

Relationship Analysis: Jane and Paul

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Child Development 1200-XX: Intimate Relationships in Our Diverse Society

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Septembuaryil XX, 2056

Jane and Paul

Jane and Paul have been together for 17 years and married two years after their first date. Jane is 41 years old and works as a pediatric nurse, while Paul is a 41-year-old engineer who works for an aerospace company. They have a 13-year-old daughter and an 11-year-old son. Jane is Mexican-American and has a different cultural background than Paul, who is Chinese-American. Paul and Jane grew up in the same neighborhood and attended the same schools in Chatsworth, California. However, they did not become close friends until they attended UCLA and took similar classes. While Paul always had a crush on Jane, Jane was in a committed relationship with another man and regarded Paul as her attractive study partner. Paul and Jane lost contact after college graduation but rekindled their friendship three years later when they saw each other at their favorite restaurant by happenstance. The restaurant is now one of their favorite destinations when Paul and Jane have date nights. Paul and Jane were interviewed, and they shared their experiences about love, marriage, raising children, and communication.

Topics

Love and Life Partners

During the two years that Jane and Paul dated, they did not face many relationship challenges. They were friends in college and had always felt comfortable around each other and could confide easily in one another. The only issues they faced related to their different cultural backgrounds. Paul's mother, Mimi, loved Jane, but she wanted her son to marry a Chinese American female. When Paul and Jane announced their engagement, Paul's mother and father refused to attend the engagement dinner. According to Lamanna et al. (2018), parents might disapprove if a child marries outside of their race or cultural background. Paul's parents disapproved of the marriage, creating heartache for Paul, Jane, and Jane's family. Although Jane

was deeply hurt, she treated Paul's parents with love and respect. Paul was worried that Jane would cancel the wedding, but the negative reaction from Paul's family made Jane determined to persevere. Jane's optimistic and loving personality made her more endearing to Paul, and he knew that he had chosen the perfect mate. While Paul's family disapproved, Jane's family was thrilled that Paul and Jane would be married. Paul felt lucky to marry Jane and felt blessed to be welcomed into her family with open arms. The love from Jane's family enabled the couple to look forward to their marriage despite the challenges they faced.

Marriage

While Paul and Jane's honeymoon to Italy was exciting, they faced some challenges in the first year of their marriage. Although their marriage roles and expectations were similar and egalitarian, Paul's mother, Mimi, expected Jane to stay home and raise children. Jane worked hard to become a pediatric nurse and refused to stop working after their marriage. When Jane was at work, Paul's mother would frequently comment that Jane should be home taking care of Paul and their home. The comments began to upset Jane, which created friction in the marriage. After many arguments, Paul agreed to speak to his mother about her toxic behavior, and Jane agreed to stop blaming Paul for his mother's actions. Lamanna et al. (2018) claim that most newlyweds learn to compromise in their first years of marriage. The couple made other compromises, such as Jane's promise to stop spending money on new shoes when she was stressed and Paul's agreement to store his comic book memorabilia in their spare bedroom instead of the entire house. To keep their marriage strong, they schedule date nights every Saturday. Their favorite destination is the Stonefire Grill restaurant and then a movie. During their dates, Jane feels that Paul always knows how to make her feel special, and Paul loves how

Jane agrees to watch comic book movies even though she dislikes them. Though they have busy lives raising two children, they always make time to date each other.

Raising Children in a Diverse Society

Becoming a parent was challenging. Jane had three miscarriages within her first two years of marriage. The pain that the couple experienced made Jane decide to stop trying to have children and go on birth control. Five months after starting birth control, Jane got pregnant. They were overjoyed when Jane gave birth to a healthy baby daughter nine months later. Two years later, a healthy son followed. While both are authoritative parents, Jane feels that Paul is sometimes too permissive. Jane insists that the children must clean their rooms before they can play, while Paul sometimes allows the children to play outside before doing their chores. Jane gets annoyed that Paul is more lenient with the children when she is not home, even though he claims to uphold the rules when she is gone. Both Jane and Paul agree that Paul is getting better at enforcing rules now that the children are getting older. Paul feels that his biggest challenge in parenting is attending all the appointments, meetings, and sporting events related to the children's activities. However, Jane's biggest challenge is not allowing her stressful job to affect how she treats her children. Neither feels that they experienced any differences in raising their second child except that it made the family busier and more joyful. They admit that they have experienced some prejudice being a biracial family. According to Lamanna et al. (2018), over nine million people in the United States identify as multiracial. When the family moved to Newport Beach, they claimed that their racist neighbor harassed their family and cursed at their children, forcing them to move. The experience caused pain for the family and the couple argued over how to explain racism to their children. Their differences in communication styles caused more stress for the family.

Communication

The couple's communication styles are different, creating stress in their family. When Jane is upset, she wants to share her feelings with Paul, while Paul is reluctant to show Jane when he is upset or unhappy. Jane wants to resolve an issue immediately, while Paul withdraws from conflict when a problem arises. Paul's reaction causes Jane to escalate the situation, leading to more stress for the couple. Paul feels that he needs to withdraw from a conflict to avoid losing his temper. However, Jane views Paul's silence as indifference, which infuriates her, causing her to criticize Paul and demand that he respond to her concerns. When Paul attempts to address Jane's issues, he feels she is not satisfied with his suggestions, so Paul shuts down, causing Jane to grow angrier. When Paul believes he is losing an argument, he leaves to avoid saying something he would later regret. In contrast, Jane raises her voice and brings up past issues when losing an argument. The few times that Paul escalated a dispute and yelled at Jane was when Jane attacked his manhood, suggesting that he was attached to his mother's apron strings. Both agree that Paul's mother is the most significant strain on their marriage. Jane expects Paul to reprimand his mother, but Paul urges Jane to ignore his mother's behavior. According to Lamanna et al. (2018), couples must address conflicts to solve them.

Integration: Patterns and Practices

Every relationship experiences conflict and struggles, Paul and Jane's marriage is no exception. Despite their healthy and loving marriage, they struggle with clashing communication patterns. The following section will delve deeper into the miscommunication between Paul and Jane, while connecting their experiences to the Family Systems Theory. This section will also discuss healthy relationships practices to potentially strengthen their communication skills.

Unhealthy Relationship Pattern – Communication

Jane and Paul's different communication patterns negatively affect their marriage. Paul's attempt to withdraw from a conflict prevents the issue from being resolved. Likewise, Jane's reaction to Paul's behavior further escalates the battle instead of providing the answers she seeks. While the couple believes that their communication is usually positive, it becomes toxic when it involves Paul's mother, creating tremendous stress and disharmony. One theoretical perspective related to the unhealthy communication pattern is the family systems theory. According to Darling et al. (2014), the family is interdependent, similar to a system where one person's behavior affects all members of the system. When a person's behavior is negative, it can create an imbalance causing the other members to change their behavior to restore equilibrium. When Jane feels that Paul's mother makes critical remarks about their children, she expects Paul to restore harmony to the family by speaking to his mother, Mimi. When Paul refuses to address the issue, it creates conflict in the marriage. Jane resorts to criticism and personal attacks to make Paul speak to his mother. However, Jane's escalation creates stress for Paul, who responds by withdrawing. Consequently, the problem never resolves and remains a constant source of stress for the couple. While Paul acknowledges that Jane's concerns are valid, Paul blames himself for his mother's unhappiness. He believes that he disappointed his mother, who views Paul's marriage as a rejection of her beloved Chinese heritage. Paul understands that he must change his behavior and address the issue with his mother for the problem to end.

Healthy Relationship Practice – Communication

To resolve the communication issues in their marriage, both Jane and Paul must change their unhealthy behavior. To begin, Paul must explain to Jane that his withdrawal from an argument is not a sign of indifference but an attempt to control his response. In addition, Jane

needs to understand that her confrontational style evokes a stress response from Paul, causing him to disengage. Their communication pattern is common and referred to as the female-demand/male-withdraw pattern (Lamanna et al., 2018). While the pattern is typical, it can be very destructive for a marriage. Both must recognize how their behavior affects the situation. Paul must be open to discussing issues with Jane to improve their relationship, and Jane must not use criticism or personal attacks when she is frustrated. Instead, they should use words of affirmation and communicate affection when discussing sensitive topics. Their non-verbal communication must be positive and engaging and not hostile or contemptuous toward their partner. According to Darling et al. (2014), how a couple communicates can affect their marriage, health, and long-term happiness.

All relationships experience conflict, and how the couple reacts to the conflict can affect the happiness of their marriage. During a disagreement, couples should focus on the issues and not bring up past mistakes or arguments. When Jane is angry, she focuses on past incidents that made her upset instead of trying to resolve the current problem. Jane and Paul must not be confrontational when communicating. Instead, they should start sentences with "I feel" instead of "You make me angry because" (Lamanna et al., 2018). Paul and Jane must remember that they cannot change their partner's behavior, but they can change how they react during a disagreement. Their communication would vastly improve if they could see their partner's view of the situation and treat their partner the way they wish to be treated.

Conclusion

I enjoyed interviewing Paul and Jane. They were both open, honest, and talkative. Jane was the first to be interviewed. We had coffee on her backyard patio furniture and drank coffee as though we were socializing. The relaxing atmosphere made the interview less awkward and

more pleasant. While interviewing Jane, Paul drove their children to the grocery store to get food for lunch. When my interview with Jane was over, I interviewed Paul in his garage while Jane and the children prepared lunch in the kitchen. Paul was surprisingly candid and expressed his interest in helping me with my school assignment. I was grateful for his and Jane's candor and their welcoming attitude.

This assignment was somewhat challenging. While Jane and Paul are my distant relatives, I was worried about invading their privacy by asking personal questions about their relationship. I did not want to offend anyone and was concerned that I would cause conflict in their relationship. I feared my questions were too personal and worried that the couple would not like their partner's answers. I was also concerned about how they would receive my advice concerning their unhealthy relationship and communication pattern. Since I am not a psychologist, I felt uneasy giving them communication advice. However, I approached the task by explaining that even though I have been married longer than they have, I learned a lot about healthy communication and hoped they could benefit from my college course. It was also challenging coordinating our schedules to complete the interview. While the couple agreed to an earlier interview date, they experienced plumbing issues in their home that needed immediate attention, forcing me to postpone my interview for the following weekend.

The most enjoyable part of the assignment was spending the day with Jane, Paul, and their children. They are related to my husband, and I have not visited them since before the pandemic. It was fun to catch up on each other's lives once the interview was over. I was amazed at how much their children had grown and how much they resembled both parents. While the assignment was mandatory, it was not a typical assignment where I spent time reading a chapter

and completing a quiz. Instead, I was fortunate enough to visit with friends and learn more about their relationship struggles and successes.

This assignment helped me to practice my interviewing skills and how to talk to parents of young children. The reading material helped to educate me about healthy and unhealthy communication patterns, which can benefit my relationship with my family and my relationship with others. I realized the importance of nonverbal communication and how to phrase sentences correctly without assigning blame or being critical. Knowing how to communicate with others is vital for all relationships. It is essential to understand how not to escalate arguments and how criticism harms relationships. I am grateful to Jane and Paul for helping me with my assignment and providing me with the opportunity to learn from others.

References

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