

The Case of Jasmine

“Jasmine is extremely dependent on you for advice in making even minor decisions. It is clear that she does not trust herself and often tries to figure out what you might do in her place. She asks you personal questions about your marriage and your family life. She has elevated you to the position of someone who makes wise choices, and she is trying to emulate you. At other times she tells you that her decisions typically turn out to be poor ones. Consequently, when faced with a decision, she vacillates and becomes filled with self-doubt. Although she says she realizes that you cannot give her the answers, she keeps asking you what you think about her decisions.”

The case of Jasmine presents a client who acts highly dependent on the counselor. Jasmine finds it difficult to make decisions on her own and probes the counselor in order to extract the answers she is seeking. As result of her extreme dependency, she has placed the counselor as a key figure in her life and tries to model herself after the counselor. The main issues arise from Jasmine ceaselessly asking personal questions and seeking out answers rather than trying to discover them for herself. This heavy reliance is hindering Jasmine’s growth and preventing her from developing the self-confidence, personal responsibility, and independence she needs to thrive. By copying someone else, she is unable to become her own person with her own identity and values. This case seems to illustrate a dilemma that is ethical, professional, and moral in nature. I was drawn to this case because Jasmine reflects an earlier version of myself in my young adult years when I was still solidifying my identity. Thus, I empathize with her and also know I will likely encounter similarly minded clients in the future.

Ethically, there are a couple sections of the ACA Code of Ethics to which we can refer when analyzing this case. First, this case seems to conflict with Section A.4.b., “Personal Values”. This is when counselors are aware of and avoid imposing their own values and beliefs onto their clients. They respect the diversity of their clients and aid clients in establishing their own value and belief systems, if that is what they so seek. In this scenario, Jasmine is stirring up opportunities for the counselor to breach this code of ethics by probing about the counselor’s marriage, family life, personal thoughts, and opinions. A counselor that is not self-aware, does not have firm boundaries, has an inflated ego, or seeks approval could easily fall into the trap of imposing themselves onto their clients. Another ethical code that could be broken is C.2.a. “Boundaries of Competence”, which requires counselors to only practice within the boundaries of their competence and areas of expertise, education, and credentials. Jasmine probing the counselor on various topics might cause the counselor to speak as an expert on issues in which they are not competent. Especially as the client has elevated the counselor to a higher status, the client will more easily absorb all the words and advice given by the counselor. Thus, the counselor must be careful with what they choose to address, knowing that the client will likely be significantly impacted.

In this case, the counselor can take a few different courses of action. When first noticing Jasmine’s personal questions, the counselor should have drawn firm boundaries. Since the counselor is aware of the client’s emotional state, it is crucial that she draw these boundaries in order to decrease dependency and potential dual relationship by over sharing. Professional limits must be maintained for both the client and counselor’s sake. Thus, self-disclosure should only be utilized in situations where it is helpful. As Jasmine is unable to act without it, the counselor’s self-disclosure would cause more harm. The counselor should, instead, explore with Jasmine

why she feels the need to hear what the counselor might do. How can Jasmine get to a place of being able to think and act for herself and be confident in her choices? The counselor can also utilize therapeutic approaches, such as CBT, that can help eliminate destructive thought patterns and increase confidence, personal responsibility, and independence. When considering what other approaches to use, the counselor should take multicultural aspects into account, such as age, cultural background, family history, relationship status, socioeconomic status, and spirituality. Each of these factors can help paint a clearer picture as to why Jasmine resorts to dependency and self-doubt. Overall, in all avenues, firm boundaries are necessary in order for the therapeutic relationship to progress. Without them, further damage may be done, and Jasmine's condition will likely not improve.

If Jasmine persists even after multiple attempts to draw a clear line, the counselor should seek supervision and consultation to gain perspective into the situation. Peers or leaders might advise on utilizing a different approach, employing assessments, or referring out if the relationship becomes unhealthy and unmanageable.