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Comm 2100

Movie Response Assignment

Blue Valentine is a romantic drama film following the relationship of a married couple, Cindy and Dean. The timeline of this film shifts back and forth from the beginning of Cindy and Dean's relationship, to the present, where various factors displayed throughout the film have put a tremendous strain on their marriage. Throughout the course of *Blue Valentine*, Knapp's Stages of Relational Development are exhibited, both in the coming together stages of the model and the coming apart stages.

As the timeline for *Blue Valentine* moves back and forth throughout the movie, several scenes depicted in the film display the coming together stages of Knapp's Stages of Relational Development. While finishing up his job at the nursing home, Cindy, who is taking care of her elderly grandmother, catches Dean's eye. He immediately approaches her grandmother's room, and asks if he can talk to her. He tells Cindy that he didn't steal any money (as Cindy saw him pocket his cash pay), and he asks for her name. Cindy replies with "go away", and tries to shut the door, but he jokingly says to Cindy "Go Away?..that's a weird name" (Cianfrance, 2010), and then gives her his work's card. This scene in the film is an example of initiation and coming together, as Cindy and Dean are meeting for the first time, and Dean tries to get Cindy's name, and give her a card so she can contact him.

Another flashback of Cindy and Dean in the early stages of their relationship displays both experimenting and intensifying in the coming together stage of Knapp's model. Cindy and

Dean are walking together when Dean starts to play the ukulele and asks Cindy “can you dance?” (Cianfrance, 2010). When Cindy shows him that she knows how to tap dance he replies “Here, I’ll play a song and you dance”, (Cianfrance, 2010). Dean then begins to play and sing a song for her, while she dances for him. Dean is experimenting, by asking Cindy if she knows how to dance, and when he finds out she knows how to tap dance, he intensifies the situation by beginning to play a song for her.

Integrating in the coming together stage is another stage of Knapp’s model that is shown in *Blue Valentine*. Shortly after she begins her relationship with Dean, Cindy finds out she is pregnant with her ex boyfriend’s child. After stopping her abortion mid-procedure, Dean comforts her on the ride home and Dean tells her “let’s do it, let’s be a family” (Cianfrance, 2010). Dean wants to help her raise her child and become a family together. Cindy tells him he doesn’t have to do that, but Dean kisses her and tells her he loves her. The two have taken their relationship a major step forward, as they agree to raise Cindy’s child together and become a family.

Blue Valentine also displayed bonding in the coming together stage between Cindy and Dean. Towards the end of the movie, a flashback scene is shown of Cindy and Dean getting married at the courthouse and honoring their commitment legally. They share their vows together and become husband and wife.

The present-day scenes of *Blue Valentine* show the disintegration of Cindy and Dean’s marriage. These scenes can be represented by the coming apart stages in Knapp’s Stages of Relational Development. The first stage in the model, differentiating, is displayed in a present-day scene when Dean and Cindy are spending the night at a motel. During dinner, Cindy asks Dean “why don’t you do something?” (Cianfrance, 2010). Dean is confused and asks her

what she means by her question, and she says, “you're good at so many things... isn't there something you want to do? You can do so many things, you have such capacity... you can sing, you can dance, you can draw” (Cianfrance, 2010). Dean tells her that their relationship and family is what he wanted and what he wants to continue to do, but Cindy tells him that she wants him to have a job where “you don't drink at 8 o'clock in the morning” (Cianfrance, 2010). Dean paints houses, and drinks a lot, which frustrates Cindy, as she sees more potential in him. The different views that the two have regarding Dean's job and lifestyle is an example of differentiating in the coming apart stage.

Circumscribing in the coming apart stage is the next stage displayed in the movie. Dean asks Cindy if she wants to have another child with him, and tells her he wants to have a child with her. Cindy tells him to stop, and starts crying. Dean tells her to stop crying and asks her why she's upset and what she wants. It is clear to the audience that Cindy is upset that Dean tells her he wants a baby with her, especially following their previous conversation where Cindy says she is frustrated with Dean's lifestyle choices. This circumscribing scene is characterized by Cindy being silent when Dean asks her why she is crying, and repeatedly just telling him to “stop”.

After this scene, stagnating in the coming apart stage is shown. Stagnating is where the partners have no communication. Cindy, frustrated with Dean, locks herself in the bathroom. Dean is repeatedly pounding on the door yelling “let me in! Can you open the door?” (Cianfrance, 2010). That morning, Cindy is called in to work. She does not wake Dean, who fell asleep in the hallway, and instead leaves him a note letting him know she had to leave. Avoiding conversation with Dean and leaving without waking him is an example of stagnation in the coming apart stage.

Avoiding is the second to last stage in the coming-apart model that is shown earlier in the movie. Upset by the death of the family dog, Dean has an idea to book a night at a motel. Cindy immediately says no to the idea, and says “I’m not going to some cheesy sex motel. I’m on call tomorrow”, (Cianfrance, 2010). Cindy repeatedly says no, and Dean begs her to come, saying they need a night to themselves and “have to get out of this house”, (Cianfrance, 2010). Cindy says, “I don’t want to get into the car at 7:30 and drive for two hours”, (Cianfrance, 2010). Dean ultimately makes the decision for her, and books the room. Cindy putting down the idea of her and Dean’s night together and telling him that she is on call for work the next day is an example of avoidance in the coming-apart stage.

The last stage shown in *Blue Valentine* is termination in the coming apart stage. Dean, angry that Cindy left him at the motel, shows up at her work drunk and causes a scene. They start to fight and Dean starts to make a mess of the office and fights with the doctor. Dean punches the doctor in the face, causing Cindy to get fired. In the parking lot, Cindy tells Dean “I want a divorce!” (Cianfrance, 2010). The two return to Cindy’s fathers house, where they continue to talk. Dean tells Cindy, “you know it’s not just us, we have a little girl to worry about” (Cianfrance, 2010). Cindy says she is thinking about Frankie too, but she can’t do it anymore. Dean asks Cindy if she wants Frankie to grow up in a broken home, and Cindy says “I don’t want her to grow up in a home where her parents treat each other like this..” (Cianfrance, 2010). She tells him that they are not good together anymore.. Dean tries to remind Cindy of their wedding vows and their promises to each other, but Cindy says she needs space. While trying to leave the house, Frankie runs towards Dean, but he tricks her to run back to Cindy. Dean then turns around and walks away, signaling the termination and end of their marriage.

Relational maintenance are the behaviors exhibited by both partners in a relationship in an effort to maintain a good, strong and healthy relationship. Relational maintenance fits into Knapp's model, as the steps in the coming-together stages are important in order to establish and build a good relationship, especially when couples are going through difficult times, and need to bond and repair their relationship. In *Blue Valentine*, little to no relational maintenance is displayed in the present day, leading to the end of Cindy and Dean's marriage. However, more relational maintenance is displayed in the flashback scenes of the movie, when Cindy and Dean are younger. After Cindy backs out of her abortion, Dean tells her that he loves her, and that he will help her raise her baby, instead of becoming angry at her for choosing to have another man's baby. They begin to get more serious, as Dean meets her family and has dinner with them. But, in the present day, Dean and Cindy are more stressed with their adult lives and growing apart, as Cindy is working a demanding and stressful job, while taking care of Frankie, and Dean paints houses, and is seen drinking a lot and sleeping around the house. Although Dean tries to make it up to her and spend the night together after the family dog is killed, it ends in disaster the next day when he drunkenly starts a fight at Cindy's work, she is fired, and then tells Dean that she is done with their marriage.

The 2010 film *Blue Valentine* depicted all ten stages in Knapp's Stages of Relational Development. Through flashback scenes, the audience sees how Dean and Cindy met, fell in love, and married. However, in present-day scenes, the audience sees how the couple is fighting, has a strain in their marriage, and eventually falls apart. *Blue Valentine* also displays relational maintenance in Dean and Cindy's early relationship, and how little relational maintenance later on in their marriage eventually leads them to divorce.

Sources

Cianfrance, D. (Director). (2010). *Blue Valentine* [Motion picture]. Hunting Lane Films.