EDPB 503 – Gail Krivel-Zacks

Applying Developmental Concepts in a Case Study

Michael Jackson – Part 1

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November 2, 2012
Summary of Michael Jackson

- born in Gary, Indiana on August 29, 1958 to father Joseph Jackson (worked as a crane operator) and mother Katherine Jackson (a member of Jehovah's Witness)
- was the 7th of nine children
- was performing on stage by the age of six with his brothers, the Jackson Five. The group’s first four singles were hits and reached number on the billboard charts.
- father Joseph Jackson was firm and used physical punishment (spanking) to make his children perform well, father had a temperamental attitude
- hugely successful as a teenager, both musically with Motown and acting with Quincy Jones, causing a media whirlwind and was always in the public eye
- received little education as a child, attended public school in Hollywood in the 1960's
- launched a solo career at the age of thirteen
- believed he was ridiculed for his acne and large nose as a teenager
- stayed in the family home until his 20's
- was exposed to his father’s and his brothers’ sexual exploits that took place after concerts and was forced to keep his father’s infidelity a secret from his mother
- his three sisters filed separate sex abuse charges on their father
- released the album *Thriller* at the age of twenty four (1982)
- filmed a Pepsi commercial in 1984 and burnt his scalp in a set fire
- built his own Neverland Ranch, complete with amusement rides and zoo animals
- known to be philanthropic and very charitable, “Heal the World Foundation”
- Michael Jackson spoke about his lonely childhood and his desire to help children around the world since he had never experienced a childhood and he wanted to help other children enjoy their own
- many illnesses (migranes) and cancellations of performances
- attended drug rehab, addicted to pain killers
- many plastic surgeries, skin color transformation
- diagnosed with vitiligo and lupus
- personality was shy, quiet, paranoid
- complex court cases of child sex abuse and child molestation (1993 and 2004), never found guilty, evidence of family pay-offs
- as an adult, often “baby-talked” or spoke in a whispy voice
married Lisa Marie Presley in 1994
married Debbie Row in 1996, mothered a daughter Paris Michael and a son Prince Michael, then divorced in 1999
later, a son Prince Michael II was born from a surrogate mother
many Jackson family feuds, lies and betrayals as adults
spent money far beyond his means and was in debt
tried to re-invent his image and career
died June 25, 2009 of cardiac arrest at the age of 50

Applying Developmental Concepts to Michael Jackson’s Childhood

Risk Factors as a Child

Some risk factors for Jackson include: little positive mother-child interaction as he often toured with his father and brothers and mother stayed with sisters at home; physical or hostile discipline at the hands of his father to perform; overcrowding or a large family; negative, stressful life events in the public eye.

Jackson did not have positive foundations of child development because he did not have a 'normal' childhood going to school and playing with other children, he was always performing. The song “Childhood” written in 1994 is Michael’s yearning to experience a childhood.
Children's Nature vs. Nurture – Chapter 1

- Jackson was raised in a shared environment (SE) with his siblings, being raised similarly by their father to practice hard and perform for the Jackson Five. As a child, Michael was not allowed to embark on his full potential because his father refused to allow any of the kids to outshine one another. A bitterness grew within Michael Jackson and his siblings because they were kept within the confines of Joseph Jackson’s expectations and standards.

- The nonshared environment (NSE) that Jackson was raised in attributed to him becoming a favourite of the Jackson Five and more successful than the rest of his siblings. Jackson also never had much of a chance to relate to children his own age (peers) during childhood and his teenage years because he was always touring and was world famous.

Physical Development and Health as a Child – Chapter 2

- Jackson would have had a very different pattern of brain development early in life (till age 10) because he was very famous, was exposed to stress, travelled a lot and did not have a solid, routine home life.

- His strong development of the prefrontal cortex and motor development would have contributed to his natural singing and dancing talents. His brain would have developed a greater density in the areas of his brain related to his experience with those skills. By the age of six he was performing very well on stage, and had gross motor skills beyond his age. McGraw’s experiment on exercising children would conclude that you can speed children’s motor development with exercise, but only to a limited extent.

- Jackson was born genetically into a African American working-class family. African American infants are smaller at birth than other ethnicities and are less likely to be breastfed, although there is no evidence to suggest that Jackson was not breastfed. Studies show that as infants, African Americans grow more quickly during the first few years of life and are more advanced in skeletal development.

- It is possible (no evidence) that Jackson began using prescription medication in his childhood to deal with stress and physical pain, since it is known that he was a heavy drug user as an adult. His father was known to drink, but not to excess.

Learning and Cognition as a Child – Chapter 3

- Jackson would have received punishment as a form of operant conditioning when his father
would deliver spankings or verbally abuse Michael if he did not perform to the standards that his father expected.

Jackson likely had cognitive development that was more along the lines of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (learning from father and brothers) rather than Piaget’s theory of constructivism and assimilation. Jackson developed into the intellectual life of those around him, using cultural tools and scaffolding.

Talent and Achievement as a Child – Chapter 5

Jackson used deliberate practice: activities specifically designed to increase competence. A lot of people at the Motown studio recall Joseph forcing his kids to practice relentlessly. Hence, why the Jacksons were talented at both singing and dancing. Michael Jackson was known to spend more time practicing than his brothers.

As a child, Joseph controlled and trained the boys to dedicate all their time to practicing/rehearsing, Michael and his brothers did not have a lot of time for other activities.

Attachment and Personality as a Child – Chapter 6

Parent-Attachment is the foundation of children's personality and emotional well-being. Michael’s relationship with his father was very tumultuous and abusive and he couldn’t establish a healthy parent-attachment with Joseph. His mother created a better parent-attachment, but she was not in Michael’s life that often, when he was a child. Most children are attached to more than one person, but they are highly selective. Michael was closer to his mother because she was more “loving” than Joseph.

Attachment serves two important functions: 1. It provides a safe haven and 2. Provides a secure base for exploring the world. Michael’s mother was unable to create a healthy parent-child attachment because she was at home raising her daughters, while Joseph and the boys toured.

During Jackson's middle childhood (6 to 12 years) "The attachment figure's availability - physical presence, willingness to talk, and awareness of the child's needs - remains very important.”Michael had a healthier relationship with her mother. However, he was constantly on the road, as a young child, and his mother was not around that often.

Attachment typically stays the same as the way it was when we were toddlers. About 75 percent of toddlers will stay secure, or insecure, throughout childhood. Michael never had the opportunity to develop stable attachment because of the abuse he received from his father. As an adult, Michael Jackson never forgot the abuse he suffered as a child, and he attempted to
mend his pain by helping children around the world experience a “proper loving” childhood (Neverland visits, presents, gifts, etc.)

Disorganized Children usually have the least sensitive parent(s). "Parents frighten children through fearful facial expressions, trancelike behavior, approaching the child in an aggressive way, and handling the child like a bag of groceries. They also frighten children through abuse." Joseph Jackson (father) was firm and used physical punishment (spanking) to make his children perform well, father had a tempermental attitude. Michael Jackson was known to be shy, quiet, paranoid, which are typical characteristics of children that have been abused.

The child's need for nurturing and protection is constant, whereas incidents of abuse are typically brief, so the child turns to the parent for safety but is frightened by the parent. This terrible paradox results in the bizarre behavior characteristic of disorganized attachment. Michael was subjected to this horrible paradoxical cycle when he was growing up. He was constantly touring as a child, and his dad was the only parent present. Rather than creating a healthy relationship with Michael, Joseph inflicted emotional and physical abuse. Thus, contributing to the development of Michael’s disorganized-like behavior.

Self-Control and Discipline as a Child—Chapter 7

Parental monitoring is a large factor in development of child’s self-control. “Parents with their own risk factors [are] less likely to monitor their children.” Low parental monitoring is linked to low self-control, aggression, etc. Michael Jackson’s father did not appear to have high levels of self-control, as he was reported to have had numerous sexual affairs while away from his wife. Michael’s father did not appear to be sensitive to the negative actions he was exposing his son to.

There are two types of discipline that affected the Jackson family. Love withdrawal: “adult expresses anger and disapproval toward a child by withdrawing love and affection.” Michael’s father appeared to be emotionally abusive, and would ignore and state his dislike for Michael until Michael did what his father wanted during rehearsals. Power assertion: physical punishments or threats of physical punishment. Michael’s father was physically abusive toward his family members. The costs of power assertion include less compliance by child in the long term, values are not internalized by child, child resents the disciplinarian, and children learn aggression themselves.
It is difficult to determine how Michael Jackson’s social life as a child was. He did attend public school as a child, albeit sporadically; and it does not appear that he was exposed to many children other than his own siblings. Many authors and columnists have predicted that this is the reason why Michael Jackson acted so child-like as an adult: because he was never really ‘allowed’ to be a child himself as a result of his demanding career as an entertainer.

Risk Factors as a Teenager

Some risk factors for Jackson include: parent has multiple sexual partners because he used to witness his father and older brothers philandering while on tour sharing hotel rooms; physical or hostile discipline at the hands of his father to perform; overcrowding or a large family; negative, stressful life events in the public eye.

Physical Development and Health as a Teenager – Chapter 2

Jackson’s adolescent brain development would have had a chemical shift in levels of dopamine like other teenagers, but his experience and perception of what was ‘normal’ from his youth would lead to depression and/or mental illnesses.

Further brain development of the prefrontal cortex would have contributed to his singing and
dancing talents. However, his intense training would have been stressful and disrupted peer relationships.

- Jackson likely had an overreactive stress response that led to depression, anxiety or anorexia. This overreactive stress response may have been expressed as behavioral inhibition or a tendency to avoid new people, events, or objects. Although very famous as a teenager, he was quiet and reclusive.

- Jackson went through puberty as all teenagers do, as a gradual process of physical maturation. It is known that African American children have their adolescent growth spurt and puberty earlier than other children, although there is no evidence to suggest that this was the case for Michael Jackson. MJ may have mentally wanted to sustain the adolescence in his life and not become an adult.

- Michael Jackson spoke about being repulsed by sex at a young age. This was likely linked to witnessing his brothers/dad mistreating women.

**Learning and Cognition as a Teenager – Chapter 3**

- Jackson followed the behaviorism trend in cognition during his adolescence with both classical and operant conditioning principles being applied.

**Talent and Achievement as a Teenager – Chapter 5**

- Jackson would use deliberate practice to innovate and perfect new dance moves. Michael’s commitment to practicing singing and dancing stayed with him throughout his life (displayed in the *This Is It* documentary). Michael Jackson spent more time entertaining people, compared to his brothers, because Joseph would force Michael to stay up late in their hotel room and entertain his friends. Some sources claimed that Michael witnessed homosexual activity when he was up late, entertaining his father’s company.

- As a teen, Jackson had disciplined time management, was focused on productive activities, and avoided wasting time hanging out.

- Jackson had an innate ability: giftedness may be the result of high-level motivation. During an interview, Michael’s brothers commented on how Michael would practice for an endless amount of hours. He would stand in front of a mirror to perfect his dance moves and stage presence.
Prosocial behaviours are a natural instinct in infants and toddlers, and tend to decrease with age because of anti-social media models, or by parents telling children to cut it out. Prosocial behaviour is characterized by voluntary actions that benefit others, such as donating to charities, or building a huge, private amusement park for private guests to enjoy. It seems as though Michael Jackson remained more prosocial than other people in his adolescence and into adulthood because he did not have the same social interactions as other children. He was also the centre of worldwide attention at a young age and may not have had the interactions necessary to inhibit those natural instincts to go out of one’s way to help.
Biography Resource


http://www.squidoo.com/MichaelJacksonQuestions

Text Resource