

Handout 2-1: Case Study – Joseph and Tonya

Background

Joseph is a 20-year-old white American college student. He was arrested for driving under the influence. Joseph is struggling with the pressures of college and uses alcohol to cope with an anxiety disorder.

Tonya is a 45-year-old white American counselor.

Case Study

Joseph's psychologist is worried about Joseph because his mother recently passed away from complications of severe alcoholism. Joseph has not been attending his counseling sessions because his driver's license is suspended and the psychologist's office is in a different town.

To increase his chances of following through with treatment, the psychologist refers Joseph to the student counseling center on campus.

Joseph goes to see Tonya, a 45-year-old white American counselor. Tonya, like Joseph, has a history of alcoholism in her family. Her father, from whom she is estranged, suffers from alcoholism. Tonya does not drink.

After the initial session, Tonya doesn't think she can provide treatment for Joseph. She thinks he's in too much trouble and doesn't have enough insight or motivation. Tonya decides she already has enough on her plate and plans to refer Joseph to a different counselor.

Handout 2-2: Case Study – Pilar and Dr. Reyes

Background

Pilar is a 25-year-old black and Latina woman. She is of Puerto Rican descent, and she identifies herself as LatiNegra, a term that encompasses her Latinx and black identities. She is a graduate student in anthropology. Her internist diagnosed her with panic disorder and referred her to a Latina psychologist, Dr. Reyes.

Dr. Reyes is a 40-year-old white and Latina woman. Dr. Reyes is of Mexican descent. Dr. Reyes is a psychologist at a public university who has worked with students for the last 10 years.

Case Study (Part 1: Pilar's Perspective)

Dr. Reyes and I have been meeting weekly to discuss my panic attacks. I'm happy to be working with a psychologist who is Latina and tries to understand my life experience as a LatiNegra. It was tough for me to open up at first, but I like that Dr. Reyes was willing to understand where I was coming from.

Although I am starting to feel better, I'm still not completely comfortable with Dr. Reyes. A small part of me feels like she doesn't understand an important aspect of my life: my size. I feel like Dr. Reyes can't relate to the stress I go through on a daily basis because of the way people perceive me.

Ever since I can remember, people have looked down on me because of my size. It takes a toll on my health. In my last appointment, I tried to open up more to Dr. Reyes and explain that she doesn't understand this important part of my life experience. The conversation was a bit uncomfortable, and I'm not sure how she took it.

Case Study (Part 2: Dr. Reyes' Perspective)

During our last appointment, Pilar suggested that I didn't understand an important aspect of her cultural identity: her size. I felt taken aback and disappointed that Pilar didn't trust me as much as I thought she did. I decided that I needed to learn more about the power imbalance between me and Pilar.

During our next appointment I decided to use the power differential analysis to examine my areas of privilege and oppression and those of Pilar. I tried my best to remain present and not shy away from exploring our differences.

The areas that Pilar identified as sources of oppression were her size, gender, race, and ethnicity. The area of privilege that Pilar identified was her education. My areas of oppression included my gender and ethnicity. My areas of privilege included my size, race, and education.

It became evident to me that although Pilar and I are both women of color, Pilar's experience as a woman of color is very different than mine. While we both may face ethnic discrimination as Latinas, Pilar as a LatiNegra also deals with racism from the society at large and colorism within the Latinx community that I, being light skinned, do not.

Pilar also identified size as a main difference between us. She was right that I hadn't really understood the impact of her experiences with sizeism. Although we had touched on some of these issues before, conducting the power differential analysis offered a safe way for us to further discuss our differences.

By answering critical consciousness questions related to our areas of privilege and oppression, Pilar began to associate her cumulative exposure to sizeism with an exacerbation of her panic disorder. Over the remainder of the year, I worked with Pilar to address her physical and psychological symptoms while keeping in mind the various forms of discrimination she faces.

Through this exercise I became more consciously aware of the influence of colorism in Latinx communities, and I began to see that there are big differences between myself and Pilar in our respective areas of privilege and oppression, particularly with regards to colorism, sizeism, and the ways these intersect.

I will never know what it is like to walk in Pilar's shoes, but it was important that I was willing to openly acknowledge my privilege, learn about Pilar's cultural identity, and develop a solution to better address Pilar's unique needs.

Handout 2-3: Case Study – The Usmani’s and Ms. Patrick

Background

Ms. Patrick is a 30-year-old Filipino American woman who is a marriage and family therapist in Chicago. Ms. Patrick was raised in a conservative Catholic family but is now an atheist. She also strongly identifies as a feminist. Ms. Patrick has been practicing for 3 years and enjoys counseling families dealing with intergenerational conflict.

Mr. Usmani and Mrs. Usmani are in their mid-50s and emigrated together from Pakistan to Chicago 20 years ago. Mr. Usmani and Mrs. Usmani both identify as devout Muslims. They have tried to maintain their cultural traditions, but this is now causing tension with their two teenage daughters. This is the first time the Usmanis have sought professional counseling.

Amira and Aneesa, the Usmani daughters, are 15 and 13 years old. They were both born and raised in Chicago. Amira and Aneesa are nearly inseparable because they are so close in age. They are both doing well in school and look forward to attending the same university. Amira and Aneesa tend to shy away from the cultural traditions of their parents.

Case Study (Part 1)

The Usmani family needs help resolving a conflict. Amira and Aneesa want to go on dates and to school dances with their friends. Mr. and Mrs. Usmani do not allow them to date but recently found out that their daughters have been sneaking out and going out to parties with their classmates.

Mr. Usmani feels like he is losing control of his family life. The Usmani family has sought counseling within their religious community, but after little progress the daughters preferred to seek counseling elsewhere, and the family was referred to Ms. Patrick.

After the initial family counseling session, Ms. Patrick met with only Amira and Aneesa. They told Ms. Patrick that they are doing well in school, but feel pressure from their father to only focus on grades. During their next counseling session, the girls began opening up to Ms. Patrick and expressed a desire for more freedom. They want to feel like regular teenagers and hang out with their friends and classmates more.

Over the next couple of sessions, Ms. Patrick found herself empathizing with Amira and Aneesa. In fact, Ms. Patrick begins to overidentify with them, viewing their situation as a struggle for independence.

Case Study (Part 2)

After the initial family counseling session, Ms. Patrick also met with only Mr. Usmani and Mrs. Usmani. Mr. Usmani was hesitant to discuss his family life with Ms. Patrick, but he tried to explain that he views himself as his family’s protector, which makes his daughters’ recent behavior so hard to deal with. Mr. Usmani dominated the conversation, seeming to speak for him and his wife.

Ms. Patrick wanted to establish trust with Mr. Usmani but found it hard to connect with him during the first two appointments. Ms. Patrick became increasingly uncomfortable working with Mr. Usmani because of their cultural differences and her empathy for what she views as Amira and Aneesa’s struggle for independence. To Ms. Patrick, the issue was clear: Mr. Usmani wants to control the dynamics of his relationship with his wife and daughters.

Case Study (Part 3)

Ms. Patrick was frustrated by her difficulty connecting with Mr. Usmani. After talking it over with her supervisor, she realized what made her uncomfortable was the value Mr. Usmani places on his faith and family ties. Ms. Patrick does not have much faith in religious institutions, and she values personal independence.

Ms. Patrick's supervisor suggested that a good place to start would be for Ms. Patrick to increase her exposure to individuals who have similar worldviews as Mr. Usmani.

Ms. Patrick decided to attend a professional development training on cultural humility. Over the next couple appointments, Ms. Patrick tried to reach common ground with each family member. She realized that although there were differences in values between her and Mr. Usmani, his values and worldview should be respected, and she should not impose her values of independence. Ms. Patrick also tried to make a more conscious effort to be aware of her biases and learn more about Mr. Usmani's culture.