

Couple Genogram II: Jonathan & Jasmine

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I had the pleasure of interviewing both Johnathan and Jasmine. I will be examining these patterns below through the framework of Bowenian theory, Contextual theory, and Object Relations.

Johnathan & Jasmine: Bowenian Theory

As Johnathan began describing his family home, it quickly became apparent that the family had high anxiety, and his parents had low differentiation levels. His late mother, Nicole, died when he was sixteen. Johnathan and his mother had a fused relationship. Nicole walked him to school every day, and he even slept by her side till her sudden death. Johnathan described his mother as having an undiagnosed psychological condition and had a life long struggle with amphetamines. Nicole's low self-differentiation resulted in an inability to manage her anxiety resulted in the fusion between her and Johnathan.

The fused relationship between Johnathan and his mother led to triangulation between him, his mother, and his father, Oscar. Oscar and Nicole both struggled with the abuse of amphetamines, and Johnathan says his father continues to struggle with substance abuse and underlying psychological conditions. Johnathan says his distant relationship with his father directly results from his fused relationship with his mother.

Although Johnathan smokes cigarettes, he has no underlying psychological conditions and is not a substance abuser. After Nicole's death, Johnathan and Oscar de-triangulated. Through Johnathan's work with a therapist, he began using I-statements and became highly differentiated. His decreased anxiety allowed him to not repeat his parent's behavior. He was able to not be as reactive to his father. Although Oscar and Johnathan remain distant, Johnathan believes the distance is healthy.

Jasmine describes her relationship with her parents as close. They all immigrated to the United States from Mexico when she was five years old. Jasmine says her parents are very hardworking, and although they struggle with the English language, they have achieved much success. Although Jasmine's relationship with her parents is very close, there doesn't appear to be any signs of fusion. Jasmine says her parent's approval is vital to her, yet she can remain differentiated from them in conflict. Initially, Jasmine's parents did not think Johnathan was the best choice for Jasmine due to his background. However, Jasmine assured her parents that she knew what was best for her.

Jasmine attributes her high level of differentiation to emigrating to the states. Jasmine is the only person in her FOO that speaks English fluently. Her fluency created a different role in her parent's life. As much as she needed them for survival, they needed her. This need for one another generated high levels of closeness and low levels of anxiety. Looking at Jasmine's family, I wonder if there was a triangle between her and her parents. Through further questioning, I was unable to determine if one was present.

Johnathan & Jasmine: Contextual Theory

Through contextual theory, Johnathan partook in split filial loyalty. His loyalty was with his mother at the cost of his loyalty to his father. Johnathan says despite his parent's psychological issues, they were close. However, due to Johnathan being the youngest in the home, Nicole did not trust Oscar to keep Johnathan out of harm's way. Johnathan says his parents both came out of disloyal homes that had no merit. The lack of loyalty in Oscar and Nicoles FOO led them to destructive entitlement. Johnathan never had a relationship with his extended family. His parents felt that not allowing Johnathan or his brothers to know their extended family served as revenge and generated a revolving slate of injustice.

After the death of Nicole, Johnathan began to engage in destructive entitlement. Johnathan began to hold a grudge against his father; he blamed Oscar for his mother's death. Only after partaking in rejunctive moves, such as forgiving his father, was Johnathan able to balance the ledger. He looked at his relationship with his father and began to see where his father had built merit. Despite his father's issues, they never struggled financially, and Johnathan even attended a prestigious private school.

Johnathan and Jasmine work in their marriage to have a balanced ledger as Johnathan does not want to continue the revolving slate of injustice. To break the revolving slate and balance the ledger, Johnathan makes it a point for his son Matthew to have a relationship with his extended family.

Jasmine displays constructive entitlement in her FOO. The loyalties passed down from generation to generation are mostly healthy. There seem to be generations of balanced ledgers. Jasmine attributes this to her family's desire to help one another live a better life than the previous generation. In doing so, there was an equitable asymmetry in the parent-child dynamic passed down from generation to generation.

Jasmine's role as a translator in her parent's life is one area where she felt parentified. She often had to engage in parental duties such as scheduling appointments or helping her parents complete legal documents. However, due to the high merit in the home, this did not affect her negatively. Johnathan says that Jasmine does have a high level of filial loyalty, especially as Luis and Thalia get older. However, Johnathan admires this about Jasmine.

Johnathan & Jasmine: Object Relations

In assessing Johnathan's FOO through Object relations, it is clear that Johnathan viewed his mother as a self-object. There were no boundaries between Johnathan and Nicole.

Johnathan's school time was one of the only times he and his mother were apart. Johnathan needed to split his mother's image to continue to see his mother as loving and safe. He had to distinguish between his loving mother and his mother under the use of amphetamines. In doing so, Johnathan only viewed his mother as loving and kind, which further fostered viewing her as a self-object.

However, Johnathan did not split the image of his father. He viewed his father negatively. Oscar and Nicole would do drugs in private; Johnathan viewed this time apart from his mother as abandonment. He blamed his father for separating them. It was only after Nicole's death that Johnathan had to evolve his view of self. As he began to define his self-representation, he was able to see his parents as whole objects. In this process, he was able to achieve object constancy with his parents.

Jasmine grew up in a home that fostered positive internal objects. Her parents loving and supportive nature helped Jasmine view herself as lovable and worthy of support. She trusted that she was good because her parents were good, and if they were good, others were good.

This view of the world allowed her to bring this into her marriage with Johnathan, improving his positive internal objects. It was essential in her home for everyone to view one another as whole objects. They were able to share their different feelings and concerns without the threat of abandonment. Jasmine was able to mirror healthy behaviors because her parents respected her perspective and loved and supported her true self.

Jasmine was able to foster excellent self-esteem. Her parent's motto of "si se puede" allowed her to have positive idealization. Despite her parent's language barrier, they showed Jasmine that they could achieve their dreams if they put in the effort and worked together. Jasmine's parents offered positive idealization. She was able to believe if her parents could do it,

she could do it. Jasmine hopes that in mirroring her son Matthew's feelings that he too can create healthy internal objects.

Assessment of Experience & Results

Johnathan and Jasmine were very open. I appreciated the lightheartedness in the home. I was surprised about how much they knew about one another. As Johnathan shared about the hardships in his FOO, Jasmine was very affirming and reassuring. It was clear that they came from two very different backgrounds. I wondered if that was in part why they got together. I had many questions, but I made it a point to discuss the facts when talking about my findings.

Johnathan's background was shocking to me. As I didn't know the couple very well, all I knew of Johnathan was his success and reputation for being a wonderful husband and a fantastic mentor. It was apparent that Johnathan was versed in psychology and had done much work never to repeat the cycles or patterns exhibited in his home. It was amazing to hear how he met his father where he was at; in accepting his father, he accepted himself.

I wondered if Jasmine was open with me. She was very proud of her upbringing. Her love for her parents was evident, and it was clear that her home was relatively healthy. However, the limited amount of negativity caused me to question if she was frank about some of the hardships she may have faced. I then had to ask myself if I was cynical when it came to family dynamics. All in all, this was a wonderful experience. I am grateful that they allowed me into their homes and the privilege of knowing them more.