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CLINICAL CASE REPORT

Reconsidering culture, attachment, and inequality in the treatment of a Puerto Rican migrant: Toward structural competence in psychotherapy

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Abstract

Cultural competence refers to our ability to understand, engage, and treat patients from diverse backgrounds or belief systems different from our own. Although addressing culture and cultural difference as part of diversity is important, it is also critical to consider how systemic and economic forces influence the patient's presenting problem and clinical interactions. Summarizing research on cultural competence, attachment, and inequality, this paper reconsiders diversity considerations by discussing how structural inequities disrupt one's ability to trust others interpersonally and across cultural difference. Psychotherapy from this point of view is a relationship that attempts to address the effects of inequality at an individual level by repairing trust and using that trust to work toward change. To illustrate this perspective, the author presents a case of a Puerto Rican migrant whose developmental and family history was impacted by colonial, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic inequality.

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