

We Were the Mulvaney's

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Themes and Concepts.

*We were the Mulvaney*s is hands down one of the absolute best books that I have ever read. The relationships of this family is unlike any other that I have ever seen before. This family is one of loyalty, compassion, closeness, and popularity all until one small event happens that tears the family apart. The first theme that is the main focus of the book in my opinion is the transitions across the family. This family was one of strong connections between one another, and you never would have imagined for anything to tear these connections apart, although time can never tell.

Time did indeed tear this family apart, in a very harsh and cruel way that should be wished upon no family. Some transitions that happen within our families in this life are easy to overcome, and some take a strong backbone of the family to be able to overcome. This situation was one that must have been too strong for the family to overcome, and caused the family to do a complete lifestyle transition. The article from sage journals about parental divorce and family functioning is one that directly aligns with the children in the Mulvaney family. Although the parents in this book do not actually get a divorce, the Michael leaves his wife Corrine.

Relationships.

This article states that children from divorced families are more likely to have academic problems, exhibit problematic externalizing and internalizing behaviors, be less socially responsible and competent, and to have lower self-esteem. This article also says that the parent-child relationships are perceived differently by young adults from divorced and intact families. (Johnson, Thorngren, & Smith, 2001). The second concept that I want to address from

this book that will be explored in this paper is the parental relationships that these four children used to have and have now with their parents.

This relationship was one that also changed completely by the end of the book. Relationships were broken that never looked as if they were going to break. From an article on parent-child relationships and the offspring's positive wellbeing, we learn that parent-child relationships are central to psychological development. Several studies have shown that suboptimal parenting is an important risk factor for psychological disorder in clinical and representative community samples.

Behavioral Control.

Behavioral control can provide a structured and predictable environment for the child and encourages their socially acceptable behavior. Results from this study proved to us that relationships with fathers and mothers which are supportive, affectionate and allow the child appropriate autonomy may promote good psychological functioning across life up to and including the seventh decade. (Stafford, Kuh, Gale, Mishra, & Richards 2015). Parental relationships must be strong with the child while they are adolescents to ensure that the child is growing up in the right direction that the child should go. Without any guidance, the child has no way to prosper like the child should. The parents in the book are very supportive in the beginning, when times are easy.

Although when times seem to get a bit harder, instead of the parents gearing up to help they seem to take a step back and this is when the children began to go in their own directions with no guidance. This family never would have fallen apart if they would have stuck together and been strong through it all, rather than giving up when the times get hard. Another

article that focus on parent relationship with their children showed that parent-child closeness and parental affection are associated with adolescent self-worth above and beyond the effects attributable to genetic relatedness. Findings from this article state that positive parent-child relationships increase adolescent self-worth (McAdams, Rijdsdijk, Narusyte, Ganiban, Reiss, Spotts, . . . Eley 2016).

Overview of Theory Relating to the Mulvaney's

The Functionalist Theory.

A theory that I feel best relates to this book is the Functionalist Theory. This theory is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. In this theory, each aspect of society depends on each other and each contributes to the overall stability and functioning of that society. This theory says that the man of the family should have certain roles (working, chopping wood, fixing things) and the female should also have certain roles. (cooking, cleaning, painting). The point of this theory is to be sure that the children survive to become adults and to ensure that the children are socialized into the values and norms of society.

The Mulvaney's were the prime example of a family that is playing a role in the functionalist theory, at least before the raping event happened. They had successful and well-known parents, an athlete and popular son, most beautiful and kind daughter, and two brilliant sons. Everyone knew this family in the little town they grew up in. This family was always there for one another for emotional needs, love, and security. Even when the athlete walked in the house after drinking too much one night, his younger brother basically carried him up to his room so he wouldn't get in trouble.

Functionalist Type of Family.

This family had great origins to have such a functionalist type family because it has always run in their family. They will be well-known, just as the ones before them were. Considering this was a very traditional family, they were the type who had set roles and chores each day that they must complete before dinner. They must play their role in the family in order to keep the family working like they should. This is similar to how we learn in the Family Systems Theory.

Family Theory Shift.

After Marianne was raped although the whole theory for the family shifted. They no longer played their certain roles in the family or did things for one another to help the other out. They were no longer there for each other for emotional support. Just this small event led to more and more problems within the family. It did not help when no one really tried to come together and fix the family. This is what lead to the downhill spiral from here.

In the book, when Patrick says, "For the same reason Dad blames Marianne. You just have a gut feeling, you don't want to see too much of a person" (Oates, 1997). This was a part in the book that made me realize that this family was no longer functionally together. Michael was now blaming Marianne for what happened, and even told Corinne that he can't even look at her the same, so they wanted to send her off to stay with their aunt for a while. This is a terrible thing for a father to do, and although that I hate so badly that this happened... sending off their daughter to forget about her was not the correct way to fix their problems. We learn from Anderson and Sabatelli, that "Process models of family functioning all emphasize the importance of the family system as a principal mediator of individual development and

adjustment” (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011). We can learn from this how important the individual in development and normative family functioning.

Family Systems Perspective.

From a Family Systems perspective, we learn that this family also became a family with many different subsystems. For example, in the book after the situation with Marianne had happened and the school found out, she got made fun of in front of everyone. The book said, “The ugly scrawls in red magic marker on the lavatory walls, inside the toilet stalls, at Mt. Ephraim High School. Patrick Mulvaney, trembling with rage and humiliation, had tried to rub them off with his bare hand.” (Oates, 1997).

This proves that there was a whole new subsystem that became a part of the Mulvaney family after Marianne had been raped. This was no longer something that they could hide from everyone, and the truth came out just like they never hoped it would. This event caused a new subsystem, and identity of the family that the family never wished to become a part of. The well-known family was now drug into a big hole and seemed to get deeper and deeper the more you read. They felt like their identity had been ruined forever just from this one event.

From an article on developmental trajectories, we learn that “Trajectory classes differed in anxiety, depressive symptoms, and violent behavior at age 20, supporting expectations that adolescents demonstrating elevated levels and atypical trajectories of family conflict in high school would report greater mental health problems as young adults” (Choe & Zimmerman, 2014). This teaches us of how important it is to be sure about how we treat our children in their teen years, because it will have a lasting impact on them even into their adulthood years. Marianne’s parents treated her badly and did not seem to care for her anymore after she had been raped, and this drug on into her adult years with her. She was constantly crying and would

get randomly sad believing that her parents no longer love her. Having strong and reassuring relationships with your children when they are adolescents is one of the most important parts of parenting in my opinion.

First-Order Tasks of Family Identity.

The first-order tasks of this family's identity has also now been shifted after the rape happened. The family no longer had harmony between individuals in the family. There was anger toward one another, such as Marianne and her father. He would never look at her the same after this event had happened. He said it hurt him too bad. The Mulvaney's were a family that was well known and liked by everyone before this event happened. After it happened and everyone knew, it seemed that everything kept escalating downhill from there.

The family was no longer well known in a good way, but rather for their daughter being trashy. This then caused the father to drink and smoke constantly, which always caused fights within the family also. "Contact between parents and children is recognized to be important, yet may be present protective issues; in the kinship care environment, it brings the particular challenges of the complex family relationships" (Kiraly & Humphreys, 2013). This article talks about how difficult it can be at times to have a good relationship with your children, but how important it really is and how important it is to ensure that your children are also coming in contact with positive people in their lives.

Identity Changes.

"Emerging adult women who have significant physical distance from their families, particularly when away at college, may find emotionally distancing themselves from

their parents as an easy coping strategy” (Reed, Lucier-Greer, & Parker, 2016). This article describes what happened to Marianne’s relationship with their parents. After the rape happened, she was no longer close to them anymore. Before she was raped they thought she hung the moon, was gorgeous, smart, and could never do anything wrong. They could not believe they were lucky enough to be her parents. From Allen and Henderson, we learn that “The overall goal of the Mulvaney family is to complete their everyday tasks while still being able to maintain their boundaries, patterns, and overall wholeness” (Allen & Henderson, 2016). The identity changed in almost every character in this book, at one point in time.

Mindset Change.

Now that she has been raped, their mindset of her completely changes. This is why they send her off and she doesn’t live with them anymore. They say they love her and are only hoping to save their family so they feel that this is the right thing to do. Marianne although no longer feels loved. She knows that they do not think as highly of her anymore, and this hurts her. She is constantly sad about it but her parents never say anything to her. They believe pushing her away is the best option after this situation happened.

Strengths and Weakness of the Theory

Strengths.

There are many strengths of the Functionalist Theory including that the Theory illustrates how a social institution can work at two different levels- both fulfilling the needs of the individuals and meeting the needs of the whole society at the same time. Another strength of this Theory is that Functionalists show how each of the parts of society are interrelated, each

contributing to the well-being of society. The Functionalist Theory also provides a very harmonious view of society and the family (Allen & Henderson, 2016).

Weaknesses.

Weaknesses of the Functionalist Theory includes that it is too optimistic. It suggests that family life is always good and happy, when really this may not always be the case. This Theory also tends to ignore the conflict and exploitation stressed by Marxists. Another weakness of the Functionalist Theory is that by stressing the idea that the nuclear family is universal, this approach ignores other types of family and household and seems to assume that they are inadequate, such as lone-parent families and matrifocal families. However, many people still have a desire to live in the kind of nuclear households, and many social policy initiatives are stemmed from conservative politicians (Allen & Henderson, 2016).

Compare and Contrast.

The authors of this text talk about the strengths and weaknesses in the same way that I do about this Theory in relation to the Mulvaney's in that this Theory illustrates how a social institution can work at two different levels, and those are both fulfilling the needs of each individual while also still meeting the needs of society as a whole. I found contrasting how this book talks about the Theory being too optimistic. This was because I did not find the Theory to be too optimistic at all, in the case that I was using it in. For instance, with the Mulvaney's when there was a dysfunction. This was the mess up in the family that caused chaos to happen and caused the family to react in a negative way that can lead to other negative effects.

I thought about this theory in relation to the *We were the Mulvaney's* book, and I did not feel limited by the Functionalist Theory. I felt like the Functionalist Theory was a perfect

guideline for this family and what happened to them. This is why I found ease in using this Theory for this paper, because I felt like this Theory fit well with the book. This is what gave me the use to use the Functionalist Theory. For example, how they were the perfect family and I used this Theory to prove that a social institution can work at two different levels.

These levels fulfilling the needs of each individual and meeting the needs of the whole society at the same time. This is a state when everyone was happy in the Mulvaney house. The father, Michael, worked everyday while Corinne cooked dinner and cleaned the house. They had the traditional family roles. Marianne had inside chores while the brothers had outside chores like cutting logs. A weakness of this Theory is that feminists are critical of this approach because it assumes that gender roles are fixed, ignoring the changes that have taken place. Feminists also argue that the family serves the needs of men and oppresses women (Allen & Henderson, 2016).

Grasping a better Understanding of the Mulvaney's

Family Systems Theory.

The family systems theory and my chosen theory have helped me to better understand the family in the book and my ability to think from an application perspective process in many ways. In relation to the family systems theory relating to the Mulvaney family, I have learned that the family systems theory is to guide families and to give them an understanding practice. The family systems theory states that a family is a complex system with many interconnections and reciprocal relationships between family members. This theory states that family systems are dynamic, needing both stability and change. In the Mulvaney family's case, this bit of change may have been a bit too much for the family to handle.

In the Mulvaney family's case, there was no stability in the family, and there was so much change all at once when the event with Marianne happened. This is what caused so much chaos to happen within the family, which is what we learn will happen when there is no stability. I learned with this theory what exactly happened to this family when they tore apart, and why this happened in the first place. The family had no stability.

Functionalist Theory.

My chosen theory which was the Functionalist Theory helped me to better understand the Mulvaney family in a much better understanding than I had of the family before. The Functionalist Theory tells us that every part of society performs certain functions for the society as a whole, and that all parts of society depend on each other to bring about a stable social order. Dysfunction within the Functionalist Theory happens when there is a failure of some parts of society to perform their functions, and the result is disruption of the network of interdependence among all parts. As these dysfunctions occur, we learn that social disorders will take place in the form of social problems, such as high rates of delinquency, crime, unemployment and poverty.

This Theory helped me to realize why the family ending up reacting to the event with Marianne the way that they did. Since this family was no longer functioning regularly after Marianne had been raped, there kept arising problems within the family. The thought of Marianne being raped was something that was never to be thought of, so the fact that this actually happened terrified the family. It was almost like it was a death in the family, and was something that was never talked about from the moment it happened, and should never be spoken of again. The family had dysfunction in the family after this happened, with the father turning himself crazy.

All he wanted to do was kill the boy that hurt his little girl like this. This feeling then carried over to Marianne's brothers feeling the same way. The brothers wanted to fight this boy that hurt their

sister, and they could not get rest until they did. Since these dysfunctions were happening within the family, this began to cause serious problems to the family members. No one wanted to talk to the family that had a trashy daughter so this caused social problems. Everyone in the school made fun of Marianne and wrote stuff on the walls about her which disrupted Marianne's brother Patrick very badly. Another brother, Mike Jr. was on the team with Zachary, and he couldn't do this any longer.

The two boys were constantly fighting during games, causing the team to do bad. Judd, Marianne's youngest brother has no words for this whole situation and just doesn't know what to say. The father of the family, Michael, ends up going bankrupt and becomes a drunk and smoker. They send Marianne to live with her aunt for a while to hopefully save her parents marriage. Unfortunately, this didn't seem to help their marriage. Michael and Corrine's marriage falls through the cracks, and Michael ends up leaving Corrine. All of these events seemed to fall one on top of the other, all resulting from one dysfunction in the family. The Functionalist Theory was the perfect guideline to learn how and in what order the events in this family happened, and why they happened.

These theories helped me to think from an application perspective process, because I was able to see exactly how these theories say things will happen and what results from then, and then relate that to how things happened with the Mulvaney's and what resulted from their problems. Theories are a great application to apply to a real life problem at any time, and with the right theory it gives you an explanation for why certain events happen when they do. In conclusion, The Functionalist Theory and The Family Systems Theory are great to use when wanting to apply a situation to the application perspective process.

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