**PCN-521 Topic 3: Vargas Case Study**

Bob and Elizabeth arrive together for the third session. As planned, you remind the couple that the goal of today’s session is to gather information about their families of origin. Bob begins by telling you about his older sister, Katie, who is 36 and lives nearby with her three children. Katie’s husband, Steve, died suddenly last year at the age of 40 when the car he was driving hit a block wall. Elizabeth speculates that Steve was intoxicated at the time, but Bob vehemently denies this allegation. He warns Elizabeth to “never again” suggest alcohol was involved. You note Bob’s strong response and learn that his own biological father, whom his mother divorced when Bob was 3 and Katie was 5, had been an alcoholic. When asked about his father, Bob says, “His name is Tim, and I haven’t seen him since the divorce.” Bob shares that he only remembers frequently hiding under the bed with Katie to stay safe from his violent rages. He adds that 5 years after the divorce, his mother, Linda, married Noel who has been “the only dad I’ve ever known.” He insists that his sister married “a devout Christian who never touched alcohol” and attributed the 3:00 a.m. tragedy to fatigue. He adds that a few days before the accident, Katie had complained to him that her husband had been working many late nights and “just wasn’t himself.” Bob speaks fondly of his sister and confirms that they have always been “very close.”

From Elizabeth, who is 31 years old, you learn that she was adopted by her parents, Rita and Gary, who were in their late 40s at the time. They were first generation immigrants who had no family in the United States. Their biological daughter, Susan, had died 10 years earlier after Rita accidentally ran over the 5 year old while backing out of the driveway. Elizabeth surmises that her mother never fully recovered from this traumatic incident and remained distant and withdrawn throughout Elizabeth’s life. Elizabeth describes her father, Gary, as “a hard worker, smart, and always serious.” She shares that most of her family memories were of times spent with her dad in his study, surrounded by books. She states, “He could find the answer to all of my questions in one his many books.” Elizabeth describes herself as the “quiet, bookish type” and attributes her love for books to her father. Like her father in his study, Elizabeth remembers spending most of her adolescence alone in her room, reading, so she would not upset her mother. Looking back, Elizabeth tells you she recognizes her mother’s struggle with depression, “but as a kid, I thought it was me.”

You comment on the vastly different childhood experiences and normalize the potential for relationship challenges under these circumstances. Acknowledging the differences, Elizabeth remarks that Bob’s relationship with his family was one of the things that she was attracted to early in their relationship. Bob agrees with her and comments that Katie and Elizabeth are very close, “each being the sister neither one of them ever had.”