

Bio-Psycho-Social History Theory Application Paper

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### **Family Configuration**

My father, age 49, married my mother, also age 49, in the year 1992. He is the oldest of two boys while she is the second oldest of four children. Less than five years after their marriage, they gave birth to their oldest daughter, myself. Eighteen months later my sister was brought into the world. She is currently 19-years-old and I am 20 years-old. My father is currently the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of Florida Hospital and my mother is a registered nurse who works with camps and is establishing her own business. Both of them live in Altamonte Springs Florida. As the oldest child, I went to college first and decided to move out of the house and start a new journey in Tennessee for my college education. Two years later, my sister decided to go to college in Texas.

I never got to know my paternal grandfather because he died of a brain tumor in the summer of 1988, which left my grandmother a widow and my father and uncle without a father. My father's brother is married and has two children who are in the third and sixth grade. My grandmother never remarried and lives with my uncle and his family in California. She is currently 79-years-old. On my mother's side of the family, her parents were divorced when my mother was 21-years-old. Her mother never remarried and is also 79-years-old. Her father, my grandfather, remarried a Puerto Rican woman and has a family in Puerto Rico as well. My mother's older sister had two children with her husband, then got divorced, and is remarried to a new man currently. My mother's younger sister is married with three children. The baby of the family, my uncle, is also married and has four young boys. I am the oldest grandchild on both sides of my family as well as the oldest cousin.

Throughout my childhood, my parents would help college students, or recently graduated students, by letting them live in the guest room in our house. We had a variety of young adults live with us throughout my middle school and high school years. I grew close to these different individuals and consider them, to this day, to be my older “brothers and sisters”. There is talk in my family currently about having my paternal grandmother move down to Florida to live in our house there. Other than that, we have not had any other individuals live with us.

### **Individual Development**

I personally do not remember many of my early life milestones so I contacted my mother to assist me with this information. At 10 months old I began to crawl and actually crawled off a bed and fractured my arm at this age. My mother said that I began to walk before my sister was born. We are 18 months apart so I began walking at 16 months. I was also potty trained by the age of two but continued to wet the bed until I was four years old. My mother reported that my first words were “Mama”. I remember not wanting to socialize with other kids that I did not know and that I was attached to my mother’s hip everywhere we went. I would only share and play with children that I had known for a while, but other than that I was a shy child whenever social activities would come up.

Erikson’s psychosocial theory focuses on how a person’s personality develops in their social environment and how those two factors are connected (Zastrow, 2016). In the following paragraphs I will be discussing myself through the various stages I have completed and about the one I am currently in.

The first stage of Erikson’s theory, trust versus mistrust, is where infants learn to develop trust of others, especially with their parents (Zastrow, 2016). I do not remember anything from

this basic stage but believe that I did develop that trust with my parents as resulted by the way I have learned to trust them as well as others.

In the second stage, autonomy versus shame and doubt, children begin to do things independently (Zastrow, 2016). Examples of this is when children begin to feed themselves with no assistance and when they begin to use the toilet. My parents did not restrict me in this stage and I was able to develop autonomy as mentioned earlier by becoming potty trained at two years old.

Initiative versus guilt is stage three of this process. This is the stage when children age's three to six are taking their own initiative (Zastrow, 2016). I can recall being on a soccer team at this age and being actively involved in my church's Sabbath school program.

During the fourth stage, industry versus inferiority, children ages six to twelve must be productive and do well in their activities such as school (Zastrow, 2016). I believe that I prospered in this stage and mastered my academic materials and information throughout these years. I was always a good student and had that drive to push me to do my best in academics.

When adolescence explore who they are and begin to discover and establish their identity, this is known as our fifth stage: identity versus role confusion (Zastrow, 2016). I do not believe that I suffer from role confusion. I have established my roles and have learned how these roles make up my identity. Some roles that I play are daughter, sister, roommate, student, Seventh Day Adventist, club president, American, as well as many more.

The stage that I am currently in is stage six, intimacy versus isolation. This is where a young adult is searching for intimacy (Zastrow, 2016). Zastrow (2016) mentions that this intimacy does not just have to be sexual, but the ability to open up and share with another person without giving up your own identity. I have had one legitimate romantic relationship in my life,

but ended it because I was still developing my identity as an individual. Currently, I am still discovering who I am and where I stand in my own values and beliefs.

Piaget's theory for cognitive development includes four stages: sensorimotor period, preoperational thought period, the period of concrete operations, and the period of formal operations. I will now assess my development in each of these stages in the following paragraphs.

**Sensorimotor:** At this stage a child gains a basic understanding of their environment (Zastrow, 2016). I do not remember anything from this stage of my life so I called my mother for some more information. In this stage I began to understand that if I cried, I could accomplish something that I wanted. Whether that be a diaper change, feeding, or attention, I demonstrated goal-directed behavior by doing this.

**Preoperational:** In this stage "children begin to use symbolic representations for things in their environment" (Zastrow, 2016, p. 134). The best example I can think of that represents this stage in my life is when I started understanding the concept of my religion. Jesus became more than just a person from 2,000 years ago, his death symbolized something and I began to understand this concept better.

**Concrete Operations:** Throughout this stage I believe I went through grades second to sixth grade. I remember in these classes I was introduced to more complex ideas when it came to different class subjects like science and mathematics. Learning and understanding basic academic concepts was accomplished in this stage for me.

**Formal Operations:** During this stage of cognitive development, I started to be able to hold more information in my head at the same time. I started taking harder, more advanced classes that challenged the way I thought and allowed me to expand on my current knowledge. I

was able to understand more complex ideas such as variables in algebra and going deeper in my understanding and walk with God. Zastrow (2016) states that “children become capable of taking numerous variables into consideration and creatively formulating abstract hypotheses about how things work” (Zastrow, 2016, p. 136).

Lawrence Kohlberg discusses three levels of moral development in individuals. The following will discuss my personal development through each level.

The first level of moral development from Kohlberg is the preconventional or premoral level. In this level, children ages four to ten are more focused on self-interest and satisfaction more than anything else (Zastrow, 2016). I demonstrated this when I was younger by doing my chores for a treat or a prize. I only participated in these activities because I knew I had something to gain. On the other hand, I tried not to get into fights with my sister because I knew that I would be punished which would affect me in a negative way.

Kohlberg’s second level of moral thought is the conventional level. At this level, there is a very strong influence to be liked by others and be socially approved (Zastrow, 2016). When I was in this stage, I was starting to develop those meaningful friendships and trying to please others. I remember not being the most popular girl, but having some core good friends and trying to fit in socially.

Level three, the postconventional level, is where we decide what is morally right and wrong for us personally, instead of based on what others think (Zastrow, 2016). I struggled with this one growing up. I was raised in a Seventh Day Adventist home where we did not believe in shopping on Sabbath, watching or listening to secular things, and much more. As I got older, I had to make the decision in what I believe when all my friends would do what they wanted. I believe this helped me develop into the person that I am today.

### **Family Organization**

My family has a strong bond when it comes to our relationships between children and parents. I have always had a closer bond to my mother rather than my father. Growing up I had terrible separation anxiety whenever my mother would leave which leads me to believe that I have an anxious-resistant attachment style. Ever since I became a teenager, I can remember that I have not had the best relationship with my father. My sister on the other hand, had a solid relationship with both of our parents until she went away for school. Now her bond is stronger with our mom, while I am strengthening my bond with my father.

From studying Baumrind's three basic styles of parenting, I have come to the conclusion that my parents use the authoritative style of parenting. Parents who use this style are not always controlling nor are they always letting their child do what they want, they are in the middle of these two sides (Zastrow, 2016). My parents set boundaries for us and rules to follow, but gave us freedom and a voice in the family as we were growing up.

Growing up, my parents used operant conditioning in the form of punishment and positive reinforcement as parenting techniques. My parents would always say "Now Karissa, you should not do that, but if you do, there will be consequences." That trained me to listen to them so that I would avoid punishments such as timeout, spankings, or taking something away. On the other hand, my sister and I were rewarded when we did something positive. For example, getting straight A's on our report cards meant that we got ice cream cones or completing all of our chores meant we received an allowance that week.

In my household, my father holds the power in most matters. He makes all the financial decisions and things in that sense. My mother does hold a lot of power in our family as well. She tends to hold the social power and makes decisions about who will come over and what we do

socially as a family. My sister and I have the least amount of power. This is evidenced by the fact that my sister and I may give our opinion about family matters, but in the end our parents have the final word.

### **Marital Relationships**

Growing up, I have very few memories of my parents in a happy marriage. My parents have been married for almost 25 years. From my perspective, their relationship has always been rocky and full of fighting. As a child, I can remember sitting up a night just listening to my parents arguing downstairs when they thought I was asleep and not listening. Now that I am older, they fight in front of my sister and me instead of waiting for us to go to sleep. Their fighting has always been verbal, never physical. Neither of them drink, nor have cheated on one another. My mother's parents are divorced and my father lost his father 29 years ago. My parents have had their good times, but I feel like the bad outweigh the good when it comes to their relationship.

There have been only a few ways in which I have seen my parents express love for each other. They will physically say the words "I love you" or my father will try to kiss my mom, but she usually pulls away. I have noticed occasionally some handholding, and sometimes they will do things for each other. My dad will bring flowers home once in a while, while my mom will do his laundry and take his clothes and other things to the cleaners. Little things like this show me their love.

My parents argue over anything and everything. I cannot even recall the specifics of what they argue about. I know that they used to see a marriage counselor when I was in high school, but that was not helping them so they stopped going. Their fighting has not gotten better, they just tend to go do their own thing when fights occur.



My father is stuck in a household of all women. In my opinion, he views women as independent but that they should hold themselves to a certain standard. He is very biblical in his views, and although I have never asked him, I believe that he would not support women's ordination. My mother on the other hand has a small thing against men. She is always commenting on how a man can act a certain way but a woman cannot, or how there are more men higher up in companies than women, which frustrates her.

I believe that my father learned that you never know when this can all end. He witnessed the heartbreak that his mother went through when her husband died, so he takes every day as a blessing. He grew up with parents who were in a happy marriage and I believe that is what he is striving for. My mother's parents got divorced when she was 21-years-old. She told me that her parents did not have a good relationship while she was growing up. Many different things happened that caused their relationship to diminish, but I have never been told the details. I believe that my mother has an unhealthy view of marriage, because that is the environment that she was raised in.

### **Family Communication Processes**

Communication is a touchy subject when it comes to my family. My sister definitely talks the most out of any of us. Ever since we have all been separated, I will get two to three calls a day from her and she will call my parents too. I talk the least in my family. When we are all together, I am the one more likely to sit there in silence while I let my sister have the floor. My sister and I have the best communication relationship out of our whole family. We talk the most and are more likely to be open about real issues with each other. I also talk to my mom daily, but might not be as open about some topics. My father is the most neglected out of our entire family.

I neglect and fail to call him and seem to always be busy when he calls. At home, we all tend to talk, but talking usually leads to arguing.

Feelings are discussed as a last resort in my family. We are a very passive-aggressive family and tend to bottle our feelings up until it is too late. When something happens, I will keep my feelings to myself and hold it in. Then later when someone does or says something, I tend to blow up on that person and yell at them for problems they might not have even been a part of. This is relevant for every member in my family. We tend to not discuss when we are angry or sad, we just take it out on each other which is not healthy. We cover the basic conversations in our family: school, work, relationships, God, and things like that. We tend not to talk about controversial issues because we all have different opinions and tend to start yelling and being rude to the others. Communication is something that we are all working on together.

### **The Family Context**

When I was born, both of my parents were working. My dad has always worked in finance and has climbed up the ranks to get where he is now. My mom is a registered nurse and worked in the hospital's emergency room for a couple years when my sister and I were younger. Since my parents earn a good income, my sister and I have been in Private Adventist education for our entire lives. We have always had enough money to be comfortable and not have to worry about where our next meal or home is coming from.

Family has always been the most important thing to us. Family before anything is our motto. My parents have always been very accepting to those outside of our family, no matter their race or socioeconomic status. I have observed that my parents have mainly Adventist friends and do not extend outside of the Adventist bubble very much.

My parents hold a high spot in our community because of my father's job. Since he is CFO of Florida Hospital, most people know his name and treat us differently because of his title. My parents have a solid group of people in the church that they can lean and depend on for things.

Other than my father losing his father, we have not experienced any big life traumas or crises. There are also no family myths, stories, or legends that I have been told of. We also do not have any unsolved intergenerational issues in my family.

There are no emotional cut offs in my family. We have family distance, but those people have not been cut off. For example, once my grandparents got divorced and my grandfather remarried, my mom and her siblings got closer to their mom and started becoming more distant to their father. To this day we are all more distant to my grandfather than to my grandmother.

College expenses is something that is draining our family's resources. My parents have two daughters in private universities which takes up a lot of our finances. The main community resource that my family uses is the church. My mother and father have strong connections with our church and have established a strong bond.

### **Family Strengths**

My family thrives on doing the best that we can to help others and be the best that we can be. My father started out as an intern making no money, but because of his self-determination and strong work ethic, he has become the man who he is today. We strive to do our best so that we can better serve others which is an advantage to our family. My family lives in a good neighborhood in a nice house which is an advantage and we are also not wanting at all.

Ever since I have grown up and become more responsible, I have seem to become the peacekeeper of the family. My sister is the free spirit following the call of the wind which is

something I admire about her. When it comes to my parents, my father is the responsible teacher who helps us in life while my mother is the advocate who is not afraid to speak up. We all have different strengths, but when you put us all together, we are a force to be reckoned with.

### **Conclusion**

According to Zastrow (2016, p.184) “systems theory helps us understand how a family system is intertwined with many other systems.” My family is a functioning system. We demonstrate homeostasis by working through our problems and sticking together rather than cutting each other off. An example of a subsystem within my family is my sister and I, we are siblings within our family. There are also boundaries in this system, our parents are the overall rule makers, while my sister and I are the children who abide by our parent’s rules. Our parents can do things that we cannot do because they are the parents. As a family we receive input from our friends, school, and church. We also give output to systems such as our church by participating and organizing different events. My parents have received feedback from a professional counselor when they attended marriage counseling. My paternal grandmother is not doing so well and is fading fast, this is an example on entropy in my own family because she is not going to be here forever. Negative entropy can displayed by my parents staying together and working through their problems to fix their marriage and continue to grow as a couple. Since my sister and I are not little children anymore, my family is going through differentiation. This is because when we were younger things were simpler, but now that my sister and I are both in college life has gotten more complicated. We both have more financial strains, complicated relationships, and more things happening in our lives that have made not only our lives, but our parents lives more complicated. Overall we are a functioning family who would do anything for each other no matter what.

References

Zastrow, C. H., & Kirst-Ashman, K. K. (2016). *Understanding human behavior and the social environment*. Boston, MA, USA: Cengage Learning.