



Case of Maria: A Cross-Cultural Study of the Therapeutic Relationship

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Part I—The Patient

Maria, a 30-year-old woman from Puerto Rico and the mother of two boys, was hospitalized following a suicide attempt. She took an overdose of sleeping medication. For two months prior to the attempt, she had been seeking therapy for tiredness, loss of appetite, and sleep disturbances. Her therapist noted that she exhibited extreme helplessness and hopelessness. Additionally, Maria was low-keyed, restrained in behavior, avoided eye contact, and found it difficult to verbalize her thoughts and feelings.

The suicide attempt occurred after Maria's husband, Esteban, her high school sweetheart, refused to allow her to attend night school. Maria had registered for night school at her therapist's recommendation. She had signed up for a course and had even bought her books. In response, Esteban had gone into a rage, tearing up her registration papers and destroying her books. He refused to go to therapy with Maria.

Task

Write a one-paragraph summary of the most critical problems Maria is experiencing for which treatment is recommended.



Part II—The Therapist

Maria has been in therapy with Dr. C, a white, female, feminist psychologist. For the last few sessions, Dr. C has been focusing on Esteban's sexist attitude. Further, she has been trying to help Maria "be her own person." Dr. C has stressed that Maria has an equal right in the decisions made in the home, that she should not allow anyone to oppress her, that she did not need her husband's approval to attend night school, and that having children was an equal and joint responsibility. She has encouraged Maria to consider divorcing Esteban. In addition, she has also recommended that Maria take assertiveness training and has scheduled Maria to participate in a program located in her community.

Questions

In your groups, address the following questions. Write the group's responses to the questions on a large sheet and then put it up in the room.

1. What assumptions does Dr. C have about Maria and her critical problems?
2. How do these assumptions impact the course of Maria's therapy?
3. As a group, collectively decide what could be done differently to help Maria.



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