

Bio-Psycho-Social History Theory Application Paper

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### **Family Configuration**

My interviewee is a 21 year old Haitian female who is the older of two siblings. She grew up in a two parent house hold and with one younger sister. Her father is in his 50's and is the youngest of his siblings. Her mother is the middle child in her family and is in her late 40's. My interviewee's younger sister is 17 years old and is currently in high school. Her father is a realtor and is also getting himself into the insurance business. He also is in the works of starting his own non-profit organization at the moment. Her mother is an LPN nurse who works in a rehabilitation center for the elderly. She also works the night shift so that she can be home during the day for her family. The interviewee herself is a junior in college and is studying business administration. She decided to leave home and travel to Tennessee to obtain this degree. Her younger sister is a junior in high school and is hoping to do photography as a full time job soon. The interviewee's parents as well as her grandparents were all born in Haiti and then they moved to the United States for better job opportunities. The family relocated in Florida and still lives there to this day. The interviewee is the only one who does not currently live at home since she is living in the dorm at school in Tennessee. She decided to go to school in Tennessee because she wanted something new so that she could expand her horizons. Having gone through Adventist education her entire life, she stated that it was natural for her to attend an Adventist institution as well and that Southern Adventist University was the closest.

The interviewee's paternal grandparents also live in Florida and live about 10 minutes away from the family's home. She stated that her grandparents visit a lot and actually used to live with them before they found their own house a year ago. Also, when she and her sister were younger there was a family friend who lived with them as well. He helped look after the kids and

help her father in any way he could. She went on to explain that in the Haitian community, a friend is considered family, and you always take care of your family. This individual lived with them for about three to four years.

### **Individual Development**

My interviewee stated that she could not remember the early stages of her development, but she knows that at some point she learned how to walk, talk, eat, and use the bathroom all on her own. She states that she was never really a shy child and that she loved playing with others

Zastrow (2016) explains Erikson's psychosocial theories and how they focus on a person's personality development in their social environment and how those two factors are connected. I will now discuss each of Erikson's stages and how they correlated to my interviewee's development.

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). My interviewee does not remember this stage but believes that she did develop trust because of the strong bond that she has with her parents currently.

In the second stage, autonomy versus shame and doubt, children begin to do things independently (Zastrow, 2016). Her parents allowed her to gradually start doing things on her own such as walking, eating, and using the toilet which demonstrates autonomy.

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). In this stage, my interviewee recalled that she started picking out things she liked and wanted to do, rather than following along with what her parents wanted to do.

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). My interviewee has always been a good student and was even a part of her schools band and choir at this age.

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). This interviewee knows who she is and has no confusion on her role. She identified some roles as being a Christian, daughter, sister, friend, student, and leader.

The stage that my interviewee currently is 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. My interviewee just got out of a very serious relationship, but she has no isolated herself. She has developed herself enough to the point where she can open up and lean on the close friends and family around her.

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 interviewee's 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). In this stage, my interviewee stated that as a child she understood that if she would cry her parents would feed her, change her diaper, or just give her attention. She understood that her parents were "hers" and that there was something unique and special about them.

Preoperational: In this stage “children begin to use symbolic representations for things in their environment” (Zastrow, 2016, p. 134). Understanding her religion was a big realization for my interviewee. She developed an understanding that Jesus was more than just a story and that he was something more.

Concrete Operations: This stage took place around grades second to sixth. At school, my interviewee has to learn about various subjects like math, science, history, music, art, languages, and basic human interactions.

Formal Operations: In this stage, my interviewee stated that she was able to understand broader concepts and ideas. She could be given a harder math problem and was able to sit down and solve it using the different methods that she had learned. She began developing personal relationships with other and with Jesus. She started understanding more complex ideas and was able to process things differently than from when she was younger.

Lawrence Kohlberg discusses three levels of moral development in individuals. The following will discuss my interviewee’s 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). My interviewee said that she definitely can remember being in this stage. She states that when she was younger she would not do something unless she had something to gain from it. But on the other hand, she tried to not get into trouble because she knew that a consequence would be waiting for her if she did.

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). My interviewee discussed with me that she really struggled with this stage, and still does. Pleasing

others was her main objective in life, and when she failed to get someone to like her, she felt as though she had failed at life. She did develop a good group of friends which helped her get through a lot.

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). My interviewee stated that the older she gets, the easier this stage gets for her. When she was younger, her “moral compass” was based on what others thought was “cool” rather than on what she knew was right or wrong. She has now had to make decisions on what she believes and is developing a character that stands up for what she believes in. Today she feels as though she is strong in her morals and knows what she wants.

### **Family Organization**

My interviewee discussed that she has an extremely close relationship to her parents and her sister. She stated that she talks to her parents frequently, even though they are residing in different states. She did mention that she is closer to her mother and that the two of them are best friends. She trusts her mother’s opinion and this opinion means more to her than anything else. Her parents are her support system and are always there for her. When there are disagreements, they are resolved quickly.

Her sister’s relationship with their parents is another story. My interviewee described that her sister is very introverted and quiet, the exact opposite of what the interviewee is. Interviewee mentioned that her parents even disciplined her and her sister differently. The interviewee got spankings and more verbal discipline, while her parents took a more sensitive approach with her younger sister. She mentioned that Haitians use the strategy of “tough love” but have realized that this does not work for her younger sister. They are having to find a new way to

communicate with her younger sister. The sister tends to keep to herself a lot which scares the parents because they have discovered that she is depressed.

According to the interviewee, her parents have changed their parenting styles throughout the years. She mentioned that when she and her sister were very young, their parents used more of an authoritarian parenting style. Throughout the years they have developed more of an authoritative style, except with her sister they use a more lassie-fair tactic.

The interviewee discussed a little about her parents various parenting techniques. Her parents would warn her not to do a certain thing or else consequences would follow. When she would disobey her parents she mentioned that she would be spanked and that her parents would tell her that they “are very disappointed” in her. This encouraged her to do the right thing because she did not want to let her parents down. Her parents would also reward her with money when she did something good like getting all A’s on a report card. This was a huge motivator to her as well. She mentioned that her parents used different techniques on her younger sister, but she did not give me details about that. She also reported that there was no child abuse within the family.

The more we talked, the more she shared about how her mom has the most power in the family. Her mom does try however to let her dad feel as though he is the “man of the house” and has power in that regard. If her mom is not happy, then no one in the house is happy is what she discussed with me. She talked about how her father is the leader of the house, but that her mother holds the power. Their relationship is a partnership and they share power over various tasks. For example, her mom is mostly in charge of social things while her father handles all the finances. She stated that her parents are a unit and that they cannot be pitted against each other.

### **Marital Relationships**

When asked “what is the quality of your parents’ marital relationship” my interviewee responded with “they are the premium package”. She further explained that even though they are not perfect, they are pretty close. This is the type of marriage that she wants to have when she is older. She knows that they definitely love each other and that her father wants to give his wife the world, but sometimes finances can get in the way of that. Her mom just wants to see her husband’s dreams come true and she supports him in everything her does. They are a well-functioning team.

There was no report of divorce, infidelity, alcoholism, physical, or psychological abuse within the parent’s marital relationship. The interviewee recognized that there is conflict everywhere, even between her parents. The main conflict that her parents face is dealing with finances. Her father feels bad because he is not the “breadwinner” of the household and that his wife is carrying the family. The interviewee mentioned that she has observed that this puts a little “dent” in their marriage.

The way in which the interviewee’s parents express their love to each other has influenced the interviewee a lot. Her father is always complementing her mother and her mother is always touching, kissing, hugging, and holding hands with her father. They always go on dates together, even if it is staying home and watching a movie while eating popcorn. Both parents also really enjoy buying little gifts for each other here and there.

Next we talked about when her parents would argue and how they would “get over it”. She mentioned that her mom is a little petty and passive-aggressive. So she usually slides in little side comments here and there and then go silent and give the father the “cold shoulder”. Her father on the other hand tends to get snappy at others (friends and people outside of the family) when there is stress within the family. The interviewee stated that her parents always resolve



their problems behind closed doors and never in front of her and her sister. They “get over it” by talking about it and praying together. If a problem does affect the children, then they have a family meeting and discuss what they should do to solve the problem.

The interviewee’s father has so much respect for woman. She stated that her father loves being the only man in the house. She also talked about how he always trusts women more than men. Her mother on the other hand thinks that boys are dirty when it comes to dating. She is very selective around men saying that some are awful while others are good. She does not like her daughters hanging out with their guy friends all alone.

Lessons that she learned from her childhood is that “marriage is awesome, but if you do not have the right person, you are better off alone”. Her parents taught her that marriage is a partnership and that not just one person can run it. If one person holds all the power, then that is not a healthy marriage. Working together is key to a successful marriage. She also did recognize that marriage looks like a lot of fun, but that it definitely comes with it difficulties.

### **Family Communication Processes**

My interviewee recognized that communication is a huge part of her family’s life together. Since she is away in college, her parents want to talk to her almost every day. Her parents get very worried when they do not hear from her over a period of time. She talks to her mom more than she talks to her dad. She also stated that her sister talks to her more than her parents because their parents tend to “hover” over the sister to make sure she is okay. The sister is the least talkative in the family whereas my interviewee is the one who talks the most.

Feelings are discussed pretty openly in this family. My interviewee is really open with her family and is always discussing her life and emotions. It is the exact opposite for her sister. Her sister tends to feel guilty about being depressed so she does not open up, but the family just

wants to know what is going on so that they can help. My interviewee discussed how her parents never express their sexuality or sex life to the kids, her father gets uncomfortable talking about sex. Her father and sister sometimes feel uncomfortable discussing certain topics, whereas the interviewee and her mother will talk about pretty much anything.

Difficult feelings are primarily dealt with by sitting down and discussing them. They try to be considerate and understand where the other person is coming from. She mentioned that they do not minimize how the other person is feeling. They try to figure out why they are feeling a certain way and what can be done about it. The interviewee's sister goes to counseling as well to talk about her emotions and everything.

### **The Family Context**

Income is brought in mostly by the mother who works nightshifts as a nurse. The interviewee's father is a realtor, which has been pretty rough recently. Both children were put through private Seventh - day Adventist education, but the younger sister has decided to attend a public high school and is currently still doing so. My interviewee discussed how her parents work so hard to give herself and her sister a great life. She sees how much they truly care about their children's happiness.

Her parents believe strongly in having reliable friends outside of the family. The interviewee's mother loves her friends more than anything. People outside of the family would always help out with the kids whenever times were tough or when a parent was sick. Her parents are very involved in the Adventist church and have always trusted fellow Adventists rather than non-Adventists. My interviewee explained to me that in the Haitian community, it does not matter what family or religion you belong to, if you are Haitian, you are considered family. My interviewee stated that her father is a "big fish" in the Haitian pond and that everyone knows her

father. At church, he is an elder. She also mentioned that in Haitian churches her parents are viewed in a higher regard than they are now in their current American church.

The interviewee expressed that her maternal grandfather had died a few years ago from prostate cancer and that this was very sad. The family has also experienced many losses of close family friends throughout the years.

One family story that my interviewee shared with me was about her paternal great-grandfather. This was a man that her father looked up to as a child. Her father told her that his grandfather was one of the nicest, most generous, funniest, and genuine man that anyone could have known, but he was a voodoo priest in the Haitian community. From this story, my interviewee has come to the conclusion that people who are close to the devil are no always evil and terrible people, sometimes they are as good as can be.

There were no serious unresolved intergenerational family issues reported.

My interviewee stated that her father is also so giving, and this causes conflicts within her parent's marriage. Her father always gives to those in need and has always had a soft spot for those who are less fortunate than himself. He always gives, even if it can hurt their family financially sometimes.

### **Family Strengths**

The one thing that my interviewee said helps her family thrive and go on was God. Her parents have instilled in her such a respect and reverence to God that He is all that they need. Her parents depend of God for everything, and now she is learning to do the same.

She did not state any environmental advantages.

Some psychological strengths that she discussed were that throughout the years her parents have had to learn how to adapt. They were both raised in a different country with a

different culture, and they now are having to figure out what works best for them now. They verbally motivate each other by saying statements such as “I am very proud of you” or “You have got this” to keep each other going. Issues are addressed within this family, but they never dwell on them. The family always comes up with an action plan and tries to move forward together and with the help of God.

### **Conclusion**

Understanding how a family interacts with other entities, or systems, is known as “systems theory” according to Zastrow (2016, p.184). This family that I have written this paper on is a well-functioning system. My interviewee’s family demonstrates homeostasis by working through their differences and figuring out solutions to their issues and problems together. My interviewee and her sister are considered to be a subsystem of this family system. Boundaries are a part of most systems, and in my interviewee’s family an example of boundaries would be her parents setting up rules that her and her sister must abide by. This family receives input from other systems such as work, school, friends, and counseling. They also offer output by participating in church and taking up leadership roles there. An example of feedback in this family would be the feedback the interviewee’s sister receives from her current counselor regarding her depression and mental health. An example of entropy was not given by my interviewee. Negative entropy would be the family sticking together and understanding their difference while trying to work through various situations. Differentiation is apparent because the interviewee and her sister have both developed from simple infants, to complex individuals with various thoughts, beliefs, issues, and ideas. In the end, this is a very well-functioning family that cares about each other and would go to the ends of the earth for one another.

References

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