

Integrative Case Analysis: Part One

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The van der Trees have been referred to Medicine Hat Family Services by Alberta Health Services Addictions and Mental Health. Mom (Leslie) and Dad (Murphy) followed through on the referral after they noticed a strain in the family dynamic. They hope to receive services for each member of the family as they have noticed that each member is struggling in their own ways.

Background Components of the Family System

Murphy

Murphy is the male adult in the family unit. Born in 1983, he is currently 37 years old. Murphy described himself as “ex-Mennonite,” and has had little contact with his family of origin. Murphy was 21 years old when he had his first child, Kyle. At 24 years of age Murphy fathered his first and only daughter, Betty. When Murphy was 31 years old, he became the father of his second son (third child), Samson (who is referred to by the family as Sammy). When asked about interactions in the family, Murphy described his family as being “traditional.”

Murphy has an interest in higher education, receiving a blue-seal and “all tickets” in welding. Murphy had previously worked in the oil and gas industry until he was laid off from his position 3 years ago. He currently works at a convenience store. Murphy does not currently enjoy his employment arrangements. Murphy discussed “anger” with his current life circumstances.

Murphy disclosed that he currently smokes tobacco, and drinks “4 beers a day” as a coping mechanism to deal with his current life situation. Murphy does not see his drinking as problematic. When asked how long he has been drinking in this fashion, Murphy states “for the past three years.”

Leslie

Leslie is the female adult in the family unit. Born in 1972, she is currently 48 years old. In exploring Leslie's spiritual history, she disclosed that she "was Wicca as a teen," but currently does not hold a religious affiliation. Leslie did not disclose any information on her family of origin. Leslie did, however, disclose a prior marriage of five years that ended from what she described as an "alcoholic ex." Leslie was 32 years old when Kyle was born. At 35 years of age she gave birth to Betty. Samson (Sammy) was born when she was 42. Leslie describes her relationship with the children as "babying Sammy," while also seeing "Kyle as [her] favorite." Leslie stated that she does "not like [Murphy's] current drinking." Leslie discussed experiencing situational depression as a teen, which she attributed to "acne as a teen." Leslie noted that she is "perturbed" with Betty's "hygiene practices."

Leslie is a dental hygienist, and her earnings in this position cover "most of the family expenses." Leslie also makes additional income from selling paintings on the side. When discussing Leslie's interest in art, Leslie disclosed the use of cannabis "twice a week," while painting.

Kyle

Kyle is the oldest sibling within the family unit and is currently 16 years old. Kyle currently identifies himself as both "Goth," and "Metal Head." Kyle feels closest to his mother, Leslie, and estranged from his father, Murphy. Kyle believes he has depression but has not seen any medical practitioners or professionals about his mental health. Kyle believes that his father, Murphy, is the "cause of [his] depression."

Kyle currently receives services from an addictions counselor at his high school. The services received are mandated after a suspension for cannabis use at school. When asked how

Kyle likes the services from the addictions councillor, Kyle says he “hates it.” Kyle expressed that cannabis use is “not a big deal,” as his “mom uses it.”

Kyle was asked what he was currently “interested in?” Kyle discussed interests in video games, particularly “Red Dead Redemption II, Grand Theft Auto V, and Resident Evil 6.” Kyle also expressed interest in getting to “know more about the Mennonites.”

Betty

Betty (family nickname is Bee) is the second oldest sibling of three and is currently 13 years of age. Betty displays ambition in academics and describes herself as an “honour-roll student.” Betty has a keen interest in pursuing higher education, as indicated by posters and banners she disclosed are “hung in [her] room.”

Betty appears to be able to take on multiple responsibilities quite well. Along with her interests in school, Betty believes she does most caregiving activities for the family’s potbelly pig, Bacon. Betty sees taking care of Bacon as an important role in her life, as she would like to pursue education to become a veterinarian. Betty also described a close bond with Sammy (Samson), the youngest of the siblings, saying that she “looks out for him.” When asked what looking out for Sammy looked like, Betty did not elaborate further details.

While Betty takes a great deal of pride in her relationships with family members, she disclosed some embarrassment and self-consciousness around having acne. Betty discussed having a “good, but difficult, relationship with [her] mother” who has made her “more aware of how others may look at the acne.” Betty disclosed that she is seeing a Dr. Lipschitz for some of the “cleaning” she has been doing that led to “skin irritation.”

Betty recently started helping her father (Murphy) work on an old car. Betty hopes she could use the car when she goes to university. She has identified she is learning “lots” and that working on a vehicle is “like learning the anatomy of an animal.”

Samson (Sammy)

Samson was interviewed with his mother (Leslie). Samson is currently 6 years old, and the youngest of the siblings in the family unit. Leslie told the writer that “[Sammy] is developmentally delayed.” The writer did not notice any reaction from Samson to this disclosure. Leslie told the writer that “Sammy has speech delays.” Samson was described as “regularly sleep[ing] with mom and dad.” When the writer asked what Sammy likes to for fun, Leslie responded “he has limited social interaction. He does enjoy building Lego and working on puzzles.” Samson told the writer that “[he] like Bacon.” Leslie smiled when Samson described liking Bacon but did not speak further about Samson and Bacon. Sammy is currently receiving speech therapy at occupational therapy from school. Sammy stated that he enjoys going to see the “nice ladies at the school.”

Bacon (Pet Potbelly Pig)

Bacon, the family pet appears to be well-received by both Betty and Samson. Kyle had not mentioned any interaction or thoughts regarding Bacon. Neither Murphy or Leslie directly discussed Bacon. Leslie’s non-verbals with Sammy’s disclosure of liking Bacon may suggest it is worthwhile to further explore Leslie’s perspective on how Bacon enhances the family, as well as the age and circumstances for the pet’s place in the family’s life.

Family Strengths

Murphy

Even though he has fallen on hard times due to the economy, Murphy has been able to maintain strong family ties with Leslie. They seem to work well together as a team, and even though she is the primary breadwinner of the family Murphy does not resent her, even though his upbringing included the toxic masculinity that men are always the providers for the family.

Murphy is also open to other vocational opportunities such as being a store clerk for a local convenience store. This shows that he is open to other opportunities and he is not stuck as just being a welder. He does wish to be the primary breadwinner of the family but does not resent his wife in any way, in fact he often states how grateful he is of his wife, and this is reciprocated when speaking with Leslie.

Murphy also has self-taught himself through his welding career how to fix minor problems with cars and enjoys working on a 1965 Ford Mustang in the garage that he has dearly named “wench”. He states that he enjoys “tinkering on the old wench” with “Bee”. When Murphy is describing this time with his daughter he smiles, and it is apparent this time is special to the both of them.

Murphy is also able to identify that his anger is an ever-increasing problem. He understands that when he loses his temper it is hard for the members of his family to respect him. He recounts being in a home where the father was always angry, and he does not wish to continue the “cycle of violence” as he describes. This shows some amazing potential in working with Murphy in that he already has a baseline to work on.

Leslie

Leslie is currently the primary breadwinner of the family working as a dental hygienist. This shows that she is willing to break out of the traditional nuclear family role and take on different roles when needed to. She does not flash that she makes more money, she keeps it very

humble as to not upset her husband. When asked how the marriage is, Leslie stated that she is still in love with her husband and she is proud of him for taking a lower paying job to help. She was able to see a positive side to her husband working at a convenience store. Leslie will regularly tell Murphy she is proud of him. This seems to help the family unit stay strong and positive.

Leslie also has an amazing talent of creating beautiful paintings, with no formal training. She claims these were gifts she was given, and she uses them to calm down. Leslie shows an innate sense of self awareness, and she is able to describe when she needs to calm down and practice some self-care.

Leslie also has a habit of letting her family know when she just needs some alone time. She does not feel guilt when she wants to practice self-care. She understands that times are tough but has a strong belief that good things will come for the family if they work together as a team. Leslie displays characteristics of resilience that demonstrate hope (Saleeby, 2013).

Leslie also believes that each member of the family needs to be heard and supported, which is evidenced by her allowing the writer to interview Sammy. Leslie believes that in order for the whole family unit to succeed, each member should have a voice.

Kyle

Kyle has expressed an interest in examining faith, not just the Mennonite faith. He is finding certain answers by using web browsers but has also taken it upon himself to talk to counsellors at school and ask questions about different faiths. This shows that he is resourceful when he has a question and knows there are different routes to get answers.

Kyle excels in videogames, showing great problem-solving skills and having great hand eye coordination. When asked what games he likes to play, he responded that he enjoyed

shooting and action games, but every now and then will try puzzle or maze games that make him think “outside the box” as he put it.

Kyle has stated several times that he can feel when he is getting worked up and that is when he decides to use his mother’s cannabis. This shows that he is aware when he is getting elevated, which can be a great starting point to work on his substance use.

Even though his relationship with his father is strained, Kyle was able to share that he does respect his father, but that he has a stronger relationship with his mother. Kyle was able to recount several times when he needed some advice and he was able to approach his mother without fear of reprisal.

Betty

Betty’s interactions with the family could be examined from a family systems perspective to explore the goodness-of-fit with her environment and reciprocity of relationships between family members (Ward & Bélanger, 2015). A family systems theory in this instance is empowering because it does not seek to blame individuals for a disequilibrium within the family but look for solutions within the family and their resource networks to enhance the family’s functioning. Taking this approach gives the family the power to guide the change process through their own self-determination, adhering to the *respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons*, as well as *service to humanity* through the ability of the family to develop their own goals and capacity building that enhances the functioning of the family (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005; Ward & Bélanger, 2015).

Betty has maintained positive relationships with her father and brother Samson. Betty also has a strong bond with their pet potbelly pig, Bacon. Betty does not negatively describe the relationship with her mother. “Good, but difficult,” leaves room for future exploration around

what aspects of the relationship are open to enhancement. Betty did not discuss the other sibling, Kyle. This leaves room to explore what interactions in the Betty-Kyle subsystem look like, along with influences from other subsystems. The Father-Daughter subsystem appears to transcend gender norms and have a positive influence in her life (evidenced by working on a vehicle together). Betty did not disclose any history of substance use, providing a unique opportunity to examine what coping strategies have been implemented and viewed as successful.

Betty discussed long-term goals in education, her positive connection with her father (by working on a car), and career path of interest. The multiple interests Betty partakes in suggest that she has multiple talents to draw skills from and is self-driven to learn. Betty recognizes a transferability of life skills between mechanics (working on a car), and her goals of being a veterinarian.

Further exploration of multiple interests may highlight skills that could be transferable into other domains of Betty's life. The ability to balance multiple interests may provide an opportunity to highlight Betty's resilience if enforcement of gender norms has influenced events leading to visits with the doctor. These changing circumstances provide opportunity to explore family and personal values, in particular those within the mother-daughter subsystem, with a potential feminist perspective. This process seeks to uphold per the *pursuit of social justice* while not imposing outside values on the family (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005; Miley, O'Melia, & DuBois, 2017; Ward & Bélanger, 2015).

Samson

Even though he is the youngest of the children in the van der Tree home, "Sammy" is still a vital part of the family. Sammy has an amazing talent of completing puzzles with ease, even more difficult puzzles. Sammy has amazing spatial awareness and portrays excellent fine motor

skills when working with Lego. Sammy noticed the Lego set right away that was in the office during the interview, and was able to talk to the writer and build with the building bricks at the same time.

Sammy is currently receiving therapy through his elementary school and is gaining more confidence in using his words. As stated earlier he enjoys spending time with the “nice ladies at the school”. This shows that Sammy is not afraid of meeting new people, and he understands that sometimes he needs help in areas that other people may not.

Sammy is also young enough that he does not understand that there may be tension in the house. When asked about home life, Sammy stated that he still believes his mom and dad are “superheroes”. He stated that he believes they can protect him from anything.

Family Concerns

Murphy

Murphy’s drinking is a concern as he has identified it as a coping mechanism to escape the stresses of no longer being the “bread winner” of the family. In addition to this stress, Murphy is upset that he is not working in his chosen profession. There is a concern of the potential negative impacts Murphy’s drinking and smoking are having on the rest of the family. Murphy seems to be open to examining his current substance use and he states that he is, “willing to do what it takes to make things better.” Murphy’s willingness is certainly noted as a strength. This point was conveyed to Murphy, and he responded well. The likelihood of Murphy’s success increases when focusing on his strengths rather than his deficits (Miley, O’Melia, & DeBois, 2017). The approach to engaging Murphy will remain client centered and empowering. In regard to ethical considerations, the welfare of the children will need to be considered regarding the substance use within the family, as per *the Child, Youth, and Family Enhancement Act*. This matter will be

assessed during the next session as well. In regard to implications of diversity, Murphy will have his connections and history to Mennonite culture explored.

Leslie

Murphy's current substance use pattern is causing Leslie distress, but it is unclear as to what level of distress and how it has impacted their marriage. Leslie's cannabis use is also an area of concern, as she may be using it as a coping mechanism to address the stresses of the family's current financial situation. An ethical consideration to explore would entail understanding if the children have been exposed to Leslie's cannabis use and how Kyle is accessing it. It is unknown at this time as to the level of cannabis use. Leslie had also mentioned that her previous marriage had ended due to struggles with addiction, as her husband had struggled with alcoholism. It would be beneficial to assess how Leslie's previous marriage has impacted her. There may be a potential for a referral to an Al-anon group.

Samson

During the initial meeting with the family, it was disclosed that Samson receives very little social interaction. This matter will require further investigation to determine the source of this isolation. It will be valuable to have Samson's parents sign a release of consent in order to obtain more information from the school's Occupational Therapist that is working with Samson. Collaborating with others in Samson's mezzo sphere should prove to be helpful (Miley, O'Melia, & DeBois, 2017).

Kyle

Kyle is struggling with substance use and was recently suspended as he was caught using cannabis at school. It is unknown the level and severity of his substance use. Kyle would also seem to be precontemplative in regard to his cannabis use. When discussing his father, Kyle

states that Murphy is the cause of his depression. Kyle does not have a formal diagnosis at this time. It is unknown as to the reason why Kyle and Murphy's relationship is strained. Though Kyle's challenges are multifaceted, it is important to view how his "...problems overlap, disguise or exaggerate one another" (Shebib, 2017, p.285).

Betty

From a family systems perspective, Betty appears to have an overall positive connection with many of the subsystems (Father-Daughter, Betty-Sammy, Betty-Bacon, & Mother-Daughter) (Ward & Bélanger, 2015). Betty identified the mother-daughter subsystem as an area that can be enhanced. The Mother-Daughter subsystem may reflect gendered norms of appearance (acne concerns). This can be contrasted with no currently identified concerns between the Mother-Son subsystems of hygiene or appearance. These circumstances may highlight a disjuncture of gender norms in the family (Helgeson, 2017). Examination of gender norms provides opportunity to carry out social justice, by exploring the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs surrounding feminine stereotypes. Betty's concerns can also be examined using an ecological model to assess the multiple spheres of influence on Betty (Cech, 2010).

This approach serves the benefit of recognizing values surrounding gender norms within the family, while providing space for the family to explore values (White, & Denborough, 2011). Looking at other subsystems that share members with the mother-daughter subsystem may provide insights on strains in other systems that influence the current relationship. The mother-father, the parent-pet, and the mother-son(s) subsystems can be further explored.

No current knowledge suggests that drug manufacturing is taking place, or that Betty experiences a "substantial risk of injury" from the current substance (Cannabis and Alcohol) use (Drug-Endangered Children Act, 2018). Furthermore, there is not sufficient information yet to

indicate an “impact on mental or emotional functioning,” or “inappropriate criticism” (Child, Youth And Family Enhancement Act, 2019). It is unknown as to how many times comments have been made, the nature of the comments, and how they have impacted Betty’s self-esteem. Betty also discussed that she is meeting with a doctor that is addressing the “cleaning” that lead to her skin irritation. It is unknown what is meant by the term “cleaning.” This matter will be further explored during the next session.

Conclusion

In the future more information will be gathered to determine what type of assessments or treatment plans will be best used for the family. These will be discussed with the family as a group to begin with and then the treatment plans will be delivered individually with each family member. In addition to individual counselling, opportunities to explore family counselling to enhance interactions within the systems can be further explored.

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