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Oral History Paper

Being raised under my dad's parenting was not only an extremely healthy lifestyle, but also a positive influence for what will be the rest of my life. Growing up, he faced struggles that shaped him into the man he is and created a parenting style which forged me into the person that I am today. While their family managed to make it work fairly well, having 12 siblings and a single mom seems pretty difficult, and I will forever praise them for being so successful in their process. Through the interview with my dad, I have been able to discover important information that can precisely apply to concepts that explain reasoning behind behaviors and actions in the family. **Due to a need for restructure because of the lack of a father figure in the home, my dad's family was compelled to execute the principles of systems theory as well as confront the tensions of the relational dialectics theory.**

My dad grew up in a pretty tough situation that would most likely be even more difficult to deal with in today's society. He was born in 1970 to his parents Gloria Mae and Clarence Kilmer Jr. He grew up with 11 sisters and one brother all under the roof of a single mother, where each of the children had important roles that were essential to maintain a home and family. My dad and his siblings were responsible for lots of chores around the house since my grandma needed to work out of the house each day. Performing this housework definitely bonded all of the children to have an extremely tight-knit connection that is still clearly prevalent today. They were raised to value each other and for most of them, having grown up without a father figure, it was very meaningful to have those bonds that still remained within the family in order to prepare them for life after they moved out and created their own families.

The discussion of struggles within my dad's family can be described through the idea of systems theory. Growing up with so many children in a single parent home took somewhat of a toll on my dad's family financially. During the interview, my dad discussed how they were one of the poorer families in school and described how frustrating that could be at times. One aspect of this theory focuses on the concept of hierarchy in the family which can be described by the idea that families are made up of several individuals on different levels who are affected by the larger hierarchical structures in which they are formed in (Turner & West, 2018). The fact that my dad's family grew up poor described their social situation within the environment and how they were not positively affected financially. Having to live with so many people with only one parent that steadily provided income for them was a hardship for their family. This hierarchical structure in society deeply affected their lifestyles, but they were able to adapt their behavior because of it. It is typical that families that develop a system within society are able to change their roles in order to organize a structure that best fits them as a whole as well as the relationships apart of it (McGarry, 2002). This idea is portrayed through the hierarchy that was present within the family as well. While interviewing my dad, he talked about how his older siblings had a stronger relationship with their father before he had withdrawn himself from being a constant factor in their dynamic. The fact that they were able to have that relationship with him caused a subconscious separation between them and the younger siblings that never had that chance to really bond with their dad. Even today, I see that split between the older and younger siblings whether it comes to who hangs out with each other at gatherings or who's getting invited to what.

Another aspect of systems theory portrayed in my dad's family is the idea of calibration and feedback. This aspect can be described through the need to seek equilibrium and whether improvements need to be made to the family or not based on how well a system is balanced. From interviewing my dad, it seems like his father was in the picture a lot more before he was born. Losing the reliance of a spouse or father is definitely a big change, especially for a family so large. Because of this shift, my dad's family was forced to pursue positive feedback in order to maintain balance again and function as a group. Each of the siblings were obligated to take on roles that maybe the normal kid at those ages would not have been expected to pursue. In the summer, each of the siblings worked for the contract that their family had with Bond Pickle Company where they would pick cucumbers from the rows each day and whoever had picked more cucumbers would gain a bigger check that was mainly used to purchase their school clothes. Because my dad barely had a father figure, he was also obliged to pursue positive feedback in order to gain that fatherly figure. Instead of looking up to his father, he changed his outlook and viewed his older and only brother as a role model. To him, his brother became the one to teach him how to hunt, fish, be responsible, really be that active and constructive figure that his biological father should have been able to enact, but did not care to (Doherty, Craft, 2011). My dad's older brother, Brian, also needed to pursue positive feedback to be that role model for several of the other younger siblings in order to create that equilibrium within the family with the lack of a father. According to Doherty and Craft (2011), single mothers may rely on the older children of a family to take the role of a missing figure in order to find the balance needed.

Another theory to apply to my dad's family is the relational dialectics theory. This theory contains many aspects of tensions that families face each day. One tension that can be applied is the autonomy/connection tension which focuses on the contradicting desires to be independent from the family and also feel a close bond with the family (Turner & West, 2018). The way that this was portrayed within my dad's family was through the fact that they were an extremely tight-knit family that was forced to connect each day. My dad often spoke about how close they were and how there was always someone to be there and accompany him at any time. While he stressed the idea that he was not hateful of the situation he was raised in, he also did explain that it was nice to get time apart from all the girls and spend time with just his brother. Also, even though he enjoyed living with his sisters, he moved out to live with his brother on the day he turned 18, which expresses the idea of tension between autonomy and connection within a family. My dad also explained that he often would like to think of ways or places in which he would be able to sneak off and remove himself from the environment at times. Even though he did enjoy being with so many people and having that connection, he still needed to be independent and have some privacy. Despite holding an appreciation for having a large family, there were times where my dad would want to veer away to spend time with friends. This was difficult for him, however, as he was often embarrassed to bring friends over due to the condition of his living situation. It is possible that the way he was raised had a negative impact on how he was able to engage socially with individuals outside of the home. According to Allen, Chango, and Szwedlo (2013), patterns have been made that link the idea that a lack of connection with peers during adolescent years has led to less relationship success in adulthood. It could very well

be possible that my dad struggled with his marriage because of the environment that he was raised in as a child.

Another aspect of the systems theory that my dad often faced growing up was the openness/protection tension. This can be described by the idea that individuals both have a desire to be open and communicative with their family as well as have feelings of wanting to be conservative with their communication (Turner & West, 2018). Being so connected at all times, it is likely that a majority of the siblings had open communication with each other and were able to communicate well. This is still prevalent with them today and has flowed into my relationship with my dad and aunts and uncles as well. However, there was secretive communication where answers have still not been found to this day. For example, my dad's sister, my aunt, has not really been in the picture for a long time. I am 20 years old and as far as I know, I have been around her twice. It seems odd that she has kept herself apart from the family when the rest of us are so close with each other. When I interviewed my dad, he did not have a clear understanding of why she has not stayed connected with the family which shows that she leaned more towards being protected and others were not quick to figure out why. Another example is represented in the idea that I never met my grandpa before he died due to the fact that my dad never found the need for me to be in contact with him. There is a tension of openness and protection where my dad prefers to have open communication with me, however, I am able to sense the idea that he would rather protect me from that part of his life and does not deeply express much detail about his dad to me. While I am not sure how much he actually knows about his father, he very seldom reveals personal information about him.

Even though my dad and I are exceptionally communicative with each other, I deeply appreciated this opportunity as a chance to understand him even more and interpret who he is based on his background. While I thought I had a pretty decent knowledge, I was extremely privileged to be able to learn so much more information that really defined my dad and his family even more than what I had ever originally thought. Through the interview with my dad, I was able to grow a perspective on the effect of being raised in a single parent home with twelve siblings through the concepts applied in the systems theory and relational dialectics theory. The aspects of hierarchy and equilibrium seeking help to understand the environment of my dad's family and the reasoning behind behaviors enacted. The tensions of autonomy/connection and openness/protection also allowed me to gain a better knowledge on what it was like for my dad and his siblings to be raised the way they were. I now have a much more profound appreciation and respect for my dad and his family as a result of the interview from being able to learn more about his life growing up and maturing into the remarkable dad and role model that he is today.

Reference Page

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