Case description and theoretical analysis of tracy essay

Final Assignment ' Thirteen' Case Description and Theoretical Analysis

Section 1: Case Description Tracy Freeland is a thirteen year old Caucasian female. She is a seventh grader at a Los Angeles, CA middle school. Tracey has recently begun a pattern of stealing money from individuals, as well merchandise from stores. She has started to experiment with drugs, alcohol, and sexual activities. Over a four month period that these activities took place; Tracy has also started to act out her emotional turmoil with various forms of verbal aggression, as well as self-mutilation.

These issues are not known to be patterns of past behavior, but instead recent manifestations associated with her current befriending of classmate Evie Zamora. However, Tracy's identified past family history is a source of emotional trauma for her. Tracy is the youngest child, with an older brother named Mason. Their parents are divorced and both children currently reside with their mother. The father does have visitation rights, however due to his current job he is not consistently available. He does try to offer financial support but has some difficulty, resulting in stress upon the family especially for Tracy's mother.

The mother, Melanie, is a high school dropout, and recovering from a substance abuse addiction. She does attend substance abuse recovery meetings, which may be the closest Tracy has " experienced" or been around psychotherapy/counseling. Melanie works as a hairdresser from home to try and financially support the family. Melanie also has an on again, off again boyfriend who is a recovering cocaine addict. While his place of residence is usually half-way houses, he also stays in the family home, much

to Tracy's displeasure. Tracey is an intelligent adolescent as observed through her talent in writing poems.

Until recently, she was a good student and received good grades. However, she began flunking tests, as well as not turning in homework or completing projects. As a result she is facing the possibility of needing to retake seventh grade again. Tracy' s relationship history was limited. In recent times, she has started to experiment with various sexual acts with other adolescent males and females. Tracey's level of exposure to trauma results from the divorce of her parents. Also, the exposure of substance abuse from an early onset in her life has had a negative impact.

There is evidence from her behavior that she has a great deal of residual anger over the separation and consequent lack of attention from her father. Also, there is evidence of flashbacks from when she previously witnessed drug abuse. Substance abuse and addiction history is a factor in Tracy's family and now she has begun to start participating in the consumption of alcoholic beverages and illegal drug use. She has resorted to getting high from marijuana, and stolen prescription drugs. She also misuses household inhalants by " huffing" them. Despite these illegal activities, Tracy does not have any known legal problems.

Tracy's drug use, stealing from random individuals, stores and her participation in the stealing from her mother's clients are risky behavior that can have severe consequences. She was not caught until recently when the stolen items (not all from her) were found by her mother and another individual. No legal actions are known to have been taken at that time. The

result was the end of Tracy and Evie's friendship as well as the reveal of Tracy's acts of self-mutilation to her mother. Tracy's social supports were initially friends similar to her in age and behaviors (they were also good students as well).

Her relationship with her mother had some issues, namely those surrounding the tension of the divorce, and Tracy's initial social dissatisfaction at school. However, the relationship saw a severe decline with the recent events. Tracy has little support in her father who although claims to still care, is unable to provide her with the sufficient attention she needs. Her relationship with her brother seems rocky throughout their interactions and much conflict arises after Tracy behaviors began to shift in a negative nature. During Tracy's friendship with Evie, the majority of her " support" primarily came from her.

The support provided was limited to the encouragement to behave in a way that Evie found beneficial to her. Tracy's initial decision to steal was because of Evie's actions and encouragement. Also, the additional occurrences of stealing, ignoring her previous friends, lying to her mother and so on were due to Evie's influence. Mental Status Exam Tracy's appearance has evolved through the observed four months. Though initially she dressed conservatively, wearing little to no makeup and had younger/age appropriate styled hair.

However, after being made ridiculed for her childish socks, Tracy was able to convince her mom to take her shopping for more trendy clothes, despite the lack of money. Tracy begins to steal clothes, shoes, and money, later claiming she did it because her mother was never able to give her the money

she desired anyway. Other common behaviors besides stealing were; lying, skipping school or ignoring school work, also isolating her former friends, getting drunk and high, experimenting sexually, and using self-mutilation as a coping mechanism.

Tracy's identified moods could be labeled as a variety of depressed, angry, rebellious, confrontational, but also " carefree" appearing around Evie or other friends of that clique. Tracy is very reactive especially to certain triggers such as her mother, unsuccessful attempts of discipline, or in defense of Evie. Section 2: There are many different theories that make up the fields of social work, psychology, sociology, etc. Each of these theories originates from various foundations and specializes in unique forms of analysis.

With such a diverse and widespread selection, selecting the most beneficial theories may take a thorough examination of the strengths and limitations. Systems Theory, Ecological Perspective, Psychodynamic Theories, Behavioral Learning Theories, and other alternative theories will be examined for the case of Tracy. Module 1 Individuals are continuously engaged in various groups throughout their lifespan. These groups, whether encountered in the workforce, socially or in an educational setting, will all have similar structures that are highly interconnected. However, each person's environment will vary widely depending on many factors.

System theories enhance the ability to understand the interaction and behavior of a person and to assess situations specific to an individual. Structural functionalism, ecological theory, and dynamic systems theory can

all be used to bring clarity to Tracy and her life. Structural functionalism is an important theory to consider when assessing Tracy's situation. Tracy's interacts among several different systems, one being her family. Structural-functionalism has historically been important in the study of families and continues to remain relevant (Kingsburry & Scanzoni, 1993, p. 95). Structural-functional focuses on the structures and effectiveness of systems, however the functionality of a system may be hindered due to outside forces. Adaption is a process that each system must do to deal with the demands that are placed upon it (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2006, p. 30). Throughout the four month period, many different demands affect Tracy's family. Economically, both Tracy's mother and father must work hard to support the family. They face many difficulties and consequences resulting in this external pressure.

Tracy's mom must work out of her home, her dad is unable to spend time with his children due to working numerous hours, and Tracy does not have the money she desires to buy the clothes and other objects she would like. Theses stressors cause the family to have to adapt to the situation, however the family also must deal with the negative consequences. While adaption is related to structural functionalism, it is also emphasized in the ecological perspective. The ecological theory has a prominent method of viewing individuals in context of their environments, otherwise known as person-in-environment.

Greene (1999) discusses how the individual may have an impact on the environment, as well as the environment influencing the individual. Also a similar environment will have diverse impressions on different people (p.

269). At 13 year's old, Tracy's primary environments are school and her home. Observing Tracy's interaction in both locations allows a greater examination of the person-in-environment theory. Tracy's parents' divorce, her mother's boyfriend cohabitation and their economic troubles impact Tracy's home environment.

However, it is Tracy's behaviors at school (acting out, skipping class, and not studying/participating) that influence her school environment and have negative consequences for Tracy. Observing other significant individuals in Tracy's life such as Evie Tracy's new friend and Noel Tracy's discarded friend provides an example of how individuals in a similar environment may have drastically different interactions. Tracy's association from one individual to the other greatly changed her interactions in both her school and home environment.

Tracy's attempts to adapt to her social environment at school ended up affecting her " goodness-of-fit" with her environment and as a result caused stress on herself and other members of her system. The last theory, dynamic systems theory is useful when examining systems and the relationships and boundaries associated. Members, or subjects, of a system are labeled into multiple categories; the focal system, subsystems and suprasystems (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda. 2006, p. 40). Using this theory, it is possible to view Tracy and her family within this configuration.

Tracy's family unit is a focal system, while each member is a subsystem. Tracy's parents' occupations, Tracy and her brother's school, friends and other societal influences are the suprasystems. The boundaries among this

system may be influenced by the environment and external factors placed upon it. With the interaction and constant influence, the relationships of the subsystems may be altered (McGoldrick & Carter, 2003, p. 376). Tracy's friendships with Evie, as well as her behaviors, directly impact the structure of the focal system. Because of this the resiliency of the family is greatly tested.

If the family is able to adapt to the changes by developing better communication, they will survive as a focal system (Walsh, 1998, p. 106) despite the challenges faced from these external factors. Many different perspectives can be useful when analyzing an individual. These theories could help convey greater knowledge and understanding that may otherwise be overlooked. Structural functionalism, ecological theory, and dynamic systems theory can all be used to provide clarity when examining Tracy and the factors relevant to her life. Despite the clarity that may be provided, there are also limitations that can exist.

Both systems theory and ecological theory are difficult to test and determine how realistic they may be. While these three theories are able to provide insight into Tracy's situation especially when viewed in terms of her interactions with groups and her environment, there is a lack of examination into Tracy's cognitive elements that may influence her behaviors and actions. Module 2 Society often looks to psychoanalytic theory as an important tool for understanding human nature. Psychoanalytic theory was developed by Sigmund Freud and his belief that biological forces are the primary foundations for much of human behavior.

Such forces as anger and aggression, or love and hate can unknowingly drive an individual in many ways (Berzoff, Flanagan, & Hertz, 2002, p. 19). These conscious and unconscious factors that exist within an individual, the focus of Ego Psychology and an individual's defense mechanisms all have a significant impact on an individual, including Tracy. Tracy's desires to be popular and liked by her peers are a strong motiving factor for her actions. Her initial befriending of Evie demonstrated this underlying desire. These desires ultimately led to the behavior and experiences that Tracy participated in during the fourth month period.

A person's experiences as a child have been found to have a significant influence on an individual later in life, specifically in their personality. Tracy is still a young adolescent, so many of her experiences now will impact her later in life, but despite the fact that Tracy is young, the effects of her experiences in her past can be witnessed currently. The divorce of her parents, the economic struggles her family faces, and the substance abuse struggles she has witnessed all have a significant impact on her personality, behaviors, and motivations. Ego psychology takes a greater examination into unconscious cognitive processes.

The id, ego, and super ego are important factors to acknowledge, especially in the examination of Tracy. The id is primarily known for the operation of gratifying basic desires based on unconscious needs, such as sexual desires. The ego's function is to help regulate an individual's id and the factors of reality in the outside world. The superego is often what is referred to as the " conscience" (Schriver, 2010, p. 164). A large degree of conflict can be

witnessed with some of Tracy's common behaviors related to skipping school, stealing, sneaking out and lying.

These specific actions show that regulation of Tracy's impulses (id) and her reality of right and wrong (ego and super ego) are lacking during these behaviors. Two ego functions; her reality testing and judgment need greater development for Tracy to be able to make better choices. In the stages of Sigmund Freud's theory, there are encoded strategies that people use to cope with reality. Stemming from Freudian's psychoanalytic theory, these strategies are called defense mechanisms. There are multiple mechanisms, some are adaptive behaviors while others are maladaptive in nature.

These unconscious actions can be found in varying forms in every individual (Vaillant, 1992, p. 4). Observing Tracy's behaviors and labeling them in terms of the defense mechanisms, provides a greater understanding to the reasons underlying her actions. Tracy's obvious denial of the consequences resulting from her actions; skipping school, stealing, and lying, is witnessed multiple times. Her skipping school and not participating in school work does eventually catch up to her, but her anger over the situation is evident.

Anger is also substantial in the next defense mechanisms of displacement and being passive-aggressive towards her family. While her feelings of anger and hurt can be seen as reasonable responses to her parents' divorce and her father's lack of attention, her attitude towards her mother and brother may not be desired. Tracy also seems to avoid dealing with many of her true feelings as seen in her flashbacks of witnessing drug abuse. Instead of talking these issues out, she turned to self-mutilation as a way to cope. She

also acts out by fighting with her mom, lying, sneaking out, drinking to excess and experimenting with drugs.

The varying approaches of Psychoanalytic Theory, Ego Psychology and additional knowledge provide a greater insight to Tracy's actions and the motivations behind them. However, there are some limitations that can exist. Psychoanalytic Theory's usefulness is often debated. While these theories are able to clarify why Tracy may act the way she does, there is a deficiency of attention to what can be done about those behaviors. Many of the current modern therapies have a fundamental belief that emotional problems are in the here and now and as such can be dealt with in that approach.

Modules 3 ; 4 Tracy's life for the past four months contains many different events, behaviors and outcomes that may be difficult to comprehend. There is no one way to view a situation. Each approach that may be taken when addressing circumstances may lead to varying forms of clarification. Behavior Learning Theory, Moral Development and Conflict Theory may seem diverse in nature, however when used in regards to the actions of Tracy each can enhance the understanding. Behavior Learning Theories focus on the behaviors that are presently taking place, not on past behaviors.

By focusing on the current comportments there is an ability to anticipate and regulate the behaviors of an individual. Learning and behaviors are found to result from environmental factor and are influenced by reinforcement and punishment. There is recognition that learning is an unconscious event.

However, it is not until it is displayed as a behavior is it seen as a learned trait. The existence of a mother recovering from substance abuse and the inclusion of the mother's boyfriend who is also a recovering addict can be seen as a stimulus to Tracy's eventual behaviors.

Because Tracy was a witness to the dependence of substances, she eventually turns to them as well. Positive and negative reinforcements are also significant in the case of Tracy. She partakes in stealing quite often, but because she was not caught she had no reason to discontinue this behavior. If Tracy moral progress had been better constructed, she may have been able to reason and control her desires to steal. Moral Development is the process in which an individual determines the rights and wrongs of their behaviors. It is often seen as an important process in socialization (Robbins, Chatterjee, ; Canda, 2006, p. 273).

As an adolescent Tracy's moral process is still developing and with the befriending of Evie, exceedingly tested. Moral reasoning has been found to develop in multiple stages. Both Piaget and Kohlerg have determined these varying periods (Adkins, Payne, ; O'Malley, 1974, p. 109). Because Tracy is only 13 years old, she is in the conventional level for a few more years. This level is extremely significant in Tracy's life as it involves the desire to behave in a way that is socially acceptable. From the very beginning Tracy's actions are conducted in a way to win the approval of her peers and move up on the social hierarchy.

Her decisions to steal, experiment with drugs and alcohol, cut class, and go against her mother can all be linked to the pressure she received and the

desires of Evie. Tracy's need to win support from Evie ends up outweighing her concern for approval from anyone else, including her parents or teachers. Tracy's social standing with Evie and the struggle it causes between old friends, Tracy's family and school is an example of the conflict that can be viewed as a common element in social life. While Conflict Theory usually takes a much broader approach in societal terms, it is useful when observing academic liques as well. Recalling the original interactions between Evie and the " popular" clique at her school, the event can be clarified when viewed in terms of Karl Marx's theory. Marxist Theory states that conflict can be ignited by an inequality amid groups (Bartos ; Wehr, 2002, p. 13). Tracy's lack of trendy clothes due to her family's economic standing can be seen as an inequality especially amongst her peers. When Tracy decides she is unhappy with her current situation her interactions amongst the varying groups drastically shift.

The amount of conflict that arises when Tracy is accepted into Evie's clique is evident when Tracy's shuns her old friends and starts resisting her mother. Tracy's further actions continue to cause conflict in almost all aspects of her life except with Evie. However, once Tracy's actions and behaviors catch up to her, conflict starts between Evie and Tracy as well. Behavior Learning Theory, Moral Development and Conflict Theory may seem diverse in nature, however when used in regards to the actions of Tracy each can enhance the understanding.

While there are benefits, there are also limitations in each theory the may limit the usefulness. Both Behavioral Theory and Moral Development Theory have a limitation that is not only similar but relevant to Tracy's case. One of

the constraints is the lack of focus on environmental factors. This may not seem significant; however it is when economic troubles have a substantial part in Tracy and her family's situations. Unlike the previous theories, Conflict Theory does acknowledge economic processes. Instead, this theory is limited by its deficiency of biological and psychological assessments.

Much of Tracy's conflict may appear to be caused by outside forces, such as her economic problems and other social issues. Nonetheless, Conflict Theory does not take into account the biological factors that could contribute to Tracy's anger which causes conflict with her parents and other significant groups. In conclusion, Tracy Freeland is a thirteen year old adolescent who grows up too fast. In a four month period, the consequence of her family's history and the emotional turmoil it causes puts her in a downward emotional and physical spiral.

Her inclusion in the popular but antagonistic clique and the resulting conflicts, her behaviors of lying, stealing, and partying and her unresolved emotional and cognitive disarray can all be explained by Systems Theory, Ecological Perspective, Psychodynamic Theories, Behavioral Learning Theories, and other alternative theories. References Adkins, D. C. , Payne, F. D. , ; O'Malley, J. M. (1974). Moral development. Review of Research in Education. 2, 108-144. Retrieved from: http://www. jstor. org/stable/1167160 Bartos, O. J. , & Wehr, P. (2002). Using conflict theory. New York: Cambridge University Press.

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