

Schema Paper

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Kristina Kuzmic's book *Hold on But Don't Hold Still* illustrates a woman's rollercoaster journey through motherhood and career. Kuzmic shares numerous anecdotes about her love life, career, motherhood, and mental health to paint the picture that it is okay not to have everything together. Through the works of Leahy and schema theories, Kuzmic's text can portray a client presenting with the schemas of guilt, shame, empathy, perseverance, and competence.

Leahy defines schemas as "patterns of information processing that bias attention, memory, value, or interpretation of stimuli" (Leahy, 2017). Through Beck's theory, Beck states, "Schemas that are theorized to have a causal role in the development of mental disorders such as depression and anxiety develop through a complex biasing process involving the interaction of genetic factors, selective allocation of attentional resources, and storage in memory with adverse environmental life events" (Beck, 2014). For example, Kristina experienced anxiety and depression surrounding her divorce and single motherhood.

Leahy states, "some patients confuse schemas with reality, believing that their habitual patterns of viewing things are not personal constructions but simply "the facts." (Leahy, 2017). In the book, Kristina attends free therapy sessions where she describes how she is a terrible mother and is met with the reaction that she is an incredible mother. However, she has sacrificed and persevered to achieve her current level of success. Kristina states, "without praise for the small things, there is no motivation to get past the small and try to accomplish the big. Giving our kids a chance to see they have made us proud is powerful; it puts the wind in their sails" (Kuzmic, 2020). However, Kristina does not shy away from pouring into her children and ensuring they grow up being loved and encouraged. Through Young's theory, he puts forth five domains of Early Maladaptive Schemas. In domain one, there lie the maladaptive schemas of abandonment, mistrust/abuse, emotional deprivation, and shame. Domain two contains

incompetence, vulnerability to harm, enmeshment, and failure. Domain three entails entitlement and insufficient self-control. Domain four contains subjugation, self-sacrifice, and approval. Domain five contains negativity, inhibition, unrelenting standards, and punitiveness (Young et al., 2006). As Kristina and Phillip raise their children, they attempt to bring them up in a healthy home that avoids the emergence of these maladaptive schemes. Kristina could have continued calling her daughter shy and shamed her son for his brashness. Instead, she found ways to maneuver around their personalities in a way that let them grow.

Two negative schemas found in Kristina are shame and guilt. After her divorce, Kristina experienced a period of depression and contemplated suicide. She explained that she “wrote lists of pros and cons and contemplated the easiest way to go—physically for me and emotionally for everyone around me” (Kuzmic, 2020). Although Kristina is flourishing now, there were times during and after her divorce when she felt shame. At times she would question her motherhood and internalize the negative comments made by her loved ones when she initiated the divorce. In times of divorce, those around the couple tend to throw in their two cents about what the couple should do or should have done. Kuzmic also stated, “I am a complete failure. Every idea and thought I have is useless. I am useless. I have nothing to offer. I do not know how to do anything” (Kuzmic, 2020). Although Kuzmic mentions that she reconciled with some of the people who turned their backs on her, she acknowledges how their negative comments took a toll on her. Through cognitive behavioral therapy techniques, Kuzmic can assess whether or not their comments are based on reality and has been successful in doing so.

Through Young’s schema therapy, he emphasizes that schemas are formed when core human needs are unmet (Young et al., 2006). The five core human needs put forth by this theory are secure attachment, autonomy, freedom of expression, play, and self-control. Through her

motherhood, Kristina tries her best to ensure her children grow up knowing they can make mistakes and solve problems healthily. Leahy states, “The therapist can respond by indicating that the goal is not to change their personalities, but rather to change their schemas' impact on them. However, they will remain basically the same people (Leahy, 2017). Throughout the text, Kuzmic ensures she does not shame her children for being who they are and gently challenges them to open up and relate to the world. For example, Kristina shares an anecdote about comforting Matea after Matea got a bad grade on a math test. “Ask yourself, “What can I learn from this?” Failure can actually be a good thing, but only if we choose to learn something from it” (Kuzmic, 2022). Kuzmic has achieved success after success and has been able to draw from her failures.

Two positive schemas found in Kristina are empathy and competence. If Kristina were my client, I would use several forms from Leahy. With form 10.1 Identifying and Modifying Schemas, Kristina can focus on the problematic experiences of her past, such as losing her television show or her divorce. During that time, Kristina thought that she might not find love again and could not take care of her children adequately. Through form 10.2, we would discuss her negative schemas of guilt and shame and how she would compensate by lying to her coworkers and pretending that everything was okay when she was swimming in sadness. Eventually, she was able to combat the lies she told herself when she declared, “I think I am a lot better at finally shutting down the lies that I believed about what I am capable of or what I deserve in life. So I leave with new motivation and excitement to do what I know I am destined to do and not let anyone else tell me I cannot” (Kuzmic, 2020).

Using Form 10.9 effects of my positive schema, we would focus on Kristina’s positive schemas of empathy and competence. Throughout the text, Kristina showed up for others in her

time of need. For example, in her cooking show *The Ambush Cook* on the OWN network, Kristina wanted to show everyday moms that they could prepare a meal amid the chaos of motherhood. Although she could not have complete creative control and was forced to present as more polished than she was, she could record videos of herself after the show ended, illustrating her semi-edited true self. As a result, she was able to care for others and was rewarded by receiving the support of her followers. She always mentions how she wanted to be for others, what she needed during her lowest point, and has done just that. Phillip supported Kristina in focusing on her dreams and acknowledging that she is more than a mother. That is not to say that motherhood is not essential. However, Kristina had to fill her cup as she worked to fill others. Throughout her focus on cooking, she was able to bless so many people with her tv show, her videos, Wednesday night dinners, serving in the restaurant, and so much more.

Throughout her struggles, Kuzmic had to open up and allow her loved ones to chip in and help. Her friends would babysit, purchase bunk beds for the kids, provide day-old Starbucks pastries and remind her of the wonderful person she is. Kristina mentioned multiple times in the text that she was always seen as “too” much. However, her being “too much” led to her feeding those in need, encouraging strangers to take it easy on themselves, and raising children who will healthily solve problems.

In the text, Kristina states, “Hold on for dear life and do not give up. But do not hold still and be passive; do not go numb to the good happening all around you, even when life is at its messiest” (Kuzmic, 2020). In her text, Kuzmic illustrates how one can face many closed doors and find a slither of opportunity that catapults oneself into success.

References

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