

MFT 504.NOS Psychopathology

Fall 2022

Practice Diagnostic Formulation – Case #3

75 points

Presenting Complaint

“We’re here because we argue all the time. I mean, ALL the time! We’ve talked about divorce but we believe that when we made our vows before God and the church, that divorce was not an option.”

History of Presenting Complaint

Jose is a 48 year-old, employed Hispanic male of Ecuadorian descent, married to Sarah, a 38 year-old, employed Asian female of Korean descent. They have been married for 5 years and have one 2 year-old son named Elijah. They complain of increased marital conflict since the birth of their son and past unresolved issues related to anger. When asked about his problems with anger, Jose stated that he has always been an “honest person” and “wears his emotions on his sleeve.” “People know whatever it is I’m feeling, you know?” He reported he and Sarah have very different personalities, that he is extroverted and she is more introverted, that he likes to be around people and she has been more reserved but since the pandemic and the birth of their son, she has become even more so, preferring to stay at home on the weekends rather than going out. Jose reported Sarah has become more critical of him, complaining that he doesn’t do anything around the house, that he treats Elijah too roughly, that he is always going out and not a good model for Elijah in general. He feels that the woman he married has changed and now “worries about everything all the time” and “not any fun.” He resents her “constant” criticism, especially about his parenting as he loves Elijah. Jose admits his resentment has increased over the last two years and he yells and screams at Sarah at times and he never used to be like this. He admitted that he has called her “a loser” and “a terrible mother.”

Sarah reported that during the pandemic, Jose “was so ignorant about Covid,” not caring about the possibility of getting it and passing it along to Elijah when he was an infant, that Jose “just did whatever Jose wanted.” She reported he goes out and spends money, not recognizing how much it costs to raise a child and resents his lack of concern for their son’s future. Sarah has been looking into preschools for Elijah and Jose doesn’t seem to care about this as when she brings it up with him for discussion, they end up arguing, with Jose stating that preschool doesn’t matter, that Elijah is only two years old. She tries to tell him how important it is to start his socialization earlier since he is an only child but feels it falls on deaf ears. Their arguments usually end with Jose telling her to do whatever she wants since his opinion doesn’t matter anyway. She can’t believe that the man she married has changed and become “uncaring about his family.”

Personal History

Jose is the youngest of three children and has an older brother (56) and sister (53). His parents were married for 52 years when his father passed away 6 years ago at the age of 76. Jose’s parents met in Ecuador when his father, who was working in the city at the time, went to visit his parents in the countryside. His mother was the middle daughter of a neighbor of theirs and they were introduced to one another by their parents. Jose reported they hit it off and married

about 1.5 years later. His mother went to the city with his father and all of the kids were born in Ecuador, emigrating to the US when Jose was 9 years old.

Sarah is the older of two girls born to married parents. Her sister is 42, her mother is 67 and her father is 68. Sarah's parents met attending the same church back in South Korea and married two years after meeting. She and her sister were born in South Korea and the family emigrated to the US when Sarah was 4 years old.

Jose attended Cornell University and obtained his B.A. in Organizational Management and has been a manager at a Fortune 500 publishing company for the last 8 years. Sarah attended SUNY Binghamton and obtained her B.S. in Chemistry and works in a quality control lab at Pfizer.

They met at church, serving on the ushering committee and then got to know one another better when they were in the same small group. Jose liked that Sarah laughed at his jokes and they shared a similar understanding about the immigrant experience and the importance of family. He found her very accepting of him and her willingness to try new things, like restaurants and activities, appealed to him. Sarah liked that Jose took initiative and easily engaged her in conversation and made jokes. She admired his ease welcoming newcomers at church and his openness towards her parents.

Mental Health History

Sarah reported having always been introverted and struggled with making friends at school. She was concerned about her academic performance as her parents stressed how important her grades were in order to attend a good college and obtain a good job in America and was often anxious before exams and in classes in general. One place she found comfort at was church, having grown up in a Korean-speaking church that her family attended. She reported leaving her family's church and attending a multicultural one when her relationship with one of the English ministry leaders ended and she became quite self-conscious seeing him at church and wondering what others were saying about her. She also became depressed after their relationship ended and believes this lasted about 2 months.

Currently, Sarah reported feeling some down mood at times as she worries about her relationship with Jose. She admitted having difficulty falling asleep whenever they argue and she has difficulty falling back to sleep if Elijah wakes her but this happens "maybe 1x/2 weeks."

Jose reported he has always been outgoing and was popular at school, making friends easily. He denied having any past mental health symptoms but admits increased irritability and insomnia over the last two years.

Medical History

Sarah reported being of good health for most of her life but had gestational diabetes when she was pregnant with Elijah and has had to watch her blood sugar levels ever since. She reported being a few pounds overweight as she gained about 30 lbs during her pregnancy and has lost 20. Elijah was born vaginally and other than a long labor and gestational diabetes, her pregnancy was without complication.

Jose reported his doctor expressing some concern to him about his increased insomnia and blood pressure at his most recent check up and that he has been going to the gym several times a week to work out and manage his stress, help him fall asleep more easily, and hopefully bring his blood pressure down.

Alcohol and Substance Use

Both Sarah and Jose report they drink alcohol on a social basis. Sarah complains that Jose often drinks when he goes out with friends and that they don't keep alcohol in the home at her request as she does not want Elijah accidentally drinking any. Both denied using any other recreational or illicit drugs.

Family History

Jose reported that his older sister struggled with anxiety "on-and-off" throughout her life and that his mother became somewhat depressed after his father passed away 6 years ago. Sarah reported that her sister struggled with anxiety also as a child, having similar challenges making friends and understanding the language when they first immigrated.

Assessment and Initial Treatment Plan

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For this case:

1. Propose TWO diagnoses and outline the symptoms/reasons that lead you to believe that these disorders you selected are present
First disorder: 15 points – diagnosis is 3 points, outline of symptoms is 12 points
Second disorder: 15 points – diagnosis is 3 points, outline of symptoms is 12 points
 2. Propose ANOTHER possible diagnosis, outlining the symptoms/reasons that lead you to believe that this diagnosis you selected may be present AND propose questions you would want to ask that would allow you to rule in/out the diagnosis, and state why those questions would be helpful to you.
Additional possible disorder: 15 points – diagnosis is 3 points, outline of symptoms is 6 points, additional questions is 6 points
 3. Assuming that your first TWO proposed diagnoses are present:
 - a. Select the one you believe is most problematic AND state why.
 - b. What is your formulation about what is going on in this marriage?
 - c. Suggest an initial treatment plan to address both diagnoses. This would include delineating what treatment strategies you would recommend and why (e.g., I would recommend a medication consult because Mania is best addressed through medication, and I would recommend Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy to address the thoughts of the patient thinking that they did not need medication to address the Mania. In addition, I would start to address the patient's interpersonal dysfunction using CBT by addressing the core schemas that are contributing to the symptoms such as...and by doing so, look for changes in...and so on).
- 30 points – 6 points for a., 8 points for b. and 16 points for c. (8 points for a treatment plan for the first diagnosis, 8 points for a treatment plan for the second diagnosis).
treatment plan for second diagnosis.