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FSHS 550

Paper Assignment #2

The family is a complex thing; it is dynamic and often unpredictable, such so that we are not even in agreement on how to define it. If this course has taught me anything, it is that having an understanding of today's family is more important than ever. Sometimes, I overhear conversations with people talking about families or individuals and I am baffled by the ignorance and lack of understanding. Then I remember that not everyone has a clear understanding of family sciences. In my opinion, every student should have a basic understanding of the family and the way it impacts the development of the individual.

This course has reinforced everything else I have learned about family life in this degree program so far. Learning about each of the four time there has been a debate about the future of the family was one of the most fascinating things. It's really interesting to learn about where opinions lie about the "destiny" of the family because I know what my own family raised me to expect of the family, but hearing what the culture at large thinks opens up my mind to new ideas about what families can look like. Hearing that "traditional family values" are not actually the dominant set of ideals in our families today was a reality check. In fact, there is no consistent set of ideals that applies to even the majority of families. There can be no generalizing with the family, because each family is so incredibly different. And yet, there are patterns that we can find across families that are relatively consistent and allow us to predict behaviors and attitudes and outcomes in terms of individuals. It is all so fascinating.

One of my favorite things to talk and learn about in FSHS is human development. For this reason, Family Development Theory was extremely interesting for me to learn about. I have concluded from all that I have learned that theories which focus on human development and how people's environment impacts them are the best theories that we have. We talked in class about how the oldest kid drags the family down the life course; it is so strange to think that as the

oldest child I had such a profound impact on the way my family developed. Reflecting on my own life, I see attitudes and behaviors in my family that reinforce this theory. For example, my parents' first experience raising a teenager (me) was when they were entering their mid-life years. My dad went through several job transitions while I was in high school and my parents got divorced when I was fourteen and a freshman. There were so many transitions happening at the same time, on an individual level but also in terms of my family as a whole. The stress of these transitions has definitely had a lasting impact on my family. Family Development Theory sheds light on so many other functions and dynamics of the family, too. We can look at the way an individual's development leads the family's development even by looking at things like conflict styles and types of marriages. The individual has a profound impact on the family, and the family has an equally weighty impact on the individual. The two are intertwined so heavily; it would be nearly impossible to separate them from one another.

I love learning about the family because it is so relevant to my life and to everyone around me. We all come from different backgrounds and stories, and somehow we each had a "family" of some variety that was deeply formative for us. But beyond even this personal application, the impact the material in this class will have on my potential future career cannot be overstated. I am getting a minor in Conflict Analysis and Trauma studies alongside my FSHS degree. I have found a passion in trauma and how it impacts the individual. I hope to work with people who have endured traumatic events, such as women who have been trafficked or veterans who have served in war. The socialization process is perhaps the most important process we go through as individuals in our families. The way our parents raise and teach us has a profound impact on our life course. It would not be far-fetched to assume that many people who find themselves in traumatic or abusive situations came from families who "conditioned" them to be

wired to fall into that kind of trouble. For example, we talked about how many kids with authoritarian parents are unsure of themselves and can often be passive. This might lead a kid down a road where they end up in an abusive relationship and don't have the self-respect to get out of it. On the other hand, a child who grew up with permissive parents might run away from home and find herself lured into a trafficking situation as a young teenager. Knowing people's stories is a crucial first step in helping them move forward. As a helping professional in a very difficult field, understanding the specific ways that people are shaped by their families will be invaluable.

If anything, this course has rekindled the fire in me that longs to help build and rebuild stronger families. This does not mean that all families need to look the same. This would be impossible and unhealthy. However, there are certain things that families need in order to be successful. I think a crucial one is resources. I hope to be a resource for families one day, and having knowledge about what leads families to success versus failure is extremely encouraging and makes me hopeful for the future. It is really powerful to get to sit in a room full of people who are just as passionate about the family and the individual as I am. Someone has got to know how to help the family improve and heal and take steps forward. I would argue (although I'm biased) that family science professionals are among the most important professionals in our world. If you think about it – and we have thought about it a whole lot in this class – the family is the foundation that the individual is built on. We need more people to help build stronger and sturdier foundations.