Healthy Family 1

Running Head: Traits of a Healthy Family

My Family:

The Constitution of a Healthy Family

California State University, Chico

Fall 2011

Niki Gotelli

Healthy Family 2

My Family

The Constitution of a Healthy Family

A poor man is often considered “rich” when he has family. A family is defined as a group of two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption (Cox, p. 261). Every family is different, with different morals, religions, interests, and upbringings, to name a few. The common purpose of a family is to teach children, instill values, provide support, establish security, provide necessities, improve future, and provide time for family members to grow (Mccoy, 1996). In order for these functions to occur, there are a variety of traits that a family must exhibit in order to be considered “healthy”. Many studies have been conducted with the purpose of finding consistent traits present in various healthy families. While comparing these traits of a healthy family to my own family, the research that I found concluded my original presumption that my family is a healthy one, although I realize there are areas that need further construction.

While discussing traits of a healthy family, it is important to recognize that changes have occurred and are currently occurring in the American family. The last 50 years have seen a dramatic rise in divorce, cohabitation, "blended" families of both gay and heterosexual design, and children born out of wedlock (Castelloe, 2011). It is important to note this because in a changing society, families need to work harder to adjust and survive. According to Lin, the idea of “family strength” refers to resources a family has for adapting and integrating (1994). My mother is a fulltime employee which is a different concept from the previous belief that women should be fulltime care givers. More than half of all married women, nowadays, work outside the home (Lin, 1994). Families of divorce, cohabitation, and blended families may find that they have to work harder to adapt and integrate healthy traits into their family life. Luckily for me, my

Healthy Family 3

parents are still married and my immediate family is a very tight-knit team. In regards to healthy traits, I will be discussing my immediate family consisting of my mother, my father, my older brother, and myself.

Families that are committed to facing issues head on as well as working together as a team are leading a healthy lifestyle (Boehkle, 2010). My family and I always communicate our thoughts in a healthy manner in order to get our point across. One of the most important characteristics in regards to maintaining a healthy family is communicating effectively and listening empathetically. When a set of participants were asked the most important trait in a relationship, communication was mentioned by each at least once (Mccoy, 1996). Families who are there for one another are open and honest through their communication which builds strong relationships that lay down the foundation for future generations (Boehkle, 2010). Eating dinner with my family is a time when we can reflect on the events that occurred during the day and talk about certain topics that need to be addressed. When one family member has an extremely stressful day, we try to be sympathetic and understanding. We know each other so well that we can recognize each other’s attitudes and feelings based primarily on body language and expression. Characteristics of good communication include taking turns, expression of caring, active listening, self-assertion, teamwork, eye contact, open body language, and focus (Cox, 2009). Communication is also very important in order to resolve issues and address topics. Ability and willingness for families to cope with their problems are the keys for differentiating healthy from unhealthy families (Lin, 1994). When families bottle up their emotions, there is more likely to be a huge explosion of emotions at one particular time. In order to avoid this, my

Healthy Family 4

family concentrates on working out little issues as they come and sharing our problems in order to receive help and guidance from other members.

Rebounding from loss and sticking together during hardships are necessary actions families must provide in order to strengthen relationships and comfort those in need. After family deaths and obstacles we have had to endure, my family comes together to support each other. In 1999, my grandfather died on Christmas day. It was devastating to see someone the entire family viewed as a role model pass before our eyes. At the time, my entire family had to build up strength and love in order to comfort my grandmother. My immediate family as well as my extended family came together due to intense heartache. Ironically, in some ways, the death brought us closer together.

As well as being present for the tough times, family support includes being there for birthdays, holidays, personal recognition, and accomplishments (Boelke, 2010). A family is a team. Each member of the family has to make a team effort and support one another. My mom survived skin cancer and still managed to attend every one of my soccer and lacrosse games. She will never know how much I appreciated her support. Family support also includes acceptance of each other and our decisions. My family is extremely accepting of other people and we always go into situations with an open mind. When one family member makes a poor decision, we take the time to learn from it and depending on the action, we can learn from the consequences as well. One technique my family has found extremely effective is holding a meeting once a month or whenever necessary. We talk about our concerns, things that are going well, and things we would like to improve, while also providing guidance. “Family members available for advice positively predicted achieving scholastic honors and awards” (Reinherz, Pg.

Healthy Family 5

5). My parents have been very welcoming and honest with us when we have needed advice and guidance. My brother and I have both received awards for academic achievements as well as athletic achievements. Strong families are essential to positive development, including avoiding problems such as academic failure (Reinherz).

Vacations and experiences can trigger memories that families cherish. This is why it is important for families spend time together so family members can bond with one another. As

stated by Boehlke, healthy families are those that spend time together and support each other through everyday life (2010). My family keeps a budget saved up so we can all spend a vacation together during the summertime. My extended family often joins us on our vacations. Most recently, we all travelled to Santa Barbara and attended our first polo match. It was a very fun and interesting event that all of us will remember spending together. I’m extremely grateful that my family and I have so much in common so we can find joy in similar activities. I am also eternally grateful that my family actually wants to spend time together. Children of neglectful parents are denied structure and nurturance they need in order to feel competent and loved (McAdams, Pg. 27). My entire family is very in tune with sporting events and often bond while participating in sports as well as watching them. Looking back on old photographs of vacations, events, and parties reminds me how much fun I’ve had with my family and the value of our memories together.

I have lived in the same house for my entire 18 years of existence. I would be devastated if my family decided to move out of our house and into another one. Although not large in size, I have grown to love the comfort and memories it provides. An important trait of a healthy family is that the home in which they reside is comfortable, safe, and relaxing (Mccoy, 1996). While I

Healthy Family 6

was stressed during school and extracurricular activities, I would find great comfort within my home surrounded by my family. It was a place where I was not afraid of judgment for something I did or said. If a home is welcoming and adaptable, it shows that parents are concerned about children’s needs and well-being (Boehkle, 2010). When my brother and I were younger, my parents built a play structure in our backyard so that we would enjoy playing at home with our friends and family. We also had a basketball hoop that my brother and I would play on every night before the sunset. For every holiday throughout the year, my mother dresses the home with festive décor. My home is a warm safe place that I always know will be welcome to me at any time.

It’s very rare to find your soul mate while you’re in high school. My parents, however, were the exception to this rarity. They met at a young age and happily married later in life. Although every marriage has its faults, my parents have had a very successful and enduring relationship. Parents play an important role in the emotional, physical, and social development of their children (Boehlke, 2010). In regards to my brother and I, they often try to model the adults that they would want us to be. A dysfunctional family can come from negative role-modeling (McAdams, Pg. 28). Characteristics of a successful marriage mirror the traits of an overall healthy family. They are commitment, honesty, responsibility, flexibility, unselfishness, communication, empathy, admiration, affection, companionship, ability to deal with crises, and spirituality (Cox, 2009). I feel as though my parents successfully exhibit most of these traits. They work well together when disciplining my brother and I and when accomplishing their responsibilities around the house. Through sharing and coordinating authority, parents increase their likelihood of having sufficient time, energy, and influence to provide effective family

Healthy Family 7

leadership and consistent direction and support in their own children’s development (McAdams, 23). Both of my parents work but they always make sure to have relaxing alone time together. One of the characteristics I think my parents could improve on is their communication with one another. They are always capable of settling disputes but at times their arguments can escalade quickly into larger ones.

When I get married and decide to have children of my own, I definitely want to exhibit healthy family traits. I think family is the most important aspect in life and I think a balance of

giving and taking is necessary in order for good relationships with family members. I think my parents have done an excellent job in raising my brother and I. I am proud of things that I have done because of the possibilities they have provided me with. I definitely want to acquire effective communication with my husband as well as with my children, so we can have open relationships with each other. Eating together and family meetings are two activities I will use with my future family in order to promote healthy, honest communication. I will also try to ensure a healthy support system for my children, allowing them to feel comfortable to come to me with problems and issues. I also want to travel and do fun activities to bring my family together. Throughout my children’s lives and throughout the holiday season, I want to decorate and adapt our home so they can feel warm and comfortable. New traditions and activities would be fun to incorporate as well. Most importantly, my husband and I need to model good behavior in front of the children. My parents exhibited the adult that I want to grow up to be and I can only hope that I can do the same for my children. No one knows what the future holds and people come and go throughout my life, but my family always remains.

Healthy Family 8

References

Boehkle, J. (2010). Healthy Families information. <http://www.livestrong.com/article/192755->

healthy-families-information/

Castelloe, M. (2011). Changes in the American Family. *The me in we.* http://www.psychology

today.com/blog/the-me-in-we/201104/changes-in-the-american-family

Cox, F. (2009). *Human intimacy: Marriage, the family and its meaning.*

Belmont, CA. Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Lin, P. (1994) Characteristics of a healthy family and family strengths: A cross-cultural study.

*Document Resume*, 2-22.

McAdams, C. Foster, V. Dysfunctional family structures and aggression in children. *Journals of*

*School Counseling,* V7 1-33.

Mccoy, C. (1996). Reexamining models of healthy families. *Contemporary Family Therapy:*

*An International Journal.* 18, 243-256.

Reinherz, H. Giaconia, R. Paradis, A. Family matters: The importance of family social support,

feeling valued, and family cohesion in promoting positive adolescent development.

*Simmons Longitutional Study,* 1-13.