Family Analysis Paper

Mary Chanan Gilbert

Pennsylvania State University
1. Introduction

My extended family can be described as having traits of both healthy and unhealthy family functioning. Some of the strengths my family has are: allowing every member to be heard out, a clear balance between connection and autonomy, and generally using assertive communication (Gill, 2014). On the other hand, my family often struggles with not talking about feelings directly and assigning blame (Gill, 2014). However, I do not think that any of these issues are detrimental to the family, but do need to be improved upon over time. Looking at these traits, I could see how my family has been rigid. Change is difficult for us to take on and we often have a set way of doing things. My family has more structure and is probably closer to being rigid than chaotic. We have clear roles and organization within the family. Growing up I would say that my family was slightly disengaged. Every member of the family functioned as an individual. Although we were not fully enmeshed as a family, we were involved in each other’s lives. We were all individuals, but each of us worked together to form a family unit.

2.

I was the first child that my parents had. For five and a half years it consisted of my father, mother, and me. Then, at age five, my younger brother was born. This changed everything. When I was an only child, both of my parents worked full-time and I received all of their attention. Once my brother was born, many aspects of my childhood were altered. In order to watch over her two children, my mother made the decision to leave work. She left her job of ten years as a first grade teacher to be a stay-at-home mom. Immediately her role in the household changed. Instead of helping the family financially, she contributed as a homemaker. My mother took on cooking, cleaning, nurturing, shopping, and many other responsibilities as a full-time job. My mother still is not in the public work force and is staying at home taking care of
the house. If my mother had not left her job, I probably would have grown up with the expectation that women have to have a full time job in order to fulfill their purpose in the family. In its place, when my mother made the decision to leave work, I began to realize that wives and mothers have much more responsibilities within the home than just earning a salary. Having my mom at home to look up to, I was able to see how making this decision positively influenced our family. However, I believe that a woman can take on both the work force and household responsibilities. Seeing the homemaking my mother did has encouraged me to push myself to become a supporting and responsible wife to my husband.

3. Family Roles

Roles in my family have recently changed, due to the fact that my family structure has changed. Since getting married this summer, my family consists primarily of my husband and I. My role has predominantly changed from daughter to wife. With the title change, my roles have also changed. I now have a larger responsibility being married and independent from my parents. When it comes to roles within my family, my husband and I have had discussions of who should take on which roles in the household. Before marriage, and during engagement, we came to the conclusion that my husband’s role is to financially support the two of us. He also takes on the role of spiritual leadership. I, on the other hand, take on the role of primarily caring for the home. I take on cleaning, cooking, laundry, and taking care of budgeting our finances. Also, I am a full-time student.

In making these decisions of our roles, we took into account our personality differences. For example, I am better than my husband at doing daily and time bound jobs. This is because I am capable of multitasking well. My husband is not. He has a hard time multitasking and does a better job at looking at the bigger picture for our family. This is why working to provide for us is
a better fit for him than the daily tasks at home. Designating these roles before entering into marriage has been very beneficial for us. It has allowed us to know our roles in the family, act on those roles, and then help each other when need be. With our personalities being so different, it was not very difficult to designate roles between the two of us.

Fortunately, in the five months we have had in marriage, we have not experienced much severe anxiety. However, anxiety does creep into our lives occasionally. Managing anxiety is much easier for my husband than it is for me. He does a great job at keeping calm during difficult situations and also at calming me down. We believe that the place that can provide most peace in the midst of anxiety is at the feet of Jesus. We go to Him in difficult times to find rest. He relieves our anxiety by refocusing our eyes and hearts on Him. My husband does an incredible job at being a spiritual leader by pointing me to Jesus when anxiety comes up in our family. We believe that this is the best way to effectively manage anxiety.

Growing up in my family I played the role of daughter and sister. My role was to be submissive to my parents and to respect them. As I got older, I acquired many more responsibilities such as doing my own laundry, yard work, and taking care of my pets. Now my role is not much different. My role still is to be submissive and respectful, but to my husband in place of my parents. However, I have many more responsibilities in the household than when my role was a daughter. Although being a wife has more obligations and is more difficult at times, I prefer that role. Being a wife, even for just a few short months, has been so rewarding and fulfilling. I would not trade it with any other role within a family for anything. I am looking forward to continuing this role as a wife, but also attaining the role of a mother one day.

4. Togetherness and Triangulation
When I got married I did what Kerr (1988) would consider as separating from my family of origin. However, when I lived with my parents and brother, there was not a sense of pressure for togetherness. I specifically did not feel this between my parents and me. My family was not emotionally connected when I was growing up. I still do not feel pressure by anxiety for togetherness, but I do feel more emotionally connected to my husband. Triangulation, on the other hand, was much more present in my family before I got married. When I was a little older, sometimes triangulation would come about when my parents dealt with anxiety. When they became anxious and got into arguments, they would sometimes bring me into the situation. By bringing in a third person, and creating a triangle, the anxiety that is experienced decreases (Kerr, 1988). In this case, I was the third person of the triangle in which anxiety shifted. This was the only triangulation I felt among my immediate family, but I have noticed more among my extended family. An example of this is my father and his two sisters. His two sisters often bring him into the triangle to help decrease the anxiety they are dealing with. Currently, I am not experiencing triangulation in my family because it consists of my husband and me. There is not a third person to bring in to create a triangle. Also, my husband and I feel very united and feel the concept of togetherness in our relationship. We are in sync with one another and have “become one” by getting married, yet we also consider ourselves to be two individuals part of that whole.

Entering into a marriage is one step I have made to differentiate myself from my family. On top of that, I have moved over twelve hours away from them. I have taken these measures to establish my individuality, but I still maintain a close relationship with them. I have been able to think and act for myself. Also, I can feel emotions and express those emotions for myself. These are not based on my family, but me as an individual. Clearly, I have steered away from
enmeshment and have established my individuality. However, in doing this, I also want to make sure that I balance my independence and relationships with my family. I do this by being open with my thoughts and emotions, while accepting that they have theirs as well. When it comes to my relationship with my husband, I feel that it does not particularly contain enmeshment. He views me as an individual, yet we are connected as one on an emotional and a spiritual level.

6. My cultural values are extremely important to me. With that, I think that they have heavily influenced my analysis. When I examined my family that includes my parents, I had a hard time thinking about the way I was brought up and my relationship with them. This is because some of the values we have are different. When I examined the family of my husband and me, values played a large role. We base our lives, decisions, and our relationship on our beliefs in Jesus and how we should live according to His word. I agree with Peterson (2012) that finding “significance in the contribution to something greater than the self” is essential for people when establishing a family value system. I think that this has influenced how I view my family now as being more ideal for me than it was before. I had a great childhood and love my parents dearly. However, my family dynamic has changed. Instead of simply taking what my parents offered, my husband and I are able to make our own decisions and develop our own family and it’s values.

7. The most interesting part of this assignment was analyzing the difference between my family dynamics. The dynamics when I lived with my parents are different from those I now have with my husband. This includes structure, roles, and functioning within the families. I was able to look back at the goals I had set for when I would begin my own family, and see if I have
attained them. So far, I have. Now that I am newly married it was useful to see my thoughts on what a healthy family consists of. When my husband and I have children, I want to raise them in a healthy and functional family. Looking at my past and present family experiences, I have been able to clearly see what I want for my growing family in the future.
References

