

**Multigenerational Assessment of David and Vera**

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David is a 57 year old male that was born and reared in Jamaica by his paternal grandparents. He spoke openly and assertively without malice of his upbringing without his mother who had immigrated to the United States, and his father who had immigrated to Canada when he was six year old. The ramification of this decision left him feeling emotionally distanced from both parents during his formative years. At the present time, he unabashedly accepts the reality of his relationship with his mother as amicable but *emotionally disconnected*. With regards to his grandparents, he described his relationship with them while he was growing up as “Disciplined but caring.” When asked to expound on this comment he stated that he knew he was loved and cared for and his basic needs were met, but if he misbehaved he would receive a corporal punishment. He thought it was the norm and has no ill will towards his grandparents then or now. He reported that he had not witnessed conflict between his grandparents, but believed it was done in the bedroom. When asked to describe his parents, he said, “She was strong and stubborn, and he was caring and fun *when* I was around him”.

David’s wife Vera is fifty-eight and spoke affirmatively of her upbringing in her family of origin, as a well-adjusted highly functional nuclear family of five. She states, “My childhood was great, I felt loved, taken care of, it was great”. According to Vera, her father was demonstrative and affectionate to her and her two siblings, while her mom was the disciplinarian. She noted that while growing up she had not witnessed any conflict between her parents also as this would have been worked out in their bedroom between them. Notwithstanding, her father would not attend church with her mother, for this her mother was not pleased. When asked how conflict was dealt with among her siblings, she said her parents would encourage them to work it among themselves. Both David and Vera expressed that there was favoritism in their familyof

In assessing David and Vera from a Bowenian perspective, the results demonstrated that this couple is highly differentiated and there are no triangles, cut-off, or enmeshment in the family system. While there was occasional heightened anxiety that revolved around discipline during the childrearing years, only periodic minor anxiety is noted in their current dyad. Both David and Vera immigrated to the United States in 1982, he from Jamaica and her from the US Virgin Island. They subsequently met in their local church and have been married for thirty-three years. They have raised and launched four children, two boys and two girls who are well adjusted and accomplished young adults in their chosen professions. Upon reconnecting with his mother as a young adult, David was differentiated enough to express the neglect and isolation he felt as a child to his mother. His mother's words were, "I came here to make a better life, move on." He chose to maintain a relationship with his mother instead of subscribing to a cut-off.

The only pattern that was extrapolated from his genogram was the multigenerational transmission of corporal punishment. His middle child Seahan was the most challenging, thus the use of corporal punishment to correct behaviors. Vera articulated that this was their main source of anxiety when children were developing as she was opposed to this form of discipline. She expressed however, that she would not oppose David in front of the children, and only stepped in if the discipline seemed excessive. Seahan has adhered to this form of discipline with his children; his brother uses it too to a lesser degree, his sister repudiates this practice.

As empty nesters the only anxiety noted in their subsystem is the occasional disagreement. Vera, whose personality preference is *introversion* tends to get silent/withdraws, while David an *extraversion preference* pursues, thus restoring equilibrium in the system. I inquired if during the period before resolution if she confides in her kids, friends, or anyone. She was emphatic, "Only minor issues are discussed with my kids, we resolve our issues by

ourselves”. Thus, no triangulation exists. When asked how close her children are she stated, “They are very close, but not overly”. Consequently, I did not identify any enmeshment in the sub or family systems.

From a contextual prism, David was determined as a young adult not to live his life with a sense of entitlements or indebtedness. For example, he articulated that he did not meet his father until he was nineteen years old, yet when I asked him to describe his father he was quick to say, “Caring and fun to be around.” He elaborated further that while he was in the presence of his father, his father would say, “This is my son, my *big* son.” However, when he went back home his father couldn't care less about his wellbeing. He also reflected that on Christmas or birthdays while all the other children were playing with toys, “There was not even a whistle for David.” When I asked David if there were any secrets in his family that he was aware of, he disclosed that he found out last year that the man he has been calling “father” was not his biological father. When he asked his mother about this revelation, she denied it, and his comment was, “The DNA lied.” With all these dysfunctional patterns in his family of origin, David has totally exonerated both his parents.

Accordingly, he entered his marriage with a balanced ledger, thus stopping unhealthy family legacy from infringing on it. Hence, his marriage is one of justice, trust and fairness according to their description. For instance, when I asked them about gender roles expectation as a couple, Vera described an egalitarian system. She articulated that they both worked outside the home and shared the household chores equally. In an effort to circumvent a pathological revolving slate, David expressed that he “*made sure*” he spent quality time with his children and took them out on both fun and educational trips/vacations when they were children in lieu of

expensive sneakers. They both ensured that their children grew up with adequate nurturing, affirmation, and love to prevent any destructive entitlement from developing among them.

According to object relational theory, unresolved family of origin pain creates unhealthy projection and reactivity in the current relationship. While I truly agree with this statement, I do not think it is applicable to David and Vera. For one, Vera grew up in a stable, nurturing, loving, and securely attached home where she does not display any symptomatic patterns. Nevertheless, Vera has the tendency to shut herself down when the occasional inevitable conflicts arise. According to her genogram her father was a quiet, reserved type, and she may have inherited that from him. David on the other hand, has experienced some major family origin dysfunctional issues and pain but seemed to have resolved them over the years. For example, when I encouraged David to revisit the conversation with his mother regarding the disconnection he felt between them to unearth and resolve any repressed or intrapsychic wounds (spoken to him in layman's terms), he was quite clear that he had already resolved those issues within himself. Moreover, per David, every time he broaches the subject, his mother's usual reaction would be, "Boy a kill you want to kill me," laughing while he imitated her. By his reaction he seemed to have matured over the defense mechanism of *splitting* (e.g., she loves me, but she is emotionally and geographically unavailable) he felt as a child.

Both David and Vera presented with healthy introjection of themselves and of each other. For example, Vera made a point that if she is out late she is assured that David will have a meal prepared for her upon return, David also shared the same sentiment. As far as unhealthy negative projection, they both asserted that this was not an issue for them as they take ownership of their traits, emotions, and urges. The session ended without any transference deriving from them unto me, or any countertransference emanating from me unto them.

My first impression of the results is that this couple has an unusually low amount of dysfunction and family of origin unresolved patterns or issues. On Vera's side of the family the main issue was her father's reluctance in attending church, which was transmitted down to her two siblings. Plus her shutting down during conflict, which could be her personality or the fact that she did not see her parents resolve conflict in front of her. Second, I was amazed to see a good example of a godly marriage. With all the problems that face today's marriages it was a delight to see a functional one. Third, I wondered without being judgmental, if Vera's profession as a social worker equipped her to give the right answers. My last question in my mind is, did I evaluate David's emotion correctly? Additionally, I concluded that maybe someone with greater clinical expertise could get him to have a talk with his mother.

The most helpful thing to me was the resources I had gotten throughout this course and genogram questions. I was able to look back on my theories, prepare enrich, plus handouts and incorporate them in the session. The most surprising thing to me was my confidence and differentiation level. For example, when Verna told me she was a social worker I did not let that deter my confidence even though she had years of interviewing experience. I was also very surprised about how much I remember and was able to incorporate in the session. I always see myself as a melting pot of theories, concepts, ideologies, history, and psychology etc., and not sure which way to go or what is my platform. Surprisingly I was able to track with the couple, I remembered the MFT jargons, I did use a lot of clutch words. The conversation flowed naturally. I really felt I did well. I say that with humility, because I am my worst critic. I was present, and we joined easily, by talking about the assignment and other --issues I must admit that before we started I was apprehensive to interview David's wife, because I had not spoken to her before.

Growth area – I need to know my questions more, I found myself looking on the paper too much or writing copious notes. Found myself identifying and commenting to David's on his upbringing many I need to practice better time management, we went over by half hour. Over all great experience