

Family System Within Coco

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The Rivera family fights against anything that goes against their family system, as they are enmeshed and stick close to each other and do not know what to do when their system is disturbed. The system was set into place when one of their relatives, Hector, abandoned the family for his music career and left behind a scarred and hurt family. From there on, music was banned in the family until Miguel comes along and challenges the status quo.

Part A

Significant dates. Significant dates that influenced the family system starts with the Hector leaving and his death because of the dramatic affect the family felt. Hector was the father of Coco who was the mother of Elena, and she is shown on the family tree. Hector's family saw him as a disgrace, and they felt betrayed by him because they though the did not want anything to do with the family because he never returned. Therefore, they banned music of any kind in their household and passed down the hatred for music in the family. Hector leaving was a very significant date for the family, as the impact his actions left on the family influenced the family system as a whole for generations. Elena felt very strongly on the issue and continued to enforce the hatred of music in the family, as she seemed scarred from Hector's actions.

Miguel's birth was not entirely mentioned in the movie, but was important in shifting the trajectory of the family. His birth and entrance into the family with his love for music began to push the boundaries in the family. Miguel's birth began the shift that the family began to take.

Another significant date was the Day of the Dead. Miguel began his trek to restore music in their

family, and the family had to confront their issues they had not talked about or had tried to bury.

Also, the day ended with music being restored, and the family being restored.

Gender beliefs and values: Elena is an authoritarian in the family system. She is a dominant female in the family, as she has control over what people do in the family. She has the major say in what goes on and the family goes off of her opinion and thoughts. Therefore, Miguel grew up under the control of his grandmother and the rules she had placed on the family. Miguel was directly affected especially because of his desire to pursue music, but Elena's disdain for anything that had to do with music.

Secrets:One of the secrets that was tried to be concealed was Miguel's love for music and musical ability. He kept a shrine of artifacts and such about Ernesto de la Cruz, and he even had a guitar that he loved to practice on. Another secret that affected the family tree was the secret of Coco's father. Coco's father was not talked about at all because he was seen as a shame and disgrace to the family. Elena was a factor in trying to keep the secret hushed and buried away from the family because she was scarred from the actions of Hector in regards to her mother Coco and how strongly she had felt on the issue.

Losses:The loss of Coco's father affects Elena, as she still feels the weight and sadness that was brought by his actions. The family felt betrayed and left to fend for themselves, as they thought Hector had left them and did not care for them. He ended up dying which made the situation worse because they were never able to see the truth that he did care for them. Therefore, the family seemed to grieve him and the hurt he had caused by cutting out music entirely from their

life. The result is that the family goes into shoemaking, and everyone in the family is a shoemaker. There does not seem to be any complaints from any of the family members about making shoes or the fact that music has been cut from the family entirely. Instead they seem to willingly do as Elena tells them. Everyone except Miguel because he decides that he enjoys music greatly and does not see the same need that everyone else sees to cut out music entirely.

Themes: There is a strong theme of enmeshment throughout the genogram of the family system, as they act like sheep. The family sticks to each other and follows whatever the leader or Elena tells them to do. They go into the shoemaking business and everyone in the family follows suite. When Miguel decides he wants to do something different, the family does not know how to act or handle the change and they all seem to freak out and think he is insane. The change disrupts the family system, as they do not know what to do when someone goes against the boundaries that had been set up.

Part B

Emotional climate: The emotional climate that was shown in the Rivera family was poorly differentiated. There is not “a clear sense of self in the individuals in the family”, as they “let the family control themselves” (George, 2018). The family has a hard time when they need to logically make a decision because of the emotional attachment that has been formed. There is high attachment in the Rivera family, as they are unable to operate outside of their family system. They also depend heavily on each other which is shown evidently in how they participate in the family business of shoemaking. The family uses authority to in order to manage the emotional

climate, as Elena is the matriarch of the family and when there is an issue she has the final say. In Miguel's development, there is a hindering factor to the poorly differentiated emotional climate because he is unable to have his own thoughts or pursue his own passions. For example, how he wants to become a musician, but the family says that is not an option and the only option is to be a shoemaker. Closeness is a key factor within the family system, but the family is led by Elena who delegates what is right or wrong within the family system.

Boundaries: The boundaries that are portrayed throughout the Rivera family are enmeshed. There are "clear boundaries as to what is acceptable and what is not" (George, 2018). Someone's business in the family is everyone's business, and there is low individuality because you are expected to follow what everyone else is doing in the family and not stray from the family. The imitate sheep in the way their family boundaries are put into place. The family is closed, as "no one is welcome" and there are "rules and policies put into place" (George, 2018). The family sticks true to their roots and family is very important to them, and they do not allow people to disgrace the family. Therefore, they have rules set in the family where they do not play music because of Hector who in their eyes disgraced the family by leaving them. The Rivera family is morphostasis because they "resist change to strategies," and they are like a "turtle stuck on it's back" (George, 2018). When Hector left the family, they went into distress, and Imelda decided to cut him out of the family all together. The family became resistant to change, as they became shoemakers and resisted any family member who wanted to do something different especially

music because they had been scarred from Hector's actions. The hatred for music was passed down generation to generation with the female matriarch leading the family, and Elena fulfilled that role in the current family scenario for Miguel.

Maintenance: The Rivera family receives an income through their shoemaking business where the entire family is employed. Therefore, they are able to accomplish their daily tasks of providing food, shelter, clothing and education through their family business. They appear to use their resources wisely and efficiently, as they seem to be living well on the money they make where they have a house that fits the family and clothes that they can wear, but they are not lavishly living. Their basic needs as a family appear to be met, and the family is never shown to complain about any of the daily needs. They are over organized because they are "organized to the point of being rigid or inflexible," and the family does everything together even in their occupations (George, 2018). They rely on each other and all live together to help maintain their wellbeing. The family structure and the available resources determine the daily maintenance in the family, and the Rivera family is over organized. The control and power lays in the hands of Elena, and their resources come from the fruits of the family business. Therefore, the strategic income plan and decision making power portrays an over organized family.

Identity: The identity of the Rivera family is controlled and there is not an individual identity in the family. The identity of shoemaking is strong in the family, and they pass down the family tradition. They have remained consistent in their identity throughout many years after Hector's passing. They stick to their roots and remain in their identity of family. The main focus of their

identity stems from Hector with him leaving the family for his music, and the Rivera family disowning him and kicking him out of the family tree. The story of Coco's father was made sure to be passed from generation to generation in order that everyone remembers that family comes first. Also, the idea that music of any kind is not allowed within the family or anyone's identity is enforced as well. The idea of having your identity wrapped up in your family can not be healthy because then there is no individualism, and Miguel is not able to express himself musically like he would prefer. The past has influenced and shaped the family into who the Rivera family is for Miguel during the movie.

Part C

Family life cycle: Miguel is in a current life cycle stage that is different from where his parents or grandparents were. Miguel's parents and grandparents lived when the betrayal by Hector was more relevant and when the wound was still very fresh for Imelda, Coco, and even Elena. Therefore, the emotions were a lot stronger about the act, and the people who were directly affected were still alive and having a say in what was happening in regards to music around the family. Miguel's parents were able to see more first hand how music had affected their relatives and the aftermath of Hector's betrayal. Miguel was born a couple generations after the act had been done, so he does not have as close ties with Hector and the pain that he caused. Therefore, Miguel is more rebellious against the family's strong belief against music, and he begins to pursue music secretly by himself. He is in a life stage where he wants to be able to do his own thing outside of his family's identity.

Ethnic influences: Miguel's ethnic identity is Hispanic, as that is the population subgroup that the Rivera family has a common nationality and traditions with. The nature of his current situation in regards to his current family relationships, habits, attitudes, values, and life style reflects his ethnic background in various ways. The common theme of the importance of family structure that is thread throughout the Rivera family directly reflects the Hispanic culture. In the movie, Abuelita even states how "being apart a part of this family means you are here for this family" which demonstrates the importance of family for the Rivera family (Anderson &Unkrich). Religion is another ethnic influence that plays a part of Miguel's daily life, and the audience is shown a small portion of the importance of religion from the Day of the Dead celebrations. The religious event was portrayed as important and showed how much they valued respect for family. These are the same as previous generations of Hispanic people and is a very common theme. Hispanics are family centered people who value their religious beliefs.

Celebrations & rituals: Special occasions are special and celebrated in the Rivera family. For the Day of the Dead, the family went all out for their celebration. They decorated all over their house and cooked an immense amount of food. The realize the importance of remembering family members because "when there's no one left in the living world who remembers you, you disappear form this world" (Anderson &Unkrich). The Day of the Dead is an extravagant celebration with food and family and lots of decorations, music, and celebration. Miguel's family's current rituals and routines in regards to their spiritual life were not specifically stated in the movie. However, they are shown to be religious which correlates to those of his family

origin. However, the Rivera family does not participate in the musical side of the Day of the Dead since they feel so strongly against music, so they normally try to find another family oriented way to celebrate. For every event that the Rivera family celebrates, the event is centered on family and has family involved in some sort of capacity.

Rules & values: Rules that were shown in the Rivera family varied. They were strict about not allowing any music around the house or having anyone listen or play music at any time. Also, the family was not keen on the canine Dante that Miguel hung out with all the time because he was a stray. Miguel's current family situation was deeply embedded into the rules that surrounded the musical world and the hurt that came from the families past with music and Hector leaving the family for music. Miguel discarded that rule, as he created a chest of musical paraphernalia in the attic. He also learned how to play guitar and would listen to music regularly. There were overt rules in the fact that Miguel was not supposed to participate in anything that pertained to music. There were also covert rules in that Miguel was supposed to follow and do whatever Elena told him to do. Miguel was more rebellious, and he did not listen to the rules that were set for him besides when he would respect and do what Elena, his Abuelita, would say.

Stories: Miguel's family would tell stories of their past and the ancestors that lived before them. The main story that affected the family was the story of Hector leaving the family to pursue his musical career. There was hurt that stemmed from Hector's actions, and as a result, the family engrained a strong belief that music was wrong and should not be a part of the family in any sense. The family then switched to become shoemakers instead of musicians, and they have

made shoes ever since. The underlying meaning is that loyalty to family runs deep, and influences the family members to support and stick close to their family. In the movie, the people who live in the afterlife stated how they are alive because of “our memories, they have been passed down by those who knew us in life – in the stories they tell about us” (Anderson &Unkrich). The stories that are told to help families remember their past and their roots that they come from are important to the family system and their cultural background.

Philosophy of life: Miguel’s family is able to make meaning of the world through their spiritual beliefs that stem from the Day of the Dead. The Rivera family believes that after you die you go into the afterlife with all of your family where you still stay through your family remembering you. They route the meaning of life to the importance of family and the stories or memories that are left behind. Miguel is able to find out the truth of his family’s history in regards to Hector, and restore his family to their love for music and the hurt that stemmed from Hector’s past decisions. Miguel realizes the importance of family, as they say in the movie how “nothing is as important as family” and their memories (Anderson &Unkrich). He is shown at the end telling his younger sister about their relatives and the memories they have left behind.

At the end of the movie, the Rivera family has undergone a stressful situation where their enmeshed family experienced a disturbance in Miguel’s rebelliousness. The family went through trials and tribulations, as they figured out that at the end of the day family is more important than fighting and hold grudges. The truth of Hector’s actions was brought to the light and there was

forgiveness. So that in the end Miguel is able to play music and pursue his passions while being supported by his family and remembering his roots, and where he came from.

References

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