

## MFT609 Couple Genogram Project Paper 1

### Cora and Harold

#### Significant FOO Dynamics in Bowen Terms

The members in Cora's family tended to cling to each other with the exception of her father who was at the top of the hierarchy – even above her mother. The members had low differentiation. They needed each other as a defense mechanism against her father. Her family unit was unstable and full of emotion.

There were triangles formed in the family to foster communication and this was seen in the way that Cora's mother would often go to Cora and her brother to comfort them if they were upset, and then try to talk to their father about something which had occurred. Cora was fused with her mother. Being low differentiated encourages low self-esteem. Cora's brother displayed less clinging to the family, and in fact was able to emotionally cut-off from the family at an early age. He became aware that he did not have a positive say in the family, and was able to move away from them without too much distress. He was the eldest child. It was unfortunate for Cora, because her mother seemed to be less differentiated than she was, and would on occasions seek out Cora for attention. Cora's mother had brought low differentiation into the marriage. At times Cora displayed strength which her mother did not have, and her mother would get upset with Cora whenever she appeared to be unhappy. She needed the strength which Cora had.

Harold's experience in his family was that he was fused with his mother as a young child. He was more exposed to her with his father living in another household. His closeness was shown in his description of loving to cuddle a lot with his mother on the sofa, and being affected by her emotions when she came home from work. Harold's brother was the eldest. He was distant and was the first to emotionally cut-off from the family. His level of differentiation was not as low like that of Harold, and his mother would often accuse him of being unreliable like his father. Whilst Harold had a tendency to cling to his mother, he also wanted to be with his father. Harold's mother triangled him with his father, often relaying messages through him. His brother did not get along very well with his father. This triangulation is perhaps the reason for Harold developing more fondness for his father because he felt that his mother was always against his father.

## Significant FOO Dynamics in Contextual Terms

The interactional patterns in the family of origin of Cora were very constrained. The household was dominated by her father and it appeared that this was something acceptable in terms of her mother, because his actions were not questioned but appeared to be accepted. Her mother at times would try to console Cora and her brother when something happened, but accepted what was done as the right thing to do. The concept of fairness was never mentioned in terms of what was demanded of her and her brother and mother. The scales were unbalanced. The power relation existed in her father. The ledger had to be rewritten for the family, and her father most of all made to see why a different list had to be drawn up itemizing a different way to behave and think, which would more fairly create a healthy balanced interaction and relationship in the home. At that time there was no acknowledgement given to how any member felt, or consideration given to the effect that a particular action had on a family member. Interactions would cover even the way that Cora and her brother were spoken to and the whole aspect of good communication to avoid conflict which was so prevalent in Cora's family. The revolving slate of unfairness and debt from her family of origin had to be dealt with.

Harold had experienced an unsettling pattern in the relationship of his family of origin. His mother had to tolerate the unfair behavior of his father, and the stress and anger it helped to encourage in the life of the family. The family pattern which may have existed in his father's family whereby responsibility was left to females to take care of the home had to be broken. The extent to which his father catered to his responsibilities did not in any way balance with what Harold's mother had to cope with. There was an unfair ledger which helped to bring tension in the home and affected all the members. The relationship of Harold's brother was affected as he did not communicate well with his mother. He felt that she was always picking on him and said that he was unreliable. She had already begun to associate family of origin patterns to her son. Harold thought that she was just stressed.

The persistent unfairness affected the children's emotions and the way in which they interacted with each other. Harold's father showed no loyalty towards his sons and their mother. The revolving slate of carefree and unreliability had to be re-assessed.

## Significant FOO Dynamics in Object Relations Terms

The significant family of origin dynamics in object relations terms for Cora are that she experienced a tremendous amount of mixed signals in terms of care from her father when a child, and this has caused her to engage in splitting from that caregiving in order to survive. Splitting has been used as a mechanism for her even though her father did at times try to redeem himself. He was successful in projecting his anger onto her and the whole family in fact. Her brother who was the eldest, Cora suggested was the favored child because he did less rebelling. She rebelled more against her father's aggression and was the troubled child. Negative images of her father are imbedded in her and these images may be projected in her relationship, thereby influencing negative reactivity towards her partner.

Cora's mother did represent the good object in her family and her mother tried to console her often against the abuse which the family was experiencing from her father. Cora looked to her mother for comfort and considered her the good enough parent of the two. Her mother did her best under the circumstances. Cora wanted demonstrative love from her father but she did not receive it. Her brother internalized influences of the family and began to project her fathers' introject of anger in the home.

The significant family of origin dynamics in Object relations terms for Harold were that he experienced an aggressive atmosphere in the home with both his parents for only a short time as a child. Interaction was between his parents separately. He loved his mother, but was torn between both parents. He experienced anger in the home from his mother who reacted against his father. Harold began to project the introject of anger towards his mother because he felt a warmth for his father who was kind to him. Both of his parents were not all good or all bad. He lived with his mother who cared for him so he considered her as good enough. His brother experienced splitting from his father and his mother.

Harold's brother resented his mother and father. His brother had internalized negative introject projected towards him by his mother of being unreliable like his father. Harold and his brother exhibited negative images of their father which were continually mentioned by their mother. These were introjects of unreliability and anger.

I found these interview sessions very enlightening and believe that they were beneficial to me and the couple. Both partners were extremely helpful and responsive to the questions which were asked and seemed very eager to give responses to what was being asked. At times it appeared that they were eager to be asked about different things which they experienced in their homes, and felt that there was safety in answering the questions which were asked of them.

There was truthfulness in the answers, and I felt privileged in being the recipient of hearing the responses. Both partners wanted to talk. They were not hesitant to offer information. I do think that it was helpful not knowing the couple, and the basis on which their lives were built. This fact perhaps made it easier for them to converse. It was something new which they were talking about to a different person who could put a different perspective on their experience.

There is also the element of the individual not being judgmental. We all have experiences in our lives which are worthy of being talked about. That alone takes away from any temptation to judge another individual and the life they have had to endure. In effect it could turn out that your life experiences have been far worse than theirs, and that you have been able to overcome those stumbling blocks which appeared to be unmovable at the time when they existed.

My interaction with the couple was calm and accommodating. We progressed through the interview well. It seemed as though it was meant to be, and I hoped at times that a little healing – through communication as it progressed – was taking place without anyone even realizing it.

This interview challenged me to be the best that I can be in the journey which I have been privileged to begin with the assistance of my Lord.