

Running Head: PERSONALITY ANALYSIS

Personality Analysis of Curtis Kularski

April 5, 2009

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ABSTRACT

There are many theories of personality to select between when attempting to explain any particular personality. For exploring the personality characteristics of Curtis Kularski, Erickson's Crisis and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theories were selected. These theories provide simple explanations to the intricacies of the personality being explored, provide a mechanism for predicting future behavior and personality development and explain the limitations of the present state of Mr. Kularski's personality.

Personality Analysis of Curtis Kularski

Who am I? I am Curtis Kularski and I was born in Charlotte, NC in March of 1985. In my life I have developed a wide variety of interests, and have devoted my time to exploring those interests in an attempt to narrow down what my life-long goal is to be. My early life was not much different than my life now, spending a great amount of time exploring personal interests and striving to accomplish anything I found myself capable of. The majority of my childhood was spent between home with my parents and spending time with my favorite aunt. It is the time with my aunt that I believe had the most profound effect on who I am. My aunt was always eager to get out into the world and do things, whereas my parents are both quiet, reserved and do not seek to improve themselves, a trait I would later resent about them. Throughout my childhood, from the time I could walk until I was about 10 years old, I enjoyed watching things grow and for a long time believe that my future would be in horticulture. As years passed my interests moved to things that were more instant gratification, such as computer science, programming and technology in general. I found comfort in that interest so strongly that I was finally able to develop my first real friendships. This led me to apply for a new high school, Highland School of Technology, specializing in information technology, engineering and biotechnology. My friends applied as well. When the final selection of students for the new school was made (by a lottery process), I was not among the students accepted, but all of my friends were. I was forced to begin separating from my friends. I returned to being very individual in everything I did. A few days after my first semester of high school I was invited to transfer to Highland, a decision that left me very conflicted at the time. Much to my surprise I

found it easier to make new friends at Highland than to reconnect to the ones that I had felt compelled to withdraw from. During my senior year of high school I found myself questioning my intended college major several times, from various triggers. The first major trigger was a set of “early college” classes in the field of psychology. My instructor was very aware of the type of students she had and encouraged her classes to not rush to decisions on our futures. The second such event, perhaps the most important to my present life, was the instructor I had the most respect for, a social studies teacher, telling me that everybody changes their major at least once, no matter how certain they are. His statement shocked me, since all of the other instructors assumed I would be destined for computer science. I kept the advice of both in my head as I began my first semester at UNC-Charlotte. I stayed in my intended major through my first semester of college. After completing my first semester, my view of the world changed and I was beginning to explore new interests, such as art, social sciences and astronomy. After several bad semesters in my major at the time, Software and Information Systems, I gave up the façade of being happy in the major and left UNC-Charlotte. I spent several semesters trying to decide where I fit in at two community colleges. This brings me to my present self, I am a psychology major at Fayetteville State University and I spend every available moment of my free time exploring my artistic interests.

The specifics of my future are unknown at this time, but I would like to work towards a graduate degree in Psychology and perhaps become a professional counselor or therapist.

I have selected Erikson’s Crisis theory as the primary theory to explain my personality. Erik Erikson’s theories overlap and extend the psychosexual stages of Freud with a more civilized and less sexually obsessed set of psychosocial phases. The theory provides for eight such stages, ranging from birth until death. In each stage there is a crisis, or a problem that will

either be resolved as passing or failing. The outcome determines certain traits of personality, called virtues by Erikson. A virtue being added to the personality adds strength to the ego. One of the most important aspects about Erikson's theory is that once a crisis has been resolved, it is still possible to later in life experience a trauma to reverse a positive outcome, or to undergo psychological rehabilitation to gain the virtues that were missed by having an unsuccessful conclusion to the crisis. Related to the virtues are pairs of traits, representing the normal socially acceptable form of the virtue, ritualizations, and the eccentric, unhealthy implementation of the trait, ritualisms (Hergenhahn, 2006).

The first stage is basic trust/mistrust. During infancy a child will learn to either trust, or mistrust its parents, primarily the mother. If the child is successful in this stage, determined by more trust than distrust, but never absolute trust, the child will have developed the virtue of hope (Hergenhahn, 2006). As a child I had a lot of abandonment fears, but yet there is no mental evidence of anything in particular being done to cause any form of distrust. I have difficulty trusting people to the present day and will often not allow traveling companions to leave my sight for more than a few seconds. I have hope for the future, so therefore, I must have passed this stage, although with an allowed amount of distrust as provided for by Ericson in his theory.

The second stage presents the child with a problem of choosing autonomy or having doubts about its own actions. In this stage parents have to balance controlling the child's behavior with allowing the child to make their own choices, thus allowing the formation of confidence. Erikson states that in this stage the child should learn how to use his power of choice, but yet also exercise some self-governing behavior. The virtue of will is associated with this stage(Hergenhahn, 2006). I control a great deal of my own destiny, even though I do not always make the best decisions as a result of this. I can determine if I want to do something or

not, usually within a logical and ethical framework. I do not take every wild impulse that comes across, but also do not wait for someone to tell me that I can do something.

The third stage involves a conflict of initiative and guilt. In this stage it is possible for the child to decide to take initiative or to experience guilt at the thought of having initiative. If successful a child will emerge with the virtue of purpose (Hergenhahn, 2006). This stage was somewhat a challenge for me when I first encountered it. I fought with whether I should do something or not. My parents were overprotective of me, as an only child, and I felt as though my lives were completely directed by them. Until an age of about eight I wondered if there would be some “magic” moment in my life where I would be able to take on things myself without guilt. I had taken initiative on many things during that time, but always with a worry of what would happen if I decided to do it. I had a need to know where my boundaries were before I tried to attempt anything. Many of the problems from this stage were worked out when I was spending time with my aunt and she encouraged me to do whatever I wanted to do unless I was told otherwise. This also had an impact on my ability trust. She trusted me with my own tasks, and therefore I trusted her. I feel that I completed this stage successfully, I have purpose.

During the fourth stage the person will be given the opportunity to experience the pleasure of being able to complete work. If unable to do so, the person is likely to be given a sense of inferiority. If successful the virtue of competence is gained. This is one of the few areas where I disagree with Erikson’s range and separation of crisis. I feel that this should be considered part of the initiative/guilt stage. If there is the initiative to do something, then there should also be the industry to complete it. Erickson excessively formalizes the concept of work in this stage. Any child who is in contact with adults for the process of having initiative will likely have the capacity of industry as well. Because of this believe I feel that I passed this stage.

I found many events for feeling a sense of accomplishment and attaining the virtue of competence. There were moments in both stages in which my parents discouraged me from doing things, causing guilt, or told me that something was not right, causing feelings of inferiority, but other positive influences allowed me to become competent and industrious (Hergenhahn, 2006).

Identity vs. role confusion is the crisis characterizing the fifth stage, and the crisis that has been the most challenging for me. The classic identity crisis defines this stage and makes it perhaps the most well known. In this stage the adolescent will either be able to establish an identity separate from its parents or will flounder in confusion. Upon successful completion, a person shall have obtained the virtue of fidelity (Hergenhahn, 2006). Alan S. Waterman proposes an extension to this component of the theory involving the characteristics of soma, ethos and psyche in the development of an identity (Waterman, 2004). I find the addition to be helpful in understanding why this stage was so challenging for me. Biologically (in soma) I know who I am and take on that part of the identity without question. The soma part of identity is the cause of confusion, as I have talents in many areas and in my environment I have many options. The ethos, or cultural context, aspect of my identity grants me many options, and I respect the limitations placed on me by my culture for what is valid for my identity. My difficulties with identity are centered in psyche. I can not embrace a complete set of identity elements. I have over time accepted several with great hesitation, but yet, not enough traits to have a complete picture of who I am or what my future is. It is possible that my late developing artistic traits could be linked with my difficulty in settling into an identity, as creativity is a large part of identity (Dollinger, 2005). I am running behind on this stage, but I do not feel as though I

have failed it yet. I have experimented with many things, and only have left the task of selecting an identity in order to finish off this stage with confidence and certainty.

The sixth stage of development is intimacy vs. isolation. In this stage a psychologically healthy individual should be able to engage in deeply emotional relationships and therefore develop the virtue of love. Unsuccessful attempts at this stage often results in a person withdrawing into themselves and experiencing isolation. Beginning such relationships was difficult for me for a while, due to existing trust issues as well as a somewhat jealous tendency. Moving past those issues, I am now in a committed long term relationship and find a sense of completeness in my life due to this fact. I still seek affiliation in other organizations as well as social groups, but I do not find it damaging to my ego that I have not yet achieved the affiliations I would like to have (Hergenhahn, 2006).

Adulthood is the seventh stage, it involves generativity or stagnation. This stage requires a positive self identity and a desire to pass on positive experiences to a younger generation. Doing so will ensure the virtue of care, and allow one to complete this stage successfully. If not successfully completed, the person reaches stagnation, a state in which a person can no longer grow and may only experience what has been experienced before (Hergenhahn, 2006). I have not reached this stage of development, but my inclination is already towards sharing my knowledge with others and helping anyone when I can. I recognize that my intelligence is a great gift and that I would be selfish to not use it to assist others. This may be part of reason for attempting a psychology degree, so that I may closer interact with people and help them with their own goals.

The final stage is the fight between ego integrity vs. despair. No one likes to admit it, but at some point our ability to be industrious and contribute to society will come to an end. It is

perhaps this stage of life that defines how history views a person. A person who has lived a constructive life and has a sense of accomplishment in their life will be able to finish this stage with ego integrity and a virtue of wisdom. A person who wastes their life will end this stage with despair (Hergenhahn, 2006). I do not know how I will handle this stage, as it is a far away concept for me. I can theorize that because of my present ambitions, I should be able to have ego integrity, or I will be too busy attempting to complete my various goals to notice this stage occurring.

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is the secondary theory that explains my personality. Maslow's theory does not stay with strictly scientific principles. A lot of Maslow's work, especially that involving "peak experiences" was conducted informally (Spencer, 1990). I am drawn to the openness of Maslow's theory.

The hierarchy is simple in its design, encompassing only physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and esteem. At the top of the hierarchy is "self-actualization", a nirvana-like state in which all needs are fulfilled in some way. The hierarchy moves from the most basic biological desires through the most enlightened of desires, such as an artists desire to create. This theory serves to fill the absence of a reason for my delay on having reached an identity, but yet being devoid of a role confusion. My inability to reach an identity is explained as my desire to reach a self-actualized state, at which point I would discover my true identity at the moment I reach an actualized state. Maslow defines self-actualized people as being independent, more worried about general problems than with their own situation, having creativity and a strong sense of reality, but yet can have peak experiences. I do not feel that I have come close to self-actualization yet, even though I have a tendency for the traits of a self-actualized person. I have

great stability in having my needs satisfied through the belongingness needs, but find that I periodically can not maintain my esteem needs (Hergenhahn, 2006).

I find that Erickson's Crisis and Maslow's Hierarchy models are compatible with each other and used together best explain my personality. There are some similarities between the two theories. The most obvious similarity is that it is not possible to reach self-actualization in Maslow's model without first having obtained at least the first seven virtues in Erickson's model. The biggest difference in Maslow's theory is that he allows for peak experiences, whereas Erickson does not acknowledge the potential (Hergenhahn, 2006). Both theorists present a solid case for the need for competence and love in the development of a healthy person.

Erickson attempted to validate his theory by having other researchers to complete a sixty-four space chart to further define the theory, the result was finding the need for further definition of the generativity vs. stagnation stage (Slater, 2003). I agree with the assessment, as I found both the seventh and eighth stages to be poorly defined. On the other hand, I found Maslow's theory to be somewhat unrealistic. Self-actualization being something only a few people experience, but yet being included as a normal part of the hierarchy seems to be counter-productive on the aspect of meeting the esteem needs of those who have not reached self-actualization, thus preventing them from actualization. As stated by Burke and Greene (2007), "The fifth and last level of the pyramid is distinctly different from the previous four." Also, being a fan of science I do not like the less quantitative aspects of Maslow's research that lead to his hierarchy. Erickson's theory has a lot of group-culture aspects, such as affiliation and social interaction to have a complete life. Maslow states a need for privacy and selective associations (Hergenhahn, 2006). Each theory is perhaps overly conservative in its implementation of social

roles, a ritualization perhaps. It seems as though a mix of the two would be the most healthy approach.

In conclusion, I categorize myself as being a very academic person, seeking a self-actualized life under the constraint that I have had difficulty in passing the identity crisis and being able to determine my place in the world. I use academic endeavors as a tool to enable me to resolve the identity crisis and continue on to live an emotionally healthy life in which I am able to complete all future crisis successfully and without doubt. I want to contribute to humanity and have my existence be meaningful.

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