**D’Angelo Family Assessment**

Abigail Hoffman

Longwood University

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Professor Danielsen

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The D’Angelo family is a recently blended family that is in need of services. Antonio D’Angelo recently married Selma D’Angelo and became a blended family. Antonio D’Angelo had three children from a previous marriage, Antonio’s first wife died of cancer four years ago. His children are Mariana who is sixteen, Paul who is thirteen, and Tony who is ten. Selma also has a daughter from a previous relationship named Benedetta who is fourteen. Selma’s mother, Solie, who is 68 also lives with the family. Solie has degenerative kidney disease and diabetes and is in need of full-time care. Antonio D’Angelo, the father, has reached out to family services in hopes to resolve problems within the family.

The presenting problem for this family is that there are conflicts and difficulty adjusting as a new blended family, particularly with Mariana. Mariana’s behavior is causing conflict with whole family. Mariana most frequently has outbursts toward Selma, criticizing her as and showing a lack of respect overall. Mariana is also rude to Solie and refuses to help her when asked. Mariana has a difficult relationship with her step-sister Benedetta. At some points, she is friendly at some points then will quickly become cruel toBenedetta. This has caused Benedetta to threaten to run away. Mariana insults and argues with her brothers when they are friendly with Selma, Solie, and Benedetta. Antonio D’Angelo has tried to talk to Mariana about her behavior but does not defend the other family members when Mariana argues back. Antonio tries to get Selma to overlook Mariana's behavior and reasons that Mariana is just having a hard time adjusting. Selma appears to be the most impacted by Mariana’s behavior because most of Mariana’s attacks are toward her and her mother. Selma is also caretaker of Solie. Selma spends four hours three times a week taking Solie to dialysis. Solie’s care needs are exhausting for Selma. Mariana’s behavior has caused Selma to question if the marriage is worth staying in. The family is seeking services to in hopes to improve the family dynamic.

The willingness of each family member to participate in the family therapy process varies. Antiono is very invested in the process and wants to make the family work. He was the one that made the referral for services, and is willing to try anything that would help the family. Selma wants to improve the family but is hesitant about family therapy because she is nervous about having Mariana in the same room as her mother. She feels this might be too distressing for her mother. Solie has potential conflicts with dialysis treatment that might affect her ability to come to services. Based on Selma’s concerns Solie might be hesitant to engage in family therapy due to Mariana’s treatment of her. The willingness of Tony, Paul, and Benedetta to participate in therapy has not been made clear but it can be assumed that they would be willing to participate based on their effort to corporate as a family. Mariana may be difficult to convince to participate in family therapy based on her refusal to do household tasks as well as her overall harsh behavior towards the other family members. Antonio and Selma recognize that is essential that all family members participate in the family therapy process and are willing to try to make it work.

Each family member may have different interpretations of what the problem for the family is. It seems that Antiono believes that Marinana is having a difficult time adjusting to the new blended family as well as having difficulty coping with the loss of her mother which is causing her behavoir. Antionio seems to want to keep Mariana as happy as possible even if that means that Selma, Solie, and Benedetta are treated cruelly as evidenced by his lack of intervention with Mariana. Selma is extremely distressed by her treatment by Mariana,and believes that Antiono is not doing enough to combat Mariana's behavior. Selma is worried about the well-being of her mother and Benedetta. Based on her statement that the marriage might not have been the right thing to do she seems to prioritize her mother, daughter, and herself over the family remaining together. Solie appears to be concerned for her health as a priority. She seems to want to stay in the care of Selma even with the negative treatment she is receiving from Mariana. Tony and Paul are willing to make an effort to help the other members of the family. It appears that they believe that Mariana’s behavior is causing problems with the family as evidenced by their arguments with her about her treatment of other family members. Benedetta appears to have similar feelings to Tony and Paul. Benedetta is distressed by Mariana’s unpredictable behavior towards her. Mariana believes that the problem is the new blended family. She is not willing to accept the new family dynamic.

The members of the family have unique strengths and limitations as well as different levels of functioning within the family system. Antonio appears to be struggling with the family dynamic and trying to make it work. Some of his limitations in the family are that he wants to make everyone happy, and he does not seem he feels comfortable addressing Mariana’s behavior. A strength of Antionio that can help the family is his willingness to try to make the family work, and seek help for the family. Keeping the family together seems to be a priority for him. Selma’s functioning has been affected by the conflict in the family. She receives the majority of Mariana’s attacks. She has started to question if the new family is worth maintaining. It is evident that Selma is very overwhelmed with caring for her mother and trying to navigate the home situation, this is limitation for her. A strength of Selma is that she is also willing to seek services. She wants to make an effort to make the family work before ending the marriage. Solie is reliant on the care of the family, her functioning is dependent on the functioning of the family. A limitation of Solie is that she has to spend a lot of time receiving dialysis treatment, which may affect her ability to come to family services. A strength of Solie is that she has shown that she can adjust to change with the death of her husband and moving from Italy. She also has that support from Selma which can also be a strength. Tony appears to be functioning well within the family. He is coping well with the change to a new blended family and interacts positively with the new family members. A limitation of Tony is that he is the youngest in the family, and may have more difficulties trying to navigate the family dynamics. He may also have a harder time understanding the different factors that are affecting the behavior in the family. A strength of Tony is that he is willing to cooperate with being a part of the new blended family. Paul, similar to Tony, also appears to be functioning well with the new blended family. He is kind and cooperative with the new family members. A limitation of Paul is that he is still pretty young and that he does not have much “power” in the family dynamics. This may make it hard to affect change for the family. Benedetta appears to have a more difficult functioning in the family. She has to deal with the unpredictableness of Mariana’s behavior towards her as well as witnessing the treatment of her mother and grandmother. She may feel more responsibilities to help with Selma’s care compared to the boys. A limitation of Benedetta is that she is emotionally affected by the treatment from Mariana, it may difficult for her to try to make progress with Mariana. A strength of Benedetta is that she has emotional support from her mother. Mariana is not functioning well at all within the family. She is having a very difficult time adjusting to the new family and dealing with grief for her mother. A limitation of Mariana is that it appears that she has resentment towards Selma that may be influenced by the grief of her mother (Boelen et al., 2021). Her resentment is causing her to act very aggressively towards Selma, Benedetta, and Solie. This is causing distress for the entire family. A strength of Mariana is that she is very passionate about what she wants, when done appropriately this can help her advocate for herself in the family.

Knowing the family history is relevant to providing interventions for the family. The family recently became blended four months ago when Antiono Married Selma. Before they were married Mariana was upset by Selma when they met and often ended time together early. When they got married, Mariana complained of intense stomach pain that ended the honeymoon early. After Antiono’s first wife died of cancer and before he started seeing Selma, Antonio's sister had come to stay with them for a while. She had tried to convince Antonio to not consider remarrying. After the sister left Mariana then stepped up to be an essential part of the household and the family worked as a team. Another relevant piece of family history is Solie’s recent immigration due to her need for care. Selma has adopted the full-time caregiving role for her. It is not known if Selma has any siblings that could help with this care but it can be reasonably assumed that she does not have any that could help with care. It is also unknown about Selma’s first husband and Benedetta’s father. It would be helpful to know how that relationship currently stands.

The stages of the family life cycle can determine how the family is functioning based on changes they are going through. Blended families have different family life cycles compared to nuclear families. The families separately went through marriage and raising children but have now gone back to the marriage stage and are navigating how to raise their children together. The children are in different stages of adolescence and trying to figure out their independence, boundaries, and roles in life. This has been affected by a new family forming. The couple has formed a new partnership and combined the families. The family has to learn the new dynamics of the family. They have to get used to new siblings and parental relationships being created. New family roles can cause conflicts and confusion that need to be resolved. The death of a parent can make it harder to cope with the new roles and family dynamics, there may be unresolved grief that causes resentment (Kumar, 2017). The different aspects of the family life cycle for blended families can inform the interventions for the D’Angelo family.

Understanding the cultural context is important to be able to provide the most appropriate interventions. The family is of Italian descent and has a recent history of immigration with Solie. The Italian culture is important to understand when working with this family. In Italian culture, family has a large impact. Family units are valued and function more as units rather than individuals. Mothers are seen as primary caregivers and are often responsible for education and social development. Mothers have often highly involved in their child’s life even into adulthood. There is also high involvement with extended families, it is also expected that extended family members stay close to each other and care for each other when needed (Bombi et al., 2011). These factors can inform Mariana’s behavior towards Selma in relation to the loss of her mother. The cultural context may also inform Selma’s sense of duty to take care of her mother. The family might encounter discrimination based on their ethnicity, this could depend on if they are in an area with a heavy Italian influence or not. Solie could face disparities based on her disability status and need for medical care. The family lives in a medium-sized city so they could have more access to different types of services. The influence of cultural factors would be different based on generation, it would be important to gain perspective of the cultural values and influences of each family member.

Existing Family dynamics can affect how services should be implemented. Because this is a blended family there are subsystems with the original families before joining as one family system. Previous power dynamics would have shifted when the family combined. There is a strong coalition between Antonio and Selma. There is also a coalition between the children, Mariana seems to have excluded herself from this coalition. Antonio and Selma would hold the majority of the power if the family was functioning well, but Mariana has taken a lot of the power in the family from Selma with her refusal to accept her as part of the family. Antiono has also contributed to the imbalance of power with Mariana when he refuses to intervene with her behavior. It seems that Mariana has more respect for him compared to other family members. Solie appears to have some power in the family dynamic but has been disempowered by Mariana. The other children have some power because of their age and could be more relatable to Mariana. Paul and Tony especially can be helpful to Mariana because they experienced the loss of their mother together and may be feeling similarly to Mariana. The family’s emotional climate in general is tense with Mariana’s behavior. It seems that the other family members want to avoid upsetting her. Communication among the family is probably strained in fear of causing an argument. The power dynamics would influence the interactions in family sessions. Observing how the family interacts with each other when in a controlled environment can give more insight into the family dynamics that would be useful for future interventions.

Members of the family system also interact with many different systems that are important to consider when working with families. Apart from the system of the family, each member is impacted by their ecosystem. They are a part of their extended families which could be sources of support. They are also a part of other systems like schools and healthcare. The children may go to the same school where the family dynamics may overlap. Solie and Selma are larger impacted by the healthcare system. They are also impacted by their neighborhood and the local community. This can affect any activities that they do outside of the family. They are also impacted by their macrosystems systems like their culture, ethnicity, and political system. The different macrosystems may influence the family members differently. The different systems they are a part of would what interventions were needed (Crossen-Tower, 2018).

The D’Angelo family is a complicated family system that shows the need for family-related policies. A policy intervention that could be useful is the implementation of grief-informed programs for youth experiencing behavioral issues. The complexity of grief is often misunderstood especially in adolescents. An informed program could help youth cope with their grief and see better behavioral outcomes. Trauma and grief-informed Cognitive Behavioral Therapy has been shown to produce positive outcomes with bereaved adolescents (Boelen et al., 2021). Implementing policies that provide access to these programs can help the D’angelo family as well as families in similar situations. Another policy area that could help this family is improvement to access home health services. Home health services could help with Solie’s care at home as well as help with transportation to appointments. Home health services can very expensive and are rarely covered by Medicare and Medicaid (Medicare, nd). Even for upper-middle-class families like the D’Angelos, the expense may be too high to consider. Policy could help this family by reducing the burden of care, which can provide overall positive outcomes. The D’Angelo is in need of support, interventions, and policy changes to help them achieve their goals as a blended family.

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Appendix

