstrating how Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory can be applied to the analysis of character development in films.

In conclusion, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* presents Shuri's journey of psychological development, shaped by her immediate environment. Through the framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, this study highlights how the microsystem plays a crucial role in forming her identity, emphasizing that character development emerges from continuous interaction between individuals and their closest social environment.

Microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory

The microsystem refers to the most immediate environment in which individuals engage in direct interactions with significant others, such as family members, peers, and close relationships. Bronfenbrenner defined the microsystem as a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced in a specific setting, such as a home, school, or social group (22).

The key characteristic of the microsystem is its direct and continuous interactions, which foster emotional connections and behavioral patterns. The quality of these interactions, whether supportive or conflictual, plays an important role in shaping personality, self-esteem, and social competence. Moreover, the microsystem is not passive. It involves reciprocal influence, meaning that individuals both affect and are affected by their interactions. Through these ongoing interactions, individuals develop an understanding of themselves and their position within the social world (Bronfenbrenner 22–23).

Elements of Microsystem

The microsystem consists of several important elements that contribute to individual development, including interpersonal relationships, emotional bonds and social roles. These elements work together to shape emotional, cognitive, and moral development (Bronfenbrenner 25). The consistency and intensity of interactions within the microsystem influence how individuals interpret their experiences and construct their identities.

Santrock also emphasizes that family and close relationships within the microsystem play a fundamental role in shaping early behavior, emotional regulation, and value formation (41).

Through repeated interactions, individuals learn social expectations and develop appropriate, emotional responses.

Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships refer to direct and continuous interactions between individuals and significant people in their immediate environment, such as family members, close friends and authority figures. Within the microsystem, these relationships function as the main channels for meaningful social interactions.

Bronfenbrenner explains that individuals actively engage in communication, cooperation, and even conflict through these relationships, allowing them to exchange values, emotions, and behaviors (25). Through repeated and intensive interactions, individuals develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their roles within their social environment (23).

Emotional Bonds

Emotional bonds refer to the strong emotional attachments formed between individuals and those closest to them within the microsystem. These bonds include feelings of affection, trust, support, and loss. Bronfenbrenner emphasized that emotionally significant experiences have a major impact on an individual's affective and moral development (26). Stable emotional bonds can create a sense of security and empathy, whereas disruption or loss within these relationships can lead to emotional changes and influence an individual's attitudes and values.

Social Roles

Social roles refer to the positions and responsibilities that individuals assume within their immediate environment, such as those of a child, student, or leader. Through interactions within the microsystem, individuals learn to understand the expectations, responsibilities, and behavioral boundaries associated with these roles. Bronfenbrenner explains that social roles are learned through interactions with significant figures who act as role models. These roles function as a framework that organizes behavior and helps individuals develop their social identity, as well as understand responsibility and authority (25).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to examine Shuri's character development in the film *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022) based on Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, particularly focusing on the microsystem. Qualitative methods were chosen because they allow for a deeper understanding of the meanings, experiences, and psychological aspects represented in the film through dialogues, scenes, and narrative elements. As Creswell explains, qualitative research is used to explore and interpret how individuals understand social and human experiences (20). Therefore, the data in this study are presented in the form of words, phrases, dialogues, and narrative descriptions rather than numerical data.

The film *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* served as the primary source of data, which was used to analyze how the microsystem influences Shuri's character development. Data were collected by watching the film repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline, character development, and emotional progression. The researcher also closely examined the selected scenes and dialogues that reflect Shuri's interactions with her immediate environment. Important data were documented using notes and time stamps to ensure accuracy and clarity of the analysis.

The collected data were identified and classified based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, particularly focusing on the microsystem and its elements, such as interpersonal relationships, emotional bonds, and social roles. These data were organized into tables (Appendix) to facilitate systematic analysis. Irrelevant data were removed to ensure that the analysis remained focused on the research objectives.

The analysis was conducted in several steps, including selecting relevant data, organizing them into categories to identify patterns and themes, and interpreting the findings using Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework. This study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from the film in the form of scenes and dialogues, while secondary data were obtained from books, journals, and other academic sources related to ecological theory and film studies. The results of the analysis are presented in the next section, while the complete data are provided in the appendix to support the transparency and accuracy of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Microsystem Influence on Shuri's Character Development in Wakanda Forever

The analysis of Shuri's character in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022) reveals that her development is strongly shaped by her microsystem, as proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory. The microsystem refers to the immediate environment in which individuals experience direct interaction with significant others, such as family members and close relations. According to Bronfenbrenner, these interactions play a crucial role in shaping emotional, social, and behavioral development (25).

In Shuri's case, her character development is reflected through three main elements of the microsystem: interpersonal relationships, emotional bonds, and social roles. These elements are expressed through her interactions, emotional responses, and decision-making processes throughout the film, particularly during the moments of loss, conflict, and leadership transition.

Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships refer to direct and continuous interactions between individuals and significant others in their immediate environment. These relationships influence how individuals respond to social situations and shape their emotional and cognitive developments. Shuri's interpersonal relationship with Queen Ramonda plays a crucial role in shaping her emotional state, especially when she struggles with grief and confusion. This is reflected in the following dialogue.

RAMONDA "You cannot let your pain consume you."

SHURI "I don't know how to move forward."

RAMONDA "You don't have to face this alone."

Shuri's statement shows her emotional uncertainty, and Ramonda's response provides reassurance and emotional support. This interaction represents a direct interpersonal exchange that influences Shuri's ability to cope with her emotional state. In line with Bronfenbrenner's theory, such face-to-face interactions within the microsystem play an important role in shaping emotional development.

Another example is when Ramonda speaks on Shuri's behalf in a formal situation:

Council Member "Wakanda needs your presence."

Shuri remains silent, and Ramonda steps forward and speaks for her.

Shuri's silence indicates withdrawal, whereas Ramonda's actions reflect direct interpersonal intervention. This interaction demonstrates how significant others influence individual behavior within the microsystem, particularly in terms of responding to social expectations.

Furthermore, interpersonal relationships also influence Shuri's self-perception:

RAMONDA "Your brother believed in you."

SHURI "I failed him."

RAMONDA "He would be proud of who you are becoming."

In this exchange, Shuri initially defines herself through failure, but Ramonda reframes her perception by emphasizing her growth. This interaction shows how meaning is constructed through the interpersonal relationships. Therefore, Shuri's emotional regulation and self-evaluation are significantly shaped by her relationship with her parents.

Emotional Bonds

Positive regard refers to acceptance, appreciation, and emotional support received from others, and emotional bonds refer to strong emotional attachments between individuals and those closest to them, including feelings of trust, affection, and support. These bonds play a key role in shaping emotional stability and resilience (Bronfenbrenner 26).

Shuri's emotional bond with her mother is evident in moments of vulnerability.

Shuri breaks down in tears, and Ramonda embraces her as Shuri leans into her mother's arms.

This physical interaction reflects trust and emotional closeness, indicating a strong emotional bond. Such experiences contribute to Shuri's emotional stability, as emotional support within the microsystem fosters security.

This bond is further reinforced through verbal reassurance.

RAMONDA "I am here." "I will always be here for you, my daughter."

Shuri closes her eyes.

The phrase "I will always be here for you" expresses emotional permanence and support for the child. According to Bronfenbrenner, stable emotional bonds within the microsystem are essential for developing emotional security.

However, the loss of this bond significantly affects Shuri's emotional development, as illustrated in the following scene:

Shuri stands alone at the shore, removing her mourning clothes and burning them in silence.

This symbolic action represents emotional release and transformation following loss. This reflects how the absence of a significant emotional bond can alter an individual's emotional orientation. Therefore, Shuri's emotional development is deeply influenced by the presence and loss of emotional bonds within her microsystem.

Social Roles

Self-regard refers to how individuals evaluate their worth and abilities, often shaped by past social roles, which refer to the positions and responsibilities individuals assume within their immediate environment. These roles are learned through interaction and help shape identity and behavior (Bronfenbrenner 25).

Shuri's development is evident in her transition to a leadership role:

Elder "Are you ready to lead?"

Shuri steps forward. "I am ready."

This statement marks Shuri's acceptance of the leadership responsibility. Through her interactions with authority figures, she internalizes her role as a leader. According to Bronfenbrenner, social roles are acquired within the microsystem through direct interactions.

Her leadership role is further reinforced through her interactions with others:

SHURI "Wakanda will not fall."

The warriors respond with unity.

This moment reflects authoritative communication and a collective response, indicating that her role as a leader was recognized and supported by others. This reciprocal interaction confirms that social roles are maintained through ongoing interactions within the microsystem.

Thus, Shuri's leadership identity is formed through the acquisition and performance of specific social roles. Her acceptance of responsibility and the response from her environment demonstrate that identity is constructed through direct social interactions.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Shuri's character development in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022) through Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, particularly focusing on the concept of the microsystem. Through the analysis of selected dialogues and key narrative scenes, this study shows that Shuri's character development is strongly shaped by her immediate social environment. The microsystem, which consists of close relationships and direct interactions, plays a significant role in influencing emotional, social, and moral development. Shuri's development is reflected in several elements of the microsystem, including interpersonal relationships, emotional bonds, and social roles. Her interpersonal relationships, especially with figures such as Queen Ramonda, Okoye, and Nakia, provide guidance, support, and conflict that influence her decision making and self-perception. These interactions help Shuri navigate her emotional struggles and gradually shape her sense of responsibility in the film. In addition, emotional bonds within the microsystem significantly affected Shuri's psychological condition. The loss of her brother and mother creates deep grief and emotional instability, leading to her anger and internal conflict. These emotionally significant experiences influence Shuri's perception of herself and the world around her, shaping her responses to challenges and responsibilities. Furthermore, Shuri's development is influenced by her evolving social roles. Her transition from a princess and scientist to the leader of Wakanda reflects her growing awareness of authority and responsibilities. Through direct interaction within her microsystem, she gradually accepted her role and began to act as a leader, demonstrating changes in her behavior and mindset. Overall, Shuri's character development illustrates that individual growth is shaped by continuous interaction within the microsystem. The film highlights that close relationships and emotionally meaningful experiences play crucial roles in forming one's identity and behavior. This finding supports Bronfenbrenner's view that human development emerges from direct and ongoing interactions between individuals and their immediate environment.

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