

## **Journal Reflections**

### **September 20, 2021: Simone**

In this first therapy session, Simone comes with two goals: 1) to make decisions regarding her marriage and 2) to learn more about herself. She is legally separated from her husband, Jason, over the issue of children. He wants them, she does not. Simone believes her desire not to have children is a result of her complicated relationship with her father. Her mother died of cancer and she did not speak to her father for 18 months afterwards. She is his third child, the first being the daughter with his first wife.

Simone spends this first session emptying herself by focusing on her family of origin dynamics. She alters between idealizing and disparaging her father. She does the same, but to a lesser degree, for her mother and her middle sister. Her describes her father during her childhood as fun-loving, but then absent as she grew older. She describes his work as a coach as admirable among the community but at the same time, he was a cheater and misogynistic. On several occasions, she says he is narcissistic. She admirably describes her sister as accomplished in music and basketball, with a degree from Stanford, who works in finance. But she says she does not share the same values. Her mother sacrificed so much for the family, but died of cancer and did not stand up to her husband, but withheld sex instead.

Simone provides enough information to design a preliminary family of origin genogram. While she came to therapy to make decisions regarding her marriage, she focused on her childhood and young adulthood family dynamics, describing herself as the “glue” and that she is stressed by these dynamics and school.

## **September 27, 2021: Steven and Korla**

In this first therapy session, the married couple, Steven and Korla, are attending for what they describe as communication problems which are severe enough to contemplate ending the marriage. Throughout the Zoom session, they were able to speak freely without being interrupted however, their body language expressed incredulousness, doubt, disagreement, accusations and withdrawal.

Steven was able to describe the personal qualities for which he married Korla although he did not mention love. Korla described marrying Steven for circumstantial reasons, including fear of domestic abuse and financial entanglements, not for love or his personal qualities, although she does admit at times she has enjoyed his company. Steven has a child from a prior relationship and was living with the mother of his child while dating Korla. Fearful Korla would cheat on him, Steven demanded Korla marry him before she left for a business trip, because she has been known to hook up with a man on trips. He thought if she had the respect of being married it would deter her from cheating. She is concerned about the apps on his phone and the number of women he communicates with on them. The couple does not engage in regular sexual relations but in the past, have participated in threesomes.

Korla smokes weed and Steven drinks Hennessy on a daily basis. For Korla, the drinking is a primary reason for her to consider ending the marriage as she does not like his drinking friends and the fights among them when they are drinking which causes her to be fearful. She says he drinks to the point of passing out. She described three situations where she felt unsafe, including one with a drunk driver, among the friend group. Steven admits to drinking but finds it relieves stress after work much the way Korla enjoys weed so doesn't see the problem.

The two are ambivalent throughout the session about whether they desire to continue to be married. Korla appears less committed than Steven although at the conclusion of this first session, she did admit she wants to stay in the marriage.

## **October 4, 2021: Korla and Steven**

Korla reflects on how unsafe she feels. Not with her Steven, but rather her current NYC community environment reminds her of her childhood upbringing in Compton, CA. She feels unsafe from the gangs outside her home, the drinking Steven and his friends engage in and the fact she has no family support system. She wants to feel comfortable. Steven acknowledges shootings and gang activity, a life of which he does not want to be a part of anymore.

Korla grew up in a Christian home and makes an effort to talk to her parents every weekend. Steven loves her parents but describes himself as more of a loner.

Dr. Wells asks a very salient question and says it will impact the treatment goals: "Is divorce in the back of your mind all the time?" Steven answers, "Yes, it is a constant for her (Korla). It is consciously always there."

Steven sees his wife as reassessing their lives at all times and takes into consideration her personal and financial success. Korla says she wants to be free to communicate herself with no repercussions.

Cheating and trust come into play. Korla does not like Steven being so secretive about where he is going.

In this session, it is important to build rapport while gathering information. Dr. Wells is joining with the couple and learning their point of views. Korla grew up in a Christian family and is bisexual, introducing Steven to threesomes. Meanwhile, she is not trustworthy of Steven. He has social apps she doesn't approve of and leaves for unbeknownst reasons. She feels unsafe and Steven feels unappreciated in their marriage. Dr. Wells coaches them on how to be respectful with one another.

The goal is to help this couple navigate the rough waters of their marriage and learn from their past mistakes.

**October 11, 2021: Simone**

Simone is reflective and weepy this week as her birthday was last week. She is feeling ungrounded with her family. She takes upon herself to analyze each family member where they are in their emotional and relational development but rarely focuses on herself. Does she enjoy her own company? She often mentions and is quite proud of the accomplishments of her other family members. She also mentions their misdeeds. This week it is that her brother is coming to Germany where she is to see her but really to spend time hooking up with others, male and female. She spends more time thinking about how her family members are slighting her than on what is going on in her own life. How about herself? Is she proud of herself? She feels she is the glue and she is the one reaching out to her family, whether her father or her brother. She rarely talks about her husband, Jason. Is this a relationship she wishes to continue? She says she wants connection. From a Bowenian perspective, she needs to develop self-differentiation before she can create meaningful one-to-one relationships.

As a clinician, I see a young woman with immense potential and beauty (both inside and out). Simone has all she needs right inside her but is squandering it on others who cannot mutually meet her where she is. They un-differentiated and selfish. They cannot appreciate her. What else in her life can she focus on so she can become more of herself? Her relationship with God? What are her interests and hobbies outside of thinking and gluing herself to everyone else in her family?

## **October 18, 2021: Korla and Steven**

Dr. Wells coaches the couple as individuals to express what they wanted in a marriage before getting married. What were their hopes and dreams? What did they imagine in a spouse? This is a strategic technique to have the couple to look at their circumstances and problems from a new perspective. Interestingly, they both found what they seemingly wanted in the other. All the boxes are checked.

Just as Korla jumped into the marriage, she has a strong desire to “up and leave” the marriage. She reacts emotionally to Steven. Steven feels threatened by his wife who is reactionary and acquisitory. He will just get up and leave Korla. She wonders if he is cheating on her. There is mistrust on both sides.

The goal is for the couple to process the questions Dr. Wells is presenting and to become more self-differentiated. What other interests do each of them have? What personal goals do they have? Also, how can they change the narrative around their marriage? It was begun under unaspicious circumstances. Can they reimagine and then recreate a new narrative? These are the questions I would want to ask, coach and encourage them to consider going forward. I see a husband who is a romantic and wants to grow old with his wife. I see a wife who wants to be loved and jumps in but somewhere along her lifeline cannot trust the one she is with. What does her geogram say about her family dynamics. Can Korla and Steven relearn a new way of envisioning their life together?