

No Title. PY206

Jose and Maria met each other when Maria was working at a hotel gift shop. Jose was eight years older than Maria, but the two hit off and within 6 months were married. Jose felt that Maria possessed hard to find traditional values and was a very beautiful woman. Maria felt Jose was a very attractive man, intelligent, and hard working. I think this assignment came at a very interesting time because this particular couple is actually about to get divorced. In light of this, it provided me the opportunity to figure out perhaps what went wrong.

Although it is easy to say that at this point the couple shows no real love, I tried to assess what type of love there was in the beginning of the relationship. I believe that in the beginning of the relationship there was perhaps passionate love, which would explain its short-lived nature. Passionate love typically occurs early in the relationship and in this relationship, the couple married early. I assume that passionate love was still going on at this point. It seemed that as the passionate love faded, and they were already married, ignorance of each other's faults and incompatibilities became clearer. I would like to say that companionate love then took over, but unfortunately, it did not. Companionate love entails a "thoughtful appreciation of one's partner," and "encompasses a tolerance for another's shortcomings along with a desire to overcome difficulties and conflicts in a relationship" (Crooks 167). Although this couple did endure conflicts, they were usually outside the relationship. Conflicts within the relationship were often ignored or avoided until they reached a very hostile level. Therefore I would best describe the bulk, and certainly the latter part of the marriage as empty love, an absence of intimacy and passion (Crooks 169). The only thing holding the marriage together was what I would guess to be a commitment to staying together. I think this was strongly culturally related. Both Maria and Jose came from cultures where divorce was unacceptable, even under abusive contexts. Maria's mother put up with abuse and infidelity, as did Jose's mother. Therefore I believe both thought that no matter what, divorce was unacceptable, regardless of how poor the relationship was. According to Lee's style of loving, though it is difficult to categorize, I would say that Jose had a possessive as well as romantic style of love. Maria on the other hand had a pragmatic and agape love style. I believe Maria's cultural background influenced these love styles. Maria felt that she had to marry someone who was financially well off, or at least had the ambition to go somewhere in life. In return, it seems as though Maria felt that she would have to become selfless, caring, and compassionate.

Although Jose did not reciprocate this selflessness, it was fine so long as his role as a provider (or head of household) was unwavering. I make a distinction between provider and head of household, because it's interesting to note that Maria worked very hard. Although Jose was seen, or given the title of head of household, Maria worked just as hard if not more. However, surely due to cultural reasons, he was still seen as the head of the household. As for attachment styles, I think it would be safe to say that both had Anxious-Ambivalent styles. According to the textbook, "research indicates that people who form couples commonly have the same style of attachment" (Crooks 178). Sadly the textbook also notes a study of 354 couples where "no pairings comprised people who both had an anxious-ambivalent or an avoidant attachment style," because "such people would be quite incompatible with each other" (Crooks 178). This makes a lot of sense considering the fact that anxious-ambivalent adults worry that partners do not really love them and thus may leave them, and also are characterized by obsessive sexual

attraction and jealousy (Crooks 179). Jealousy was an extremely prevalent issue in the relationship, as was fear of both leaving each other. Furthermore, this attachment style seems to fit well considering the personal characteristics of each. In the textbook it states that Anxious-Ambivalent adults “often have a poor self image,” which they certainly did (Crooks 178). Maria in particular had poor self-image. Another interesting thing the textbook notes about this type of attachment style that rings true for this couple was that, “they try to overcome their ambivalence by making desperate attempts to get close to a partner, often relinquishing much of their independence in the process”(Crooks 178). This was particularly true for Maria and unfortunately was only exacerbated by Jose’s possessive love style. Jose often would isolate Maria from her family and become irrationally jealous at Maria’s attempt to lead a normal social life with her family. Instead of Maria confronting this, Maria simply gave in, and distanced herself from her family as well as any other social life.

Jose and Maria’s relationship satisfaction is extremely poor. It is difficult to even think of anything that contributed to relationship satisfaction. The textbook’s review of research on marital satisfaction reported a few characteristics that lead to successful marriages. Of the five characteristics, Jose and Maria did not fit one. In fact all five characteristics seemed to be the major flaws in their relationship. Both Jose and Maria had parents that did not have happy marriages. Jose and Maria’s parents were still married, but both of their parents suffered from infidelity and as mentioned earlier, Maria’s mother also dealt with physical abuse. It is unclear whether Jose’s mother did as well, but there is strong evidence to suggest she did as well at the very least-emotional abuse. Therefore, clearly neither of the spouse’s parents had happy or necessarily successful marriages. Jose and Maria in no way had similar attitudes, interests, and personality styles. Jose is extremely political, very interested in his country of origin, and is somewhat of an introvert. Maria on the other hand is not interested in politics, doesn’t care much about his country of origin nor her own, and prefers lively social interaction. In fact, before Maria decided to get divorced, she often complained that Jose never wanted to take her out. Maria loves to dance and was hurt when Jose showed no interest in sharing this hobby with her. They hardly ever went on “dates” or spent time with each other outside of work and home. Also, they never went on a vacation together, in the 26 years they have been married. These things combined truly affected their marriage. Furthermore, both Maria and Jose are not satisfied with their sexual sharing. Maria overall is not satisfied with the sex and never feels pleased, whereas Jose is satisfied with the sex but not the frequency. Clearly, Jose does not understand that it is not pleasurable for Maria, which is why she refuses to have sex often. Indeed Maria describes sex with Jose as more of a chore than anything else. There seems to be no sexual communication, which only worsens the situation. Maria and Jose have also had many problems in regard to finances. Their income has been somewhat steady and somewhat adequate, however Jose has always been a poor manager of money. This caused another major area of stress and tension in the relationship. Lastly, Maria was pregnant when she married Jose. I am not certain whether this was a leading cause for their marriage, but according to the couple, they engaged in sexual activity shortly before their wedding. Not being pregnant when the couple married is listed as a characteristic that contributes to successful marriages (Crooks 184). Furthermore the text notes another study that delineates another set of characteristics, which Jose and Maria also don’t match (Crooks 178)! There is no supportive communication, nor is there a willingness to talk about difficult issues and concerns. There is not a strong sense of companionship, and sexual expression is lacking. I feel that one of the major areas for building relationship satisfaction

(although it is clearly too late) would be working on communication. John Gottman described a variety of constructive communication tactics such as leveling and editing, validating, and volatile dialogue (Crooks 206). At the moment their communication seems to entail only the negative communication tactics such as criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling, and definitely belligerence. Interestingly enough, Gottman states that “people in a relationship characterized by these negative, harmful exchanges may eventually decide that they would be better off ending the relationship” (Crooks 208). The textbook notes that Gottman’s research supports this conclusion by demonstrating that such relationships have low long-term survival rates (Crooks 208).

Unfortunately, this marriage has been plagued by difficulties. As mentioned earlier, the couple certainly has dealt with issues of jealousy, as well as infidelity. I think it is important to note that issues of jealousy existed well before either person admitted to infidelity. The textbook notes a study of couples in marital therapy and the differences between those in which infidelity was occurring and those in which it was not. The study found that, “couples in which it was occurring had more marital instability, dishonesty, arguments about trust, self-centeredness, and time spent apart” (Crooks 366). This is a perfect description of the marriage before and after the infidelity occurred. From a class discussion, I remember hearing that infidelity did not always lead to poor relationship satisfaction. That in fact, some couples experienced a rise in relationship satisfaction because the infidelity caused the couple to address problems in the relationship. I feel that the issue of infidelity was never truly discussed. As far as I know, and from what the couple states, it never happened again, but it seems as though the reasons for why it happened were never addressed. Therefore, it seems as though both Maria and Jose simply continued to suffer from jealousy and distrust. This jealousy and distrust, among other factors, also eventually led to physical violence. This is no surprise as it even states in the textbook, “jealously is frequently a factor in precipitating violence in marriages and dating relationships” (Crooks 182). This violence only worsened every other aspect of difficulty they faced, and destroyed further possibilities for increased communication.

As mentioned before this couple severely suffers from poor communication strategies. It is hard to identify positive or constructive communication tactics either person demonstrates. Instead it’s very clear that they are more familiar with the destructive communication tactics, particularly belligerence, which is perhaps the worst. Definitely both Jose and Maria frequently use “you” comments, which immediately leads to both becoming even more defensive. Often what makes this situation worse is that communication is opened with a “you” statement, and quickly escalates after this as both become defensive. In the past their communication style would usually go as followed: “you” statements quickly would turn to name-calling and other forms of contempt until eventually a physical argument would erupt. More recently however, as each have lost interest in each other to the point of the relationship being characterized as nonlove, their communication (or argument style) tends to follow a different pattern. “You” statements are still the opening communication style, however instead of contempt following, usually Maria stonewalls until Jose resorts to either contempt or belligerence. In the time that I have known this couple, this has been their primary communication tactics in regard to conflict. Therefore it’s hard for me to think that there could be any significant change. Considering their communication style is so defensive, it’s hard to imagine how they could move forward from that. If one person had a less defensive communication style, they could perhaps lead the relationship in a more

positive direction. However since both Maria and Jose use these poor communication tactics, and don't seem to want to change, I doubt much can be done. Furthermore there seems to be a generally strong relationship dissatisfaction, which doesn't give them incentive to work at anything. John Guttman's research seems to support this very reality by stating, "long-term relationship survival rates are low for such couples" (Crooks 208). As mentioned earlier, since the couple is in the midst of divorcing (and from asking both) it seems as though there is no desire or motivation to work on any of the issues they faced. Therefore it is difficult to assess what can be done to improve the relationship. In all honesty, though it is sad for me to say this as someone who is close to them, I think they are simply incompatible, and the relationship cannot really be saved. While neither is willing to work on communication styles and other such aspects this will be their reality.

In the chapter entitled, "Sexuality and the Adult Years," I found it particularly interesting that "Women were more likely to report that their husband's problematic behavior led to divorce, whereas men were more likely to say that they did not know what caused the divorce" (Crooks 368). Despite, or perhaps because of, all the extremely dysfunctional communication tactics Jose says that he is unsure of why Maria wants divorce, whereas Maria can clearly outline the causes for their divorce. One might ask, why not make these reasons clear to Jose? But I feel that both lack the communication skills to successfully do this. Maria lacks the ability to calmly describe these reasons, while Jose lacks the calmness and objectivity to hear what Maria is trying to say.

Clearly this relationship is suffering from too many negative aspects to survive and become healthy for both people. Knowing about effective communication styles and other such healthy relationship skills is important, but if two people are incompatible, there is not much that can be done. Therefore I believe it is important to know your partner well, and have realistic expectations, as well as knowing what you want from the relationship.

Cited Sources

- Crooks, Robert, and Karla Baur. *Our Sexuality*, Paperback Version. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2007.