The Metamorphosis Essay, Research Paper

The Metamorphosis is Kafka?s portrayal of the negative mental and physical aspects in his life. It is clear that Kafka?s low self-esteem stemmed from the lack of acceptance from his family, especially his father. The relationship between Kafka and his father can be seen in the relationship between Gregor and Mr. Samsa. This paper will use various texts to show that The Metamorphosis is a story about the impact of his negative father-son relationship on his self worth.

Kafka?s relationship to his father was parallel to that of Gregor and his father. In Kafka?s younger years, his father constantly criticized him, especially about his physical appearance. His father would brag about his awesome strength and would say something derogatory towards Franz because of his frail like body. In Crawford?s biography about Franz Kafka, it is told that by the time he was six, he was convinced that he was a weakling: his own fathers attitude did this. (17) An example of his fathers attitude is portrayed in the Metamorphosis when Gregor turns into a diseased bug. The depiction of turning into a bug is a display of Kafka?s subconscious. It is how he felt about himself based on the treatment he received from his father. The transformation of Gregor symbolizes Kafka?s fathers opinion of him.

For example, the reaction to the transformation by Mr. Samsa is not one of pity, but one of anger. From the first time you meet Gregor?s father, we are shown what a hot temper he has. When Gregor first reveals himself from the bedroom, already having transformed into a bug, pitilessly his father came on, hissing like a wild man. (Kafka 19). Gregors father then chases him back to his room kicking him on his back as he reached the doorway. This situation is very similar to what Franz went through as he was maturing. Kafka was verbally abused by his father because he was seen as a failure. He was supposed to follow in his fathers footsteps and become a businessman. Instead, he wanted to pursue his passion for writing which his father seen as a waste of time. The example above from Metamorphosis shows the similarities between Mr. Samsa and Hermann Kafka. It shows that instead of Gregor?s father showing great concern for him, he chooses to chase after him with a cane and newspaper. This proves his fathers lack of respect for him and his ability for displaying violence.

Another portrayal of violence by Kafka is when Mr. Samsa throws an apple at Gregor and it becomes lodged in his back. It is the apple that symbolizes the beginning of an exile, or suffering. The apple makes Gregor aware that his life has changed and that he no longer holds the status of son; he isn?t of use anymore because he cannot earn money to support his family. His family also realizes this, and his father?s attitude towards his job is that of exile, because he is hit by reality when he has no choice but to become employed. It was at this point when Gregor mentally and physically starts to deteriorate. Not only is he rejected by his father, but his sister, who was his favorite, also begins to resent him. Just like Gregor, Kafka was isolated from his three sisters. Gregor?s mother begins to ignore his existence as well. But it is not just the transformation that the anger stems from, but the stress of financial stability. Just as Hermann did to Franz, Gregor?s entire family depended on him for support. Gregor was expected to get up everyday and go to a job that he hates, just to support his family. He felt used and taken advantage of. But when he transforms, he begins to think about he let his family down because he can no longer work to pay for the debts. These events are exactly the same as what Kafka went through with his family and their financial situation.

Kafka had to take on an additional job to support his family which took away his free time to write. He began to resent his family because of his loss of free time to which he devoted to his passion. This caused him to become severely depressed and even suicidal. In reference to Gregor and the apple (above), I would like to note that as the apple started to rot away, feelings of severe pain began as well as loss of appetite. But really Gregor was hungry, but it wasn?t for food. The only hunger he experiences is that of attention ? some kind of recognition. This touches on the idea of Lacan which is that of desire. Just as Gregor desires acceptance from his father, Kafka desires acceptance of his. The loss of appetite symbolizes Kafka?s loss of self worth and the point of giving up. He gives up on the idea that he will change back and his family will accept him with open and loving arms. Kafka?s low self-esteem stems from the alienation he felt from his father which is shown by the rejection of Gregor?s existence.

As time goes on, Gregor begins to be referred to as an "it" by his sister who was his favorite and whom he learned to depend on. But to his dismay, she began to reject him as well. This verifies Kafka?s feelings of rejection, not just from his father, but from his mother as well. Like Grete, his mother became tolerant of Gregor?s existence, and annoyed at the same time because of him being an inconvenience. This shows that while Gregor can be depended on for everything by his family, he does not get the same treatment in return. After everything he does for them, this is how they treat him. Their lack of respect is shown when they begin to move unwanted furniture items, junk and boxes into Gregor?s bedroom. This shows that his existence is just tolerated, and not wanted. It wouldn?t matter if he was around or not, and he really became a nuisance. This is how Kafka felt in regards to his relationship with his father. He receives no support from him, he may as well not even be around, but just to work and help provide for the family financially. Kafka was looked down upon because he would rather use his time to write, which was a form of expression for him.

Kafka?s father didn?t care about his needs and desires. Instead, just like Gregor, Kafka felt his father had no love for him, but rather high expectations. According to Sokel, one of the contributing factors that went into the Metamorphosis was Kafka?s responsibility to pay off his family?s debts, and the resentment that came with the price. This is the same scenario as with the Samsa?s. Sokel wrote that the dominant element in both cases is bitterness and negative feelings towards the family, and guilty feelings towards it as well. (86-88)

But not only were the negative feelings an impact, but the lack of acceptance and love from the time Kafka was growing up. I think that if Kafka?s parents would have been more supportive and respectful of his writing talents, his self-esteem wouldn?t have been so damaged. From early childhood, Kafka experienced verbal abuse from his father which is the underlying reason behind the story.

According to Howard S. Baker, MD., and Margaret N. Baker, PhD., Heinz Kohut?s theory of Self Psychology states the delighted response of the parents to the child is essential to the child?s development". Baker adds that this response mirrors back to the child, a sense of self-worth and value, creating internal self respect. The article also states that when parents respond with hostility or excessive criticism, it reflects back low worth to the child and can inhibit assertiveness. Margaret Baker states that the mirroring responses of the parent are concerned with maintenance and development of self-esteem and self-assertive ambitions.

I agree with this articles point that the failure of both parental empathy and positive interaction can effect the way a child?s self-esteem develops and that the more you nurture and instill confidence in a child, it helps build the foundation on what he or she will become. Kafka?s writings were clearly that of abuse ? abuse that was suffered right from the early age of 6 initially starting with his father. Hermann Kafka was a hard and cold man, who couldn?t find the good in anything. He grew up in a strict family quite like what he displays in his own home life. It is safe to say that Hermann?s upbringing started a chain reaction of how things were to follow once he had a family of his own. Because of this, Franz suffered for it both emotionally and physically. Constant criticism and bickering with his father made who Franz Kafka was, including what made his self-esteem the way it was.

The inability to take pride in ones self can make you dependent on those around you to make you feel good about yourself. When the failure to find acceptance from those around you fails, the more self-esteem declines. We don?t see the failures of parents in this situation, but the person who was failed from their emotional needs not being met. Low-self esteem has been regarded as the center of depression. Not only does it deal with how you feel about what is inside yourself, but how you feel about your physical appearance as well.

The Baker article points out that physical appearances and the sense of bodily integrity are an important component of the sense of self both in childhood and adult life. Kafkas lack of bodily integrity is symbolized by the transformation into a bug. Gregors character displays Kafka?s inner feelings about how his father perceives him.

Kafka did understand why his mother couldn?t do more to alleviate his miserable relationship with his father. Just like Franz, his mother was a victim of Hermann?s cold manipulation. Although Kafka very much admired his mother, he understood that she could not fix his feelings of isolation because of her position in the family. The feelings of isolation continued to haunt him throughout his entire life. He had to face feelings of severe isolation which forced him to become introverted but put on a façade in order to be accepted. The mental scars left from his father and the inability to relate to his family is what shaped the rest of his life. It was the feelings of inadequacy that made Kafka the creative writer that he was.

In conclusion, the reason behind The Metamorphosis was to show the world what Kafka went through. Gregors relationship with his father had a negative impact on his self-esteem and neither his mother or his sister came to his rescue, much like the desertion Kafka felt by his family. Kafkas attitude towards himself was the driving force of this short story. It shows the importance of parental acceptance and love, and how vital it is vital to ones self-esteem. Childhood years are when a person is most effected by what they are told, and how they are treated. As seen with Kafka?s story, this is not one of acceptance for who you are, but how you are depended on to meet others needs. This is proven by carefully examining the similarities between the relationships of Kafka and his father and Gregor and Mr. Samsa. The Metamorphosis is not a confession, but an indiscretion that leads you to his own personal story.

The first generation of Franz Kafka?s critics has construed The Metamorphosis, like his other enigmatical takes, diversely as a fusion of naturalism and supernaturalism, or of realism and surrealism; or as an allegory, or as a mere psychotic projection. Gregor Samsa?s metamorphosis into a bug serves, if supernatural, to magnify his natural anguish or despair; if surrealistic, to illumine the categories of self, of the absurd, or of nonentity, if allegorical, to figure the reincarnation of Christ, the isolation of the artist, neurotic illness, or alienation at large. If, finally, it expresses literally Kafka?s own view of the world, then its significance is autobiographical rather than artistic. (Binion 7)

588

Baker, Howard S., MD., and Baker, Margaret, N., PhD. "Heinz Kohut?s Self Psychology:

An Overview." American Journal of Psychiatry: January, 1987: 1-5.

Binion, Rudolph. Soundings. Psychohistorical and Psycholiterary. New York:

Psychohistory Press, 1981.

Crawford, Deborah. Franz Kafka, Man Out Of Step. New York: Crown Publishers,

1973.

Kafka, Franz. The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka. New York: A Bantom Book, 1915.

Sokel, Walter. Franz Kafka: Tragik und Ironie. Munich and Vienna: Albert Langden,

Geroge Muller, 1964.