

Bio-Psycho-Social History

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Family Configuration

As the individual in question, I am the oldest child of three, belonging to two parents. I am 19 years old, born on November 21, 1996. I am followed by my brother, Austin (17), born on August 2, 1999, and my sister, Brooklyn (14), born on March 26, 2002. My parents, Ken (father), born on November 21, 1968, and Amy (mother), born on June 5, 1966 are ages 47 and 50 respectively.

Starting with the youngest, Brooklyn occupies her time as a sophomore in boarding academy. Her student job involves babysitting the young children of one of the music instructors. In her spare time, she has taken up percussion in the school's wind symphony. Austin is occupied at the same academy as Brooklyn, enjoying his senior year. His student job is assisting the dean as the dean's reader. In his spare time, he enjoys playing on various intramural teams. As a natural progression, each left the home as freshmen to live at school. With a relatively newfound empty nest, Amy left her primary duties as a mother and went back to work part-time. She works as an aide to the mentally handicapped, assisting in their daily lives. In her spare time, she enjoys crafting. Ken, who has always been the primary bread-winner, works as an auto-mechanic for Ford. He enjoys relaxing after a hard day of work and helping out at our local church. Both parents remain in the same home in Pontiac, Michigan of their children's growing up years. Lastly, I, Savannah, occupy my time as a junior social work student at Southern Adventist University (SAU). I left home as a freshman in college to attend SAU in Collegedale, Tennessee, where I currently live. In my spare time, I have enjoyed being a part of the SAU gymnastics team, Gym-Masters. I work in the School of Religion as a reader to the dean.

There are those important to the nuclear family, who are extended family and otherwise. The majority of family on both sides lives in the area, so relationships with extended family has

always been close. The closest include Ken's parents, his step-aunt, uncle, and Amy's brother. Aside from family, a previous pastor of our church and his family, have proved to be influential individuals of the family. The pastor and his wife, who taught us children piano, were excellent role models and friends to the family during our growing up years. However, when they moved up north to a church in the Upper Peninsula a few years ago, their role in the family was diminished.

Individual Development

To my knowledge, my development progressed relatively normally through the milestones, with some exceptions. I have been told that I did not start walking until I was 18 months, as opposed to beginning to run as described by the textbook (Zastrow & Ashman, 2016). The majority of what I remember about my development centers around motor and play development. When I was three years old, I started gymnastics classes, and ended when I was nine. This fact compliments Zastrow and Ashman when they said that, "Three-year-olds participate in a lot of physically active activities such as swinging, climbing, and sliding" (pg. 82). A normal developmental milestone suggests that a five-year-old child will have just begun forming letters and numbers. However, by the time I was five, I already knew the alphabet and how to spell my own name. Learning these things at an early age was important to my parents.

Erikson. Erik Erikson conceived an eight-stage theory of psychological development that focused on how personalities evolve in life as a result from biology and society (Zastrow & Ashman, 2016). During my introspective reflection, I was able to identify with six of the eight stages, because I have not progressed into the last two stages yet.

Stage one, *trust versus mistrust*, indicates a need for infants up to 18 months of age to develop trust in others. As an infant, I continually received love and necessities from my parents and, therefore, developed a basic sense of trust in this stage.

Autonomy versus shame and doubt is the second stage. The major crisis in this stage is the child's desire to accomplish things independently. I specifically remember potty-training during this stage of development. My mom helped me gain independence through the process of scaffolding, as she rewarded me with stickers when I was learning how to use the toilet.

Preschoolers in the third stage of *initiative versus guilt* must face the idea of taking initiative through exploration and experience. During this stage, my parents helped me gain independence by exploring physical activity through gymnastics classes. They were always supportive of me and told me that I could accomplish anything I put my mind to.

Erikson's fourth stage of development centers around the *industry versus inferiority* of six to twelve-year-old children. Children in this stage must address the stress of productivity, success, and failure. My development in this stage was mostly positive; however, when I was about eleven years old, I started struggling with math and was sent to summer school after receiving the grade of a C. After that, I began to believe that I was not good at math and that I would never be able to succeed in that subject; it has stuck with me until this day.

Stage five, *identity versus role confusion*, occurs during adolescence. This is a time where young people transition from childhood to adulthood and develop a sense of self based on their perceived roles. Looking back, I feel like I had an easy time during adolescence. Despite the typical insecurities of those years, I developed a strong sense of self through my family, friends, and church support.

Intimacy versus isolation is the sixth stage, located in young adulthood, which is characterized by the need to establish intimacy in a relationship without sacrificing identity. I am currently developing in this stage. Because of my strong sense of self coming out of stage five, I am transitioning well into young adulthood in stage six. I am developing intimacy in my relationship, and learning how to be identified with another person without losing my identity and sense of self.

Piaget. Jean Piaget proposed a theory that proposes that people go through various stages of cognitive development from infancy to adulthood (Zastrow & Ashman 2016). Stage one called the *sensorimotor period*. It extends from birth to two years of age as the child progresses from thoughtless reflexes to a basic understanding of the environment. The third major accomplishment during the sensorimotor period is establishing object permanence. Through my parents' story and a foggy memory, I remember one instance of establishing object permanence. When I was an infant, my family had a Siamese cat named Sy. Sy and I were friends until I was about 2 years old and he died. My parents did not tell me what happened to Sy and I continued living my life as though nothing had happened. I forgot about, or never truly realized that Sy was gone until I saw a picture of a Siamese cat later when I was around three and suddenly remembered that he existed. My parents did not know how to explain death to me so they never brought it up, and because I had not established object permanence yet, I did not remember we even had a cat.

Stage two of Piaget's theory is the *preoperational thought period*, in which abstract, logical thinking continues to develop in two to seven year olds. Egocentrism is one of the barriers to the development of logical thinking. My parents have a video of me exhibiting this line of thinking in the preoperational period. As they are videotaping, I am adamantly saying that

I need some paper and a pencil. In the background, my grandma mentions that what I need is not to be bossy. Ignoring her perspective, I mention again how I need a pencil and some paper.

Again, she mentioned that what I actually need is a change of attitude. This goes on for a while, and is evident that I am still unable to see the world from somebody else's view.

Stage three is called the *period of concrete operations* and is exhibited in children of seven to eleven or twelve years of age. In this period, a child develops the ability to think logically and has mastered the barriers to logical thinking, such as egocentrism, that is seen in the previous stage. In this stage, situations may be viewed with many variables; however, they are only tied to concrete issues. Children think about things that they perceive concretely with their senses rather than ideas. I was an example of this in seventh grade when I started keeping a journal. Looking back, I can see how narrow my focus was compared to now. I focused mainly on literal, menial things around me that never went deeper than my immediate senses.

Piaget's final stage is the *period of formal operations*. This stage begins at the age of eleven or twelve and ends around the age of sixteen. It is characterized by cognitive development in the adolescent years, when abstract thought reaches its culmination. One of the three major developments in this period is hypothetical-deductive reasoning, where a child can evaluate many potential relationships and arrive at a conclusion in an "if-then" manner. I believe that I was exceptionally proficient in this area during the period of formal operations. When I was a sophomore in high school, around the age of fourteen or fifteen, I took a geometry class. One of the main aspects of the class was completing "proofs" where one must use theorems and postulates to prove a relationship between one figure or idea and another. I was told that most students find these assignments particularly difficult, but I thought they were fun. My teacher told me that I was the fastest student to learn proofs proficiently that he has ever taught.

Kohlberg. Lawrence Kohlberg proposed a theory of three levels and six stages in which moral development occurs in individuals (Zastrow & Ashman, 2016). The first level, known as the *preconventional level*, occurs during the ages of four to ten. It is characterized by the individual's priority to self-interest, where decisions are based off external standards such as reward and punishment. As a child, I often stood out from my peers because I did not want to participate in any activities that might even remotely have the chance of causing trouble. Looking back, I see that I was exhibiting the first two stages in the preconventional level.

Kohlberg's second level of moral development is the *conventional level*, which is characterized by the conformation to standard roles during the ages of ten to thirteen. I especially exhibited stage four of this level, "authority-maintaining morality" where I often received the nickname of "teacher's pet" because I desired to please my teachers by doing the right thing, even if it meant going against my peers.

The *postconventional level* is the final level in Kohlberg's theory. During this level, a moral conscious is developed that goes beyond what others say and true morality is reached (Zastrow & Ashman, 2016). Every day I continue to develop further in this level. I am learning skills in my social work classes that cause me to think about ethical issues and evaluate relationships based on many variables to reach a decision.

Family Organization

The relationship between the parents and the children is based on basic mutual love. Each relationship differs between persons though. Starting with the youngest, Brooklyn has a stronger bond with Amy and myself, while she rarely gets along with Austin. Austin, on the other hand, often has little respect for Brooklyn, argues with Amy, and identifies strongly with Ken. I get along well with all members in my nuclear family equally. If I were to get into a disagreement

about something, it would probably be with Austin. We used to fight more, but our relationship shifted when I moved out of the house, as it did with the rest of my family. As the parents, Ken and Amy each have separate yet equal relationships with all of their children. Each child tends to identify with their same sex parent the most.

I would describe my attachment style as secure. As I mentioned before, I was always provided with love and necessities as an infant and developed a basic sense of trust. This has carried over into my relationships today, where I feel confident and secure in myself.

The Baumrind System. Using Baumrind's model as my guide, I would classify my parents' parenting style as generally authoritative, with a slight aspect of permissiveness. I think they were often too permissive when discipline was in question. According to Baumrind's classification, warmth, support, and caring characterize authoritative parents. Reading this classification, I believe that I closely identify my family in this group. I remember as a child, my parents would explain to me why they made the rules that they did. For example, my mother would tell me not to run with a lollipop in my mouth. Her reasoning for this was that I might fall and choke. She did not usually expect strict obedience without the justification of reason.

Learning Theory. My parents used a lot of reinforcement and conditioning in their parenting techniques. The most common use of conditioning was operant conditioning. Some examples of operant conditioning I experienced in their parenting styles include receiving a sticker during potty-training, receiving a treat for being good at the Dr.'s office, and receiving money for completing extra chores. Positive reinforcement was used in each of these examples. An example of a negative reinforcement that they used was taking away our early bedtime if we had been exceptionally good. While operant conditioning was the most common form of conditioning used, I can recall one instance of classical conditioning used by my parents.

Whenever we children were misbehaving, our father would look at us pointedly and snap his fingers loudly in our direction. If we continued to misbehave, then punishment ensued. The resulting punishment was usually in the form of a time-out or spanking. Eventually, we associated our father's pointed snap with punishment. This conditioned us to stop our misbehavior after the sound of the snap.

In the nuclear family, power was distributed differently during different periods of life. As a general rule, Ken and Amy had the highest power as the parents. Amy frequently conceded the highest relative power to Ken. As the oldest, I had the next highest amount of distributed power over my younger siblings. For example, when I got old enough, I was often put in charge over my siblings while my mom ran errands so that she did not have to take all three of us. Austin refused to conform to a hierarchy of power in the family. A constant power struggle between Amy and Austin ensued. Sometimes Austin would win and Amy would give up and let Ken deal with Austin when he got home from work. Because there was a power struggle between Austin and Amy, there was an even greater struggle for power when I was left in charge. It progressed to the point where Austin was left home alone while Brooklyn and I ran errands with our mom to gain respite.

Marital Relationship

The marriage of Ken and Amy has lasted a strong 21 years. Growing up, divorce was never a question in my thoughts or knowledge. Rarely, were my parents seen fighting. Both have remained loyal to their wedding vows. There was no substance abuse or personal abuse. Aside from the stressors of raising three kids and a tight budget, my parents have enjoyed a relatively happy marriage. My parents express their love for each other in less traditional ways. Physical affection was rarely seen between my parents while we were growing up. I could probably count

the number of times I have seen them kiss on one hand. Instead, they chose to show their affections through their actions. My mother made sure that my father was fed and clothed, and my father made sure that my mother had money for groceries. My parents show love through acts of service. Sometimes they engage in small gift giving, but not necessarily on special occasions. If they ever fought, it was usually about money or us misbehaving kids. My mother would become stressed over the fighting of her kids and want my father, a relatively passive man, to deal with it. He, in turn, would sometimes get frustrated. I cannot recall how the few, witnessed argument were resolved.

Based on my eye-witness testimony, it appears as though Ken and Amy adhere to typical gender roles regarding the opposite sex. Ken grew up in a divorced family, but after his father remarried, his step-mom took up the traditional role of mother and wife of the house. As a teen, he lived with an independent step-mother who took care of the house and maintained a job, and a disciplinarian father who worked long hours to provide for his family. It is my deduction that my father's view towards women is a mixture of the traditional homemaker and the contemporary working woman. Amy grew up in a traditional family. Her mother never worked a job other than that of wife and mother, and her father worked to provide for the family. Her mother seemed subservient in nature and regarded her husband as the head of the household. Based on this history and my witnessed accounts, it is my inference that my mother views men with a traditional bias of gender roles. She views men as active, heads of the house, lovingly dominant over their wives.

Growing up in the atmosphere of their marriage, I learned a lot from my parents. I believed in traditional gender roles. I grew up believing that most women stayed home with their kids and that their careers were over when they started having babies. I believed that men were

supposed to be the providers and leaders in the family. In the age of increasing divorce, I learned from my parents that a lasting marriage is possible.

Family Communication Processes

Everyone is communicated with in my nuclear family, however, each relationship is different. With all of the children living away from home most of the year, texting and calling is the primary form of communication. Amy is the one that generally keeps the rest of the family informed. A text or call from her about family life is not uncommon. Ken generally lets his wife update the family, while he mostly keeps to himself. A text from him is not as common and a call would be rare. Austin would argue that he is left out of the communication, however, the rest of us say that he was not listening when he was informed. Sometimes I feel like I am left out of the communication process, because I am the farthest away from the rest of the family. Brooklyn communicates the most with our mom and myself. She has had trouble adjusting to life away from home and desires the most frequent communication out of the family.

A high priority was not placed on expressing feelings in my family. Anger and sadness were expressed the least. When sadness was expressed, it was generally only for the purpose of grieving a death. No subject was inherently taboo in my family. The only topics that were never really discussed were sexual subjects. As stated under the marriage section, my parents rarely exhibited romantic physical intimacy towards each other in the home, and it was discussed even less frequently. As a result, I grew up thinking that romantic feelings were shameful and should be kept secret or private. Difficult feelings such as anger are dealt with through the unspoken practice of personal space in my family. If a member of the family was angry, she or he would take time for themselves until they felt better. Anger towards another sibling were dealt with through discussion (in the form of arguments) or mediation (in the form of parents).

The Family Context

Ken has provided for his family through his work as a mechanic. He also added side jobs to his schedule whenever he could to compensate for his low salary. Amy worked as a manager at a popular fast food chain in the family's early years, but took on the role of stay-at-home mom after her third child was born. After her children were mostly self-sufficient, she got a job working as a home healthcare assistant. They worked where they could, when they could, to provide a good home and a Christian education to us kids.

The conceptions of my parents varied from person to person. They view those outside the family as friends, acquaintances, and strangers depending on closeness to the family. Those outside the family and the church were mostly viewed only as acquaintances or strangers. I am not aware of any close friends of my parents that are not in the church. My parents did not perceive those outside of the racial/ethnic group differently than friends, acquaintances, or strangers. They made it a point to teach us that character defines a person more than their race or status.

During my growing up years, my parents were just another set of homeowners in the community and another set of hands in business; however, at church my parents were integral members. Over the years, Ken has served as school board chair, head deacon, Pathfinder leader, and Early-teen Sabbath school leader. Amy has served as janitor to the church and school, Cradle-roll Sabbath school assistant, greeter, and deaconess. They taught us to help others when we can.

The family has experienced one major crisis and several minor ones throughout the lifetime of their kids. Amy lost both of her parents within 10 years of each other. Her father passed away after an arduous battle with lung cancer. Her mother passed away after several years

of hospitalizations and rehabilitations due to a brain aneurism, lung cancer, and a brain tumor. This was a frequent point of crisis within the family. During the latter part of that time, the nuclear family also filed for bankruptcy and had to abandon the house in which their children grew up. This occurred during my transition from middle school to high school.

Growing up, my siblings and I were regaled with funny stories of our passed relatives and of the times before we were born. There were no major myths, heroes, or heroines, just stories of our history and family.

There is no significant emotional cut off from either side of the family today. However, that was not always the case. It began before I was born, when my mom was a teenager. Her mother cut ties with her grandmother. My grandmother stopped talking to her mother and refused to see her. One of my grandma's brothers took her side, and the other brother took my great-grandma's side. It remained that way until they died many years later. There is one highlight to this sad story. On my great-grandma's deathbed, my aunt went to visit her and in her medically induced stupor, my great-grandma perceived my aunt to be her daughter coming to visit her one last time. She was so grateful to see her daughter one last time that nobody told her that it was really her granddaughter, whom she had seen many times since the split. Because this emotional chasm has been dead for several years, there are currently no intergenerational family issues at this time.

Growing up, the only outside stressors draining the resources of the nuclear family that come to mind were the failing health of my maternal grandparents. Over the course of many hospitals and rehab facilities, the family was left emotionally and semi-financially drained. My family did not make use of community services per se, but instead used the church community as

a pillar of support. My family turned to family and friends within the church during times of distress.

Family Strengths

It is family, friends, and faith that help the family go on in times of distress. The environmental advantages of church support are available to the family. My family also used the advantage of some governmental supports when we were children in the form of WIC and Medicaid. The family has many strengths that help them cope in life. The family cognitively knows that with God, they will be all right. As long as they stick together, they can get through anything. The parents are motivated to thrive for the sake of their children. The family has the emotional strength not to give up when things get tough. They can look back at the crises and major events that they have already survived, and know that they have the strength to carry on.

Conclusions

Despite our differences and shortcomings, my family is a unit of strength for each other. This is evident in our exhibition of concepts from the systems theory. My nuclear family is a system that makes a functional whole. Within that system are subsystems such as the parents and the children. Boundaries of power and respect are divided between the subsystems. As discussed in the family contexts section of this paper, the family has gone through difficult stressors, but we adapt to maintain homeostasis and thrive. My family adheres to typical societal roles for family, with the father as the bread-winner and the children underneath the parents. As discussed in the family organization section of this paper, many separate relationships exist within our family system. We give and receive feedback from each other to help improve our family relationships. We also receive feedback from extended family. My family experiences interface in many ways such as interaction with church, extended family, and they subsystems within our

nuclear family. My family greatly exhibits the concept of differentiation. As my siblings and I mature and move out of the house, family interaction becomes more complicated and interface only occurs around the holidays. Overall, my family is a dynamic and developing system. It is because of them that I am who I am today.

Reference

Zastrow, C., & Ashman, K. (2016). Understanding human behavior and the social environment (10th ed.). Australia: Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning.