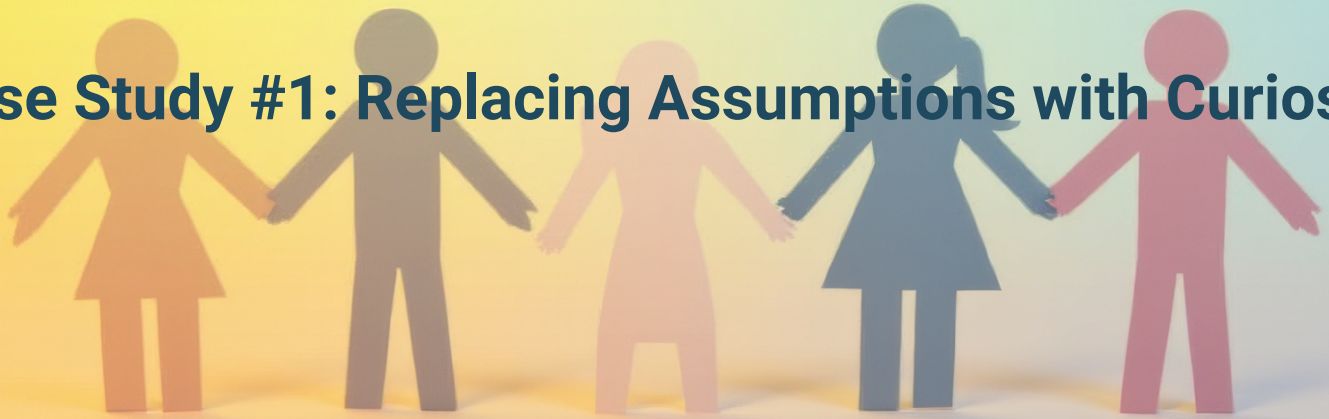


Case Study #1: Replacing Assumptions with Curiosity



Case Study #1: Replacing Assumptions with Curiosity

A client presented to therapy having experienced domestic violence after immigrating to the U.S. and marrying a man she had been talking to online. As she and her therapist began formulating treatment goals, the therapist quickly realized that the client seemed unfamiliar and uncomfortable with therapy.

The therapist asked the client, "What thoughts are going through your head right now?" The client was confused and asked the therapist what they meant. The therapist clarified, asking what the client was thinking.

The client explained that in her country of origin, therapy is neither common nor widely accepted. She also said that thought is perceived to happen in the heart rather than the head or brain in her culture. The therapist had assumed that the survivor was familiar and comfortable with therapy and that she would understand and relate to English idioms. In future sessions, the therapist made an active effort to be mindful of assumptions and accept feedback from the client.



What assumptions have you made in your practice?

What role does curiosity play in your practice?

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Case Study #2: Diminishing Power Imbalances

A survivor presented to therapy initially seeking support after an acquaintance experienced sexual violence, though it soon became clear she was personally experiencing domestic violence. She had immigrated to the United States and spoke English as her second language. She commonly encountered racism and nationalism, which caused her significant harm.

While she had extensive education and a successful career in her country of origin, she had few applicable credentials and limited understanding of relevant systems in the U.S., which lead to significant power imbalances broadly and in her relationship.

Her history since immigrating was characterized by powerlessness, and her expectations around therapy seemed to reflect this. She was surprised when asked what her goals were, and she would apologize for crying, talking in sessions, and even “ruining” her therapist’s plans for sessions.

The therapist consistently encouraged the survivor to bring topics and needs to therapy and reminded her that therapy sessions were for her, not for the therapist. Over time, the survivor stopped apologizing and eventually began starting sessions by saying what she wanted to work on and assertively requesting support and resources. She also reported to her therapist with increasing frequency ways that she had stood up for herself and taken empowered action between sessions.



How can we identify power imbalances in practice?

Are there times when power imbalances are impossible to avoid or even necessary?

Case Study #3: Building Collaborative Relationships

A client presented to therapy at an agency where she was also attending group sessions led by the therapist assigned to work with her. Prior to beginning individual therapy, the client had approached the therapist after one group session and explained that the discussion that day had not met her needs, and she felt upset about it.

Before the intake session, the therapist confirmed with the client to ensure she was comfortable doing both individual and group therapy with the same therapist. At intake, the therapist referred to the conversation they had around the client's needs not being met in one group session, celebrating the client's willingness to express her needs. The therapist asked how they could work together to make sure her needs were met in individual therapy.

The client took an active role in treatment planning and regularly brought materials, topics, and questions to sessions. The therapist encouraged this and prioritized what the client brought to sessions. The therapist accepted feedback, consistently reinforced collaborative practices, and encouraged the survivor to continue taking an active role in her therapy.



What are some common barriers to building collaborative relationships in practice?

What are some creative ways you have navigated some of these barriers?



Questions to Prompt Self-Awareness

- What and how are you communicating?
- How do you feel physically, mentally, and emotionally?
- Are you present here and now, or there and then
- How comfortable are you with conflict?
- Are you aware of transference and countertransference?
- How does your identity/culture affect your work?

Strategies to Increase Cultural Humility

- Seek ongoing exploration and training.
- Engage in self-reflection and accept feedback.
- Cultivate awareness of personal biases.
- Take responsibility for educating yourself.
- Ask questions and approach with curiosity.
- Recognize how comprehensively culture shapes a person and their world view.

Before, During, and After Meeting with Clients

- Why do you do this work?
- What are your emotions telling you?
- What did you learn and how can you improve?
- What do you need in this moment?
- What is your goal with the words you are saying, and does your goal align with your client's goal?

