



STAR
Institute

NAVIGATING YOUR SENSORY HEALTH THROUGH ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and the Social Model of Disability both emphasize the importance of the environment and society in shaping an individual's experiences and development.

The Social Model of Disability suggests that disability is not an attribute of an individual, but rather a complex experience created by the social environment. It's not the person's physical or mental differences that disables them, but the physical barriers, attitudes, and societal norms that prevent them from fully participating in society.

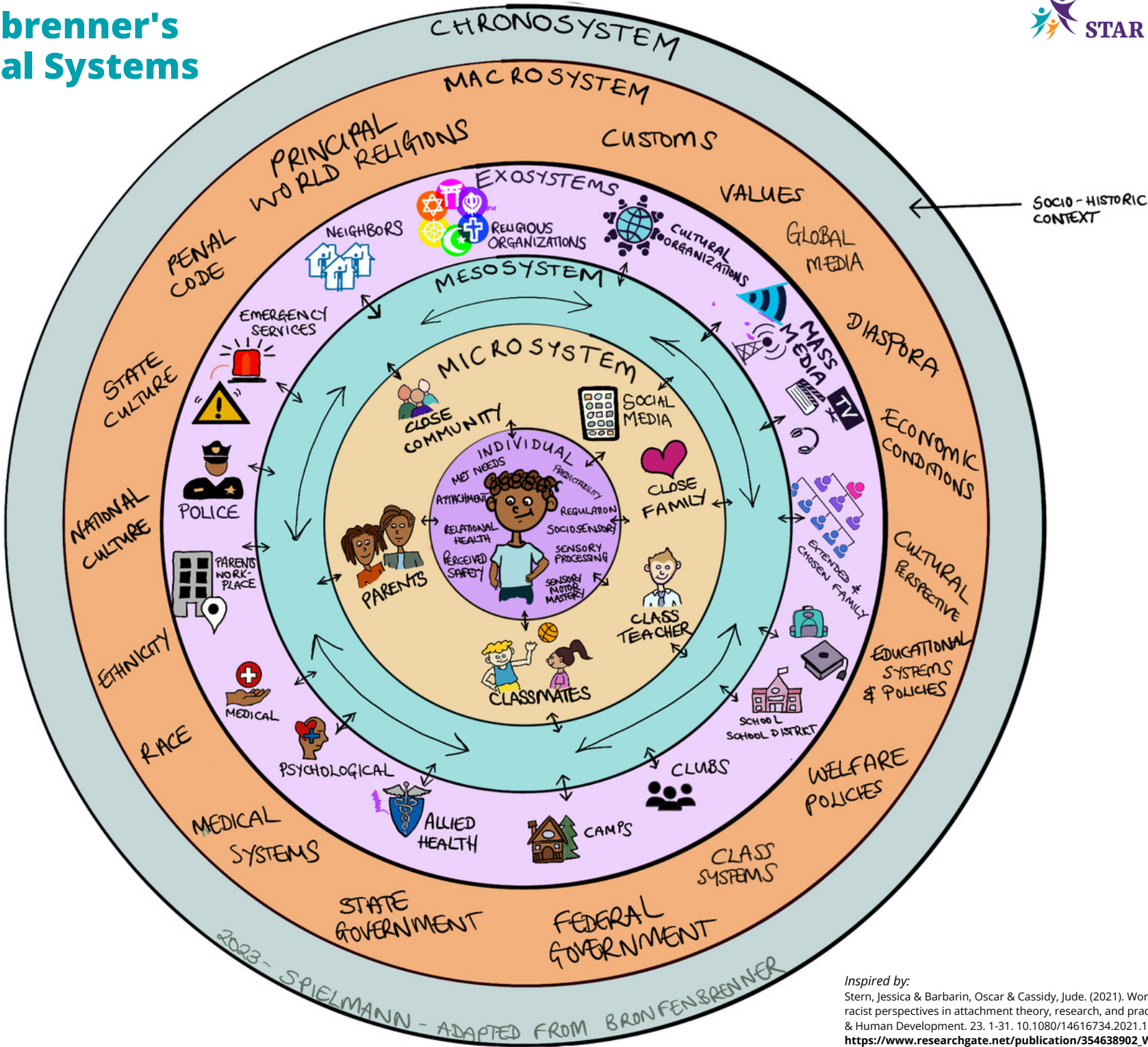
Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests that an individual's development is influenced by their environment, which is divided into microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, and macrosystem.

This theory recognizes that an individual's experiences are shaped not just by their immediate surroundings (microsystem), but also by interactions between different parts of their life (mesosystem), external environments that they don't directly interact with but still affect them (ecosystem), and the broader societal context (macrosystem).

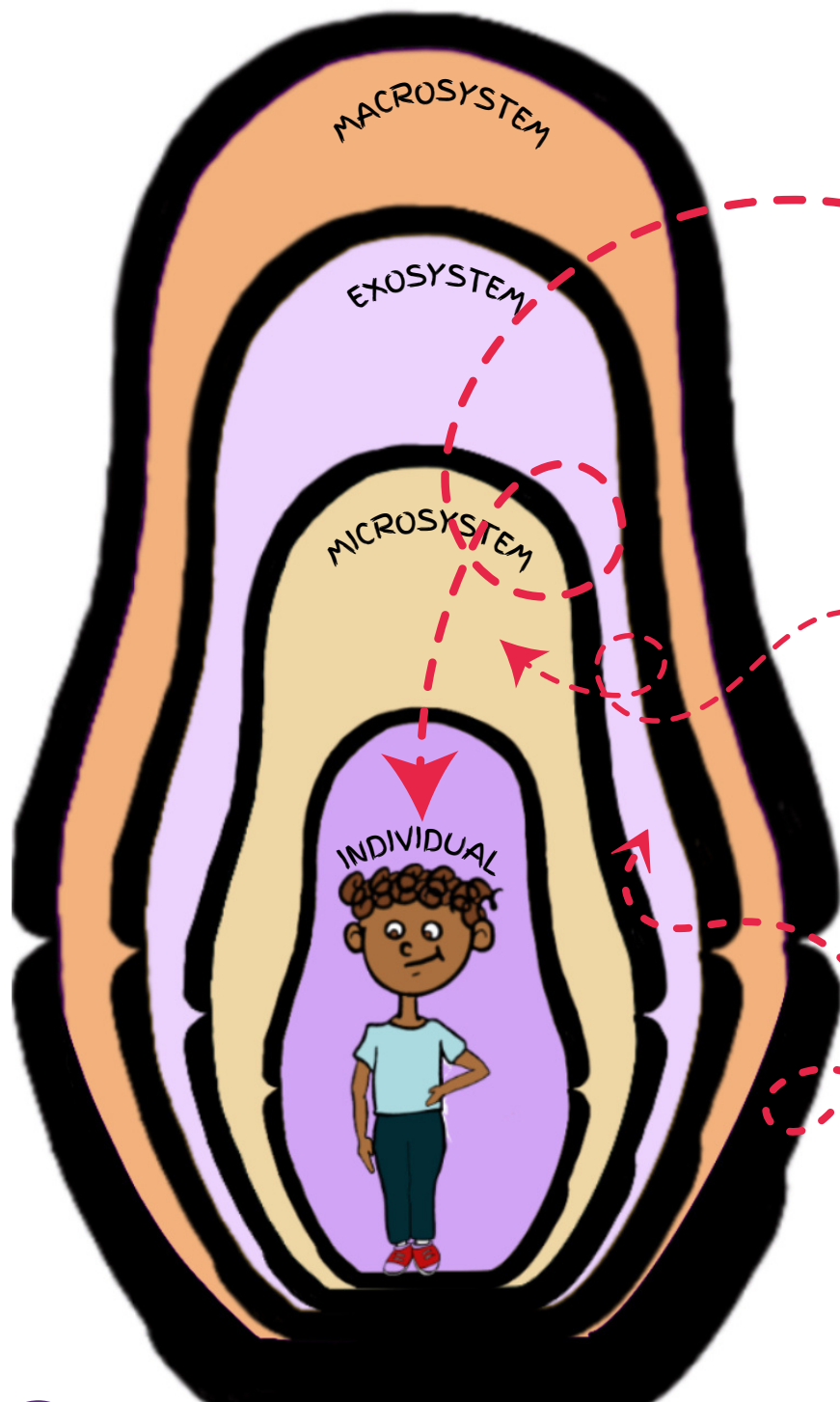
These perspectives emphasize the role of societal and environmental factors in shaping an individual's experiences and highlight the need for societal change to improve individual experiences and outcomes.

In the context of disability, this includes removing physical barriers, challenging discriminatory attitudes, or changing policies to promote inclusion and participation.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Inspired by:
Stern, Jessica & Barbarin, Oscar & Cassidy, Jude. (2021). Working toward anti-racist perspectives in attachment theory, research, and practice. *Attachment & Human Development*, 23, 1-31. 10.1080/14616734.2021.1976933.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354638902_Working_toward_anti-racist_perspectives_in_attachment_theory_research_and_practice



Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory can be a bit complex, but when it comes to supporting sensory health and neurodivergent individuals, it can be broken down into several layers of influence. Think of a Russian Nesting Doll. Let's explain these layers in simpler terms:

Individual Layer:

- This is the innermost layer and represents the person at the center, such as a neurodivergent individual.
- It focuses on their sensory experiences, needs, and preferences. It considers each person's unique sensory profile and how this influences what they need to be well and healthy and how they process and express themselves in daily life.
- It considers how each person's distinctive sensory processing patterns affect their health and well-being. It explores how these unique sensory characteristics shape the way people understand, respond to, and express themselves in everyday life.

Family and Close Relationships (Microsystem): Intermediate or Middle

- This layer includes immediate family members, caregivers, and close friends.
- It's crucial for neurodivergent individuals because their sensory needs often require understanding and support from those close to them.
- Effective communication and empathy within these relationships are vital.
- Caregivers and other people in the microsystem are really important as they help co-regulate the individual.

The mesosystem represents the relationships between the microsystem and exosystem and how they are interconnected and influence one another. For example, how a parent interacts with a teacher or how family interacts with friends/extended family.

Community and Social Groups (Exosystem): We've Gone Outside

- This layer extends to the broader community and social networks.
- It includes schools, support groups, clubs, and organizations that the neurodivergent individual interacts with.
- Ensuring these environments are sensory-friendly and inclusive is essential.
- It is important that groups and organizations in the exosystem take responsibility and adapt their policies, practices, and environments to best support all brains and bodies.



Institutional and Cultural Influences (Macrosystem): Zoomed Out

- The macrosystem encompasses societal and cultural factors that affect sensory health.
- Laws, policies, and cultural attitudes toward sensory differences and neurodiversity fall into this category.
- Advocating for inclusive policies and raising awareness can help create supportive macrosystems.

Broader Socioeconomic and Political Context (Chronosystem):

- This layer considers historical and time-related influences.
- Changes in society's perception of neurodiversity and advancements in sensory support over time are part of the chronosystem.
- Advocacy and research can drive positive changes in this dimension.

Systems Beyond Bronfenbrenner's Theory

Physical and Built Environment (Nanosystem):

- Though not explicitly part of Bronfenbrenner's theory, we can add this layer to emphasize the importance of the physical surroundings.
- Creating sensory-friendly spaces, reducing sensory overload, and providing sensory accommodations in the environment are crucial for sensory health.

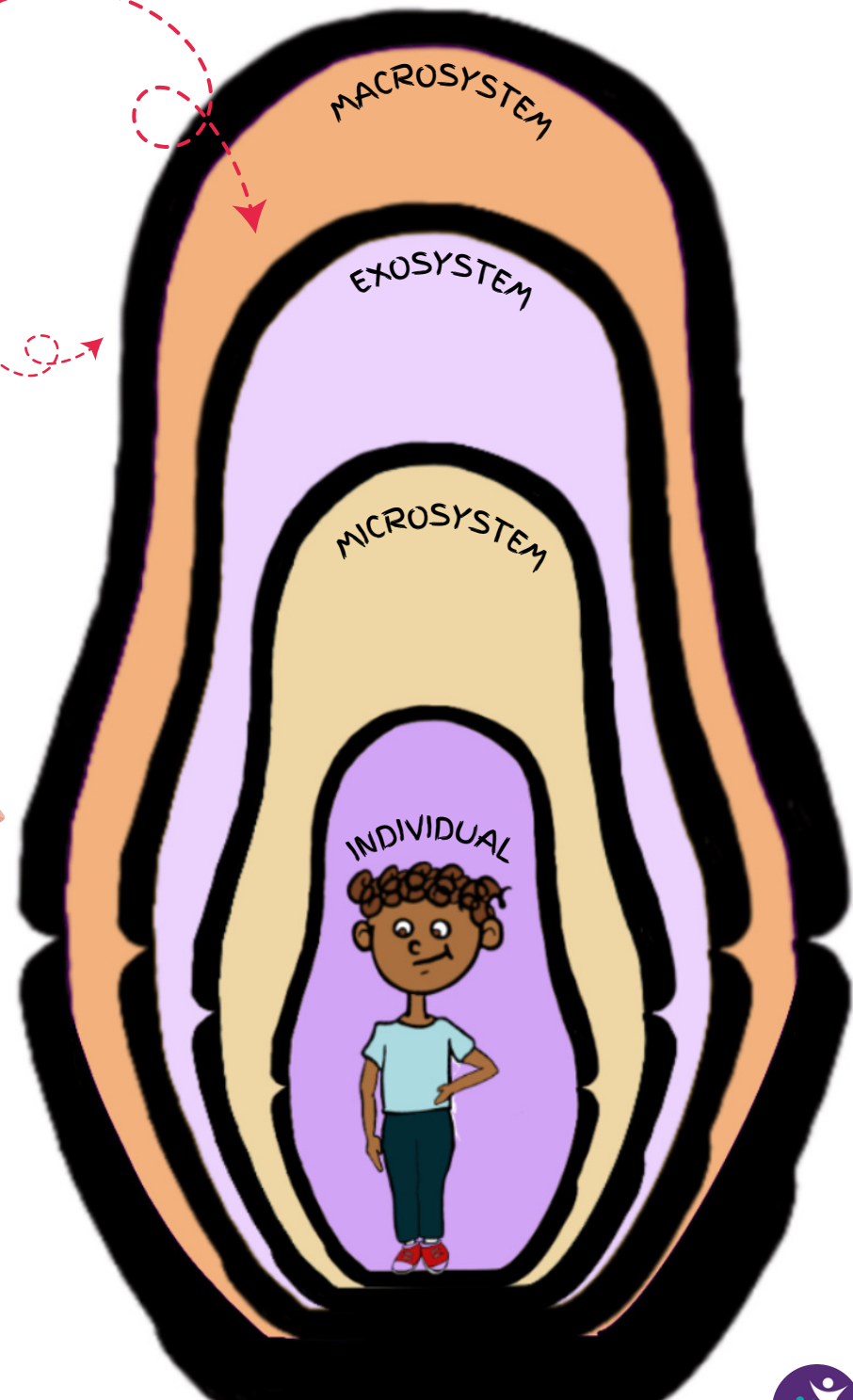


Technology and Innovation (Virtual System):

- In today's world, technology plays a significant role.
- Access to sensory-friendly apps, devices, and virtual communities can greatly benefit neurodivergent individuals by providing tools for sensory regulation and communication.



In summary, when supporting sensory health and neurodivergent individuals using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, it's essential to consider how various layers of influence, from the individual to the broader societal and environmental contexts, can either support or hinder their well-being. Creating an inclusive, understanding, and sensory-friendly ecosystem around them is the ultimate goal.



Unlocking Your Potential: Exploring Your Ecological Systems with Bronfenbrenner's Wheel

Uncover the profound impact of your environment on your well-being using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Join us in **filling out your own wheel**, connecting each system to your sensory health. Break down barriers, challenge norms, and explore how these systems influence your life. Embark on this insightful journey of self-discovery and societal change.

www.sensoryhealth.org

