

Case Study of Sister Ruth

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This research paper examines the case study of Sister Ruth, a 75-year-old Roman Catholic Grey Nun female from Buffalo, NY. Her story is about her struggle on her beliefs and manifestation of her ego to make other people near her understand and accept them. Her story concentrates on her academic activities, academic works, volunteer works, decision to retire into Church service, her health issues, family relation issues, and her struggles to prove her points to others as her greatest challenge. Sister Ruth is not a stranger to me. I have known her for at least seven years. I have much of basic information on her life before the formal interview. After the formal interview for this research paper, the information I obtained became as reference check in chronologic collection of unintentional information collection in past interactions vs. her presentation (her story). Sister Ruth is somewhat a public figure with her involvement with many public affairs, but her exact identity will remain anonymous in this research paper. I will be presenting some obvious information in visually apparent conditions about herself, which are not part of interview questions. This comparison presentation portrays very well about Erik Erikson's psychosocial crisis of Integrity vs. Despair descriptions. Her actions in trying to live as a great-challenge proof for her beliefs are compliant with Erik Erikson's **psychosocial crisis of Integrity vs. Despair** (Newman & Newman, 2014).

Her Story

Sister Ruth described her life in her academic pursuit for Bachelor of Arts in Spanish from D'Youville College. She is a Buffalo Native who graduated from Riverside High School at Buffalo, NY. She has very strong personality, as if stubborn, and is intent to make others

understand and accept her points. She seemed to be proud of frightening people in her life by threatening to write about them or include their life stories in her books, other writings, and public discussions. She expressed her dysfunctional relationship with her siblings, cousins, and her other family members. She told me about how she threatened her family members to have stories about them in her writings, or her radio shows. She has serious tensions, disapprovals, and ostracized relationship with her remaining family members. In fact, she described with laughs and smiles that she always made them mentally uneasy during their interactions with her--this includes her parents as well. Because of the tense family relationships, she didn't have much financial support from family for her career.

She complained often about being poor and wishing to have great-paying job throughout the times I knew her and during the interview. She is finally stable in a sense that her living expenses are secure by her disability benefit income, Church income as clergy person, and other government benefit income. Still, she complained about not having much cash although she did not have to worry about paying for her car (insurance and gas costs), rent (Church and government paid for her apt rent), food, medical expenses, clothes, utility bills, and etc. I noticed that Sister Ruth was always trying to sell something to people near her. For example, she would advertise bible study activities through parish bulletin, but she would be selling highly commercialized bible-study exercise books, her written books, candies, and other religious trinkets in those meetings. I tried attending some of the bible-study sessions, thinking that all I would need is a bible to participate, but I was surprised to find the exercise book for sale for \$25 and many other things for sale.

Sister Ruth thought I had no income or I was struggling financially, so she often criticized about my life and gave me advices that I never asked for. I was involved with her

about religious activities because of my genuine interest in knowing more about God the Creator, the Church, and moral values. Sister Ruth expressed great fear that I might become financial burden for her if I was becoming friendly with her. She accused me of being a liar when I told her about my educational backgrounds, and my current full-time job. She expected everyone to be somewhat deceptive and dishonest like her. In fact, Sister Ruth was struggling from her early age with financial instabilities, self-worth in her academic accomplishment with her Bachelor of Arts in Spanish, and other inner conflicts. She had unstable low-paying or non-paying volunteered Spanish teaching positions at some local high schools in her early career. She was on public assistance in her middle-adult age. She expressed these periods of financial instabilities with ambiguities and not willingly. She talked proudly about her short-term position as being a principal of a high school, which she obtained through Church connections after she received her Theology degree from Pennsylvania Grey Nuns organization.

Sister Ruth responded to the reason to become a nun with a very vague paraphrase, “I heard God’s calling.” Incidentally, this was an important question of interest for me personally, not just for the interview. There were other Roman Catholic nuns I had the opportunities to talk with occasionally in addition to Sister Ruth. They all answered the same to the decisions and reasons to become a nun with, “I heard God’s calling.” I tried getting tangible scientific elaborations to the phrase, such as “how did you know God was calling you? Did you hear God or angels’ voices? Did you interpret calling from inexplicable personal events worthy to dub as personal miracles?” Surprisingly, Sister Ruth and all other nuns were very defensive, ambiguous, and unwilling in describing about “God’s calling” in details. Sister Ruth joined Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart, spent some times at the state of

Pennsylvania, and received a theology degree through Church. To become a nun, priest, or a clergy in RC Church is a great commitment and a very serious decision. The rules in the Church require these people not to have sexual relationships, withdrawn from many personal pursuits of wealth and other ambitions, some daily codes of conducts (such as abstinence, prayers, and strict moral rules), and follow certain assignments and orders from hierarchical chains. I believed every clergy person would have some interesting personal miracle to share with others (about their decision to enter clergy life) to listen and inspire everyone else. To keep a civil atmosphere and continue with the interview, the question about why she decided to become a nun must be withdrawn. The answer to this question is present in logical interpretation of her life turning points, situational conditions, and undeniable facts from the other answers.

Sister Ruth attended weekly Sunday masses at a parish in Buffalo NY. She and her friends at her age met at Tim Horton café after mass usually. This unofficial meeting is like a social club. They invited me to hang out with them. I joined them for several occasions. At first, I thought these old people were saintly people who met after mass to talk about God and religious or moral topics. I was surprised to hear the themes they talked. They mostly spread gossips and complained or mildly insulted each other about their financial shortcomings and their lives as general theme. I was surprised to see that these old people were discontent with all the free loads they had and were always thinking of ways to make money through petty lowly commercialization in religious activities. I was also a target for Sister Ruth wild accusations in regards to financial stabilities. Sister Ruth was surprisingly materialistic and paid particular attention to someone wealth, job, income, and things like what type of car someone drives. Sister Ruth openly insulted how my car looked like, and that she feared I

might come and live with her because I would not be able to pay rent for myself. She thought I spent some times with her because I was poor, idle (or under-unemployed), and was looking for an opportunity to make money through her somehow. Incidentally, I have a perfectly functioning car without any blemishes in appearance and it is 100% reliable.

At Tim Horton café, Sister Ruth particularly liked to criticize about parish activities, such as reader's voice, singer's voice, and pronunciations in words, appearance, and other random people whom she never tried to talk to directly. Sister Ruth likes to write and she has written some books. I was surprised to find out she didn't know how to type with computer or use Microsoft Word program. She would like me to teach her, but she could not make up her mind exactly when she wanted to learn in over two years. Many other themes of her talks went this way--consisting of many loose nonsensical talks. She and her friends approached people with many ideas, but followed up with none or very little of them. Lastly, the major theme in their talks at Tim Horton were shockingly about short stories that involved decadent sexual behaviors, which they thought were jokes. There were many sex joke stories I heard, which I could not remember all. One joke in particular Sister Ruth told was about a nun who got inside a taxi cap and got into sexual intercourse with the driver; another story her friend told was about a woman who gave birth to a baby whose father was a mailman. Sister Ruth also remarked one time a surprise phrase when a young man greeted to shake her hand after mass. She asked him to give her a hug and quickly said "my boyfriend!" They all seem to approve each other's dark whims about sex jokes, but they had very little self-reflection about themselves. Sister Ruth is short and extremely over-weight person who relies on a support from a walker, four-legged device to hold with both hands, to move about. Sister Ruth was not born over-weight and unhealthy. She was perfectly healthy in the past and in fact was

athletic in her younger days--I heard from other people. She could not walk up stairs with her walker, so she demanded the parish to spend money for her case and make an elevator just for her. The priest at the parish complained to me one time about this when I told him about how some people I met through parish were not talking about God and religion in their conversations.

As for highlights in our interviews, Sister Ruth was more interested in telling or teaching her moral codes for people to be aware of, such as her views in pro-life stance, evaluating someone life and make suggestions abruptly with wrong information, and getting public services or our immediate social surroundings to work for our ego. She did not want to talk about personal self-reflections and wisdom through her personal experiences. She liked to remove herself from getting involved as much as possible in all her talks, advices, and suggestions. Her hands shook very visibly at some moments and she seemed to be having some deep inner conflicts whenever conversations implied self-reflections.

Psychosocial crisis: Integrity vs. Despair

The psychosocial crisis of later adulthood is integrity versus despair (Newman & Newman, 2014). Integrity is defined as the “ability to accept the facts of one’s life” which leads to facing death without fear (Newman & Newman, 2014). In order to acquire integrity, one not only integrates the past events of their life, but also accepts any mistakes while realizing their purpose (Newman & Newman, 2014). Integrity in Sister Ruth case was visible through her strong stance in her psychologically arrived conclusions in her thoughts. She was not an analytical person who would check the data integrity or ingredients in right or wrong about how the conclusions were arrived in her thoughts. She would spend all her times, energies, and available resources at her reach to prove her points. As an observer, I can see

her life is not a happy model life, but she is very appreciative of her existence (integrity). She became an icon fighter for pro-life topics in political campaigns.

The negative aspect of later adulthood's psychosocial theory is despair. Despair is defined as a feeling of loss of hope and confidence in one's life (Newman & Newman, 2014). Although Sister Ruth appeared over-weight and unhealthy, she did not show any remorse in her actions or words. She might realize many of her words and actions were not right, but she did not ever apologize. Her way of expressing admission in her errors was to ignore them and move on. She expected everyone to ignore her health issues, many of her aggressively spoken words, and still be friends later without remembering them. The despair because of these double standards are observable only thorough her poor health, hand shaking and display of deep mental conflicts in her appearance at some moments during conversations.

Central Process: Introspection

The central process of later adulthood is introspection (Newman & Newman, 2014). Introspection is defined as the deliberate self-evaluation and looking at their own thoughts and emotions (Newman & Newman, 2014). This could include reminiscing back on one's life and recalling meaningful experiences. I think Sister Ruth is very frightened about reminiscence about herself and her life. She has devised a psychological state to blot out many of the reminiscent mental functions that would require her to change. Her close friend her age often ridiculed and yelled at her at the times she asked me to teach her how to use a computer and MS Word program to type. She immediately added, "You got to make decisions quickly" relating to this incident, as if I was the cause of the delays. Her friend was talking about a couch she has been planning to move for years in her apartment.

Prime Adaptive Ego Quality: Wisdom

The prime adaptive ego quality of later adulthood is wisdom (Newman & Newman, 2014). While wisdom can be difficult to put into words, it is an integration of knowledge and experiences that can be expressed and passed down to other generations (Newman & Newman, 2014). Sister Ruth found ways to redeem her bankrupt life through becoming a clergy in Church and found ways to present arguments to provide for her needs, such as requiring a parish to build a special elevator for her. As her words of wisdom, she advised me to “let people make their own mistakes.” She tried as much as she could to influence other people with her writings, books, radio shows, political campaigns, and public services. Her wisdom motto is “keep nudging other people to listen to you.”

Core Pathology: Disdain

The core pathology of later adulthood is disdain, or the feeling of weakness or frailty of oneself or others (Newman & Newman, 2014). This can also describe when one feels their own opinion is superior to others or contrary belief (Newman & Newman, 2014). Sister Ruth showed many discontents and demands from people around her. She avoided conversations or dialogues. She was always interested in expressing her beliefs and thoughts as long as the other party would not talk back. She expressed no regrets.

Developmental Task: Redirecting Energy to New Roles and Activities

A developmental task that was apparent during the interview was redirecting energy to new roles and activities. According to Newman & Newman (2014) redirecting energy to new roles can include “role transitions, role gain, and role loss” (p.540). Sister Ruth found changes to be very challenging. She was a person who kept her social connections as her tools to sustain her slowly evolving life. She found ways in surviving without having to adapt or learn

rigorously in skills, education, and knowledge. Nevertheless, she was not content. Retiring into Church clergy life sustained her, but she might have other personal ambitions that conflict with her new roles.

My Analysis

Sister Ruth enjoyed talking and interview as long as the other party would not talk back, teach her something new, or she did not have to listen much. The interviews were her ideal way of interaction, for she would be talking and others would be listening in interviews. In many ways, Sister Ruth is a very stubborn bully although she is not very capable physically. She had learned very effective methods in exercising her poorly derived conclusions about her understanding of anything, but she has been actively involved in defending herself and her beliefs all her life. Her life would have been more graceful if she would check integrity or truthfulness in her beliefs, information, and actions and work through personal improvement goals instead of goals to make impacts on other people and speak out wrong criticisms. Lastly, she should be very concern about her diet, and exercise to lose weight.

Appendix: Question Transcript

Q1: What was your biggest challenge or challenges?

- Health issues
- Travelling
- Getting along with my family
- Making other people understand issues
- To answer to God's calling and become a nun

Q2: How did you cope or resolve your challenges?

- I write
- I volunteer on radio shows
- I keep myself active and involved with public affairs and topics

Q3: What wisdom can you share with me about what you went through?

- Keep nudging people to listen to you
- Love Jesus
- Life is short; make decisions quickly; let people make their own mistakes.

Q4: Do you have any new roles or transitions in your life? Like retirement?

- I wrote a book, am volunteering on Church related activities, a pro-life activist, and retired to Church.

Reference

Newman, & Newman. (2014). Later Adulthood (60 to 75 Years). In *Development Through Life A Psychosocial Approach* (12th ed.). Stanford: Cengage Learning.