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Comprehensive Assessment of Paula Cortez

SOCW 6111: Advanced Clinical Social Work Practice

Comprehensive Assessment of Paula Cortez

Completing a thorough assessment is an important part of the intake process and engaging with a client to evaluate the presenting problems and develop a plan for treatment. There are a

variety of assessment models available to utilize, however a good assessment should focus on multiple areas and be well rounded reviewing the problems, strengths, weaknesses, and available resources. In the pages that follow I will discuss the case of Paula Cortez, review her strengths, and provide an analysis of her treatment team providers.

### **The Case of Paula Cortez**

This week we were presented with the case of Paula Cortez, a 43-year-old Latina female who was born in Colombia but immigrated to New York City. Paula ran away from home when she was 17 years old due to parental abuse (Plummer, Makris, & Brocksen, 2014). Paula began using illegal drugs shortly after she left her childhood home in Colombia and met a man named David, whom she followed to the US. David and Paula got married after she got pregnant with her first son Miguel, who is now 20. Paula was able to get sober during her pregnancy, however David continued to use drugs which caused their marriage to collapse. When Paula's son Miguel was 8 years old she learned that she was HIV positive and became too sick to take care of him. Making her situation more complicated was the fact that she was also diagnosed with Hepatitis C and Bipolar disorder (Plummer, Makris, & Brocksen, 2014). Paula recently learned that she is pregnant again and has decided to keep her baby due to her Catholic faith and viewing an ultrasound (Plummer, Makris, & Brocksen, 2014).

### **Assessment Tools**

While there are a variety of assessment tools available, I feel that a cultural assessment, specifically a culturagram would be very helpful with Paula's case. This would provide a visual

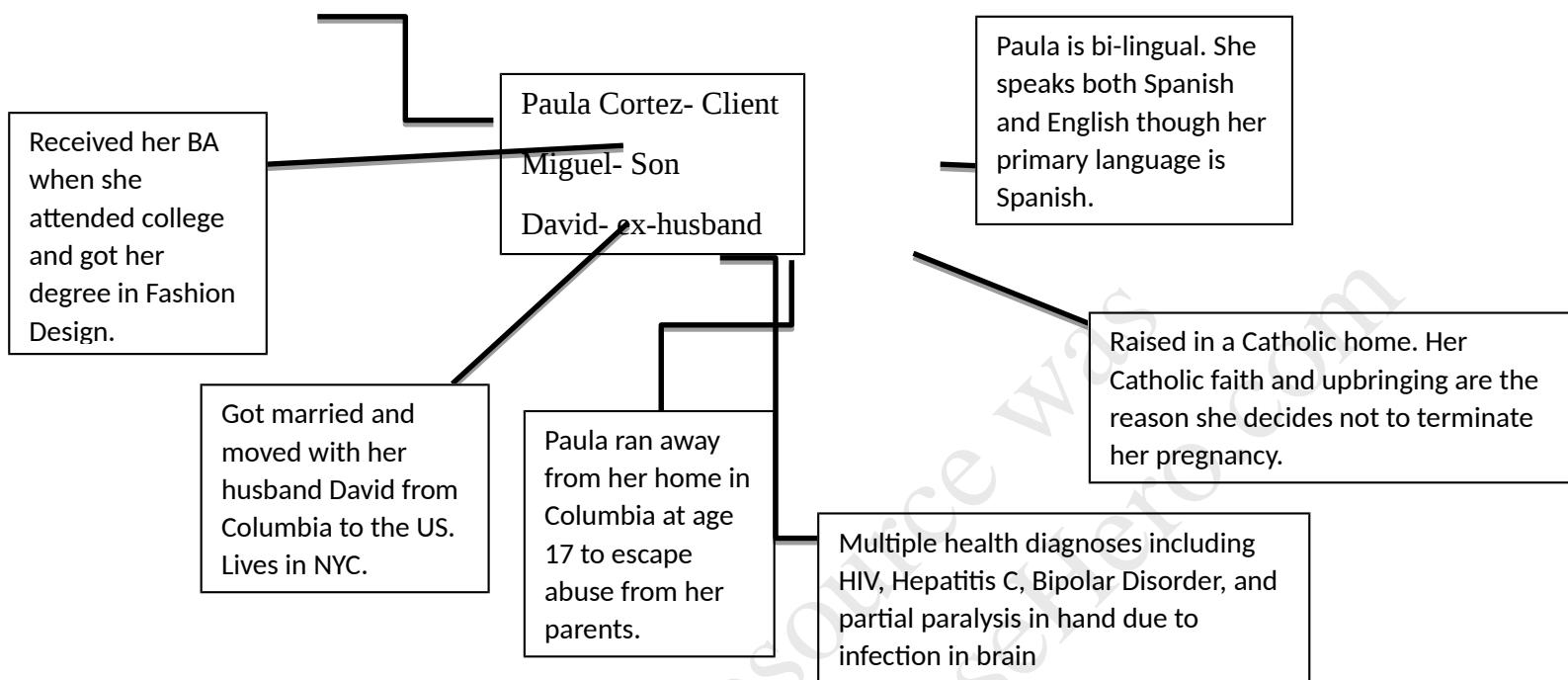
Paula's new boyfriend is abusive and controlling. Gets her pregnant.

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Paula has been in the US for over 20 years.

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representation of Paula's culture and the impact it has on her life. Having a thorough understanding of a client's background is crucial to a complete assessment (Congress, 2013). Paula's culturagram can be seen below.



I would also complete a strengths-based assessment that utilized a solutions focused method.

Solutions focused therapy has been shown to work well with mandated clients (Congress, 2013) and would be effective in developing interventions in Paula's treatment plan. Throughout the assessment interview I would assist Paula in identifying her main concerns as well as her goals for treatment and work to assist her in finding solutions to her presenting problems. An example would be assisting Paula in identifying that she will need assistance in caring for the baby and then identifying potential supports. One of Paula's needs is that she lacks an adequate support

system as most of her family does not reside in the United States and she does not have friends that are healthy. Linking Paula to child care programs that are subsidized or with in home health services that could check on her and the baby would be beneficial.

### **Paula's Treatment Team**

Paula's doctors felt very strongly that Paula should not carry the baby to term and should abort the baby due to her fragile medical condition. They did not feel that she could provide for the baby's needs and her own and therefore should choose to terminate her pregnancy (Plummer, Makris, & Brocksen, 2014). This was opposed to Paula's religious beliefs. The physicians were looking at the presenting problems from a medical model. The social worker on the team took a very person-centered approach with Paula, using an empowerment model and focusing on Paula's strengths to develop solutions. The social worker appeared to be using a strengths based model during her assessment of Paula (Plummer, Makris, & Brocksen, 2014).

### **Bias in Assessment**

When choosing an assessment and completing an evaluation there is always a potential for bias, not matter which model you choose. Each client brings his or her own set of issues to the table, its important that you are objective and focus on the issues at hand. In Paula's case, it would be easy to let her HIV status, prior drug use, and poor decision-making bias my opinion when making an evaluation of her. However, that would be a huge disservice to Paula, because those are only just a few small areas of concern and would be completely ignoring the many strengths

that she has. In order to refrain from allowing bias to impair my judgement I would remain self-aware and utilize clinical supervision to discuss cases that can be particularly challenging.

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- Cowger, C. D. (1994). Assessing client strengths: Clinical assessment for client empowerment. *Social Work*, 39(3), 262–268. Retrieved from the Walden Library databases.
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The Cortez Family (pp. 23–25) \