

Symposium

📅 Sun. Sep 28, 2025 1:10 PM - 2:40 PM JST | Sun. Sep 28, 2025 4:10 AM - 5:40 AM UTC 🏛️ Session Room 8 (Meeting Room 1)

[Symposium 99] (De)constructing the cultural other: professional responses to cultural diversity in mental healthcare interactions

Moderator: Norma Day-Vines (Johns Hopkins University)

[SY-99]

(De)constructing the cultural other: professional responses to cultural diversity in mental healthcare interactions

Hilde Depauw¹, Lotte Morel¹, Marjolein De Pau¹, Norma Day-Vines² (1.Universiteit Gent(Belgium), 2.Johns Hopkins University(United States of America))

[SY-99-01]

Psychotherapists' Discursive Constructions of Culture and Cultural Conversations in Therapy

*Hilde Depauw (Universiteit Gent(Belgium))

[SY-99-02]

Rethinking Othering: The Added Value of a Lacanian Psychoanalytical Perspective

*Lotte Morel (Ghent University(Belgium))

[SY-99-03]

Navigating Ethnic Diversity in Forensic Mental Health Care: A Qualitative Perspective on Professional Approaches and Needs

*Marjolein De Pau, Tom Vander Beken, Freya Vander Laenen, Stijn Vandeveldde, Hilde Depauw (Universiteit Gent(Belgium))

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Keywords : Therapist - client interactions、 Othering in mental healthcare、 Minoritised clients、 Anti-discriminatory practice

This symposium examines how professionals construct, interpret, and respond to cultural diversity in their therapeutic work, revealing both systematic gaps and emerging strategies across different mental health contexts. By examining micro-level interactions within healthcare settings, this session aims to reveal how these dynamics contribute to healthcare disparities and are shaped by broader structural barriers.

Presentations employ a diverse range of methodologies, including qualitative research (participant observations, thematic analysis, and discourse analysis) and quantitative studies, while incorporating insights from both the perspectives of healthcare providers and clients. The first presentation explores how community mental health teams construct the "cultural other" through focus group analysis, applying Lacanian psychoanalytic perspectives to postcolonial othering processes. The second study investigates forensic mental health professionals' experiences with ethnic diversity, documenting their informal strategies while highlighting the absence of formal organisational support and training. The third presentation analyses psychotherapists' discourse patterns when addressing culture, identifying distinct repertoires that professionals employ, mostly relying on intuition, personal experience, and improvised strategies to navigate cultural differences. The final study examines therapists versus minoritised clients' perceptions of how discussions about racial, ethnic, and cultural factors are initiated during treatment. Collectively, these studies reveal a consistent pattern: mental health professionals across forensic, community mental health centres, psychotherapy and counselling settings recognise the importance of cultural factors but lack systematic training and organisational frameworks to guide their practice.

Together, the presentations offer an empirically grounded analysis of how healthcare systems construct "otherness" and how structural-level inequalities permeate at interpersonal levels, enriching the narrative on healthcare disparities. As professionals' practices significantly impact care quality and can either perpetuate or challenge existing disparities, this symposium aims to highlight promising pathways toward culturally responsive care that move beyond "cultural sensitivity" to actively anti-discriminatory practice.

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[SY-99-01] Psychotherapists' Discursive Constructions of Culture and Cultural Conversations in Therapy

*Hilde Depauw (Universiteit Gent(Belgium))

Keywords : Critical Discursive Psychology、 Cultural Conversations、 Psychotherapists

The discrepancy between cultural diversity presented in clinical psychology education versus practice is pronounced, leading to therapists drawing on intuition and wider societal ideologies rather than professional training to confront the question of how to attend to cultural diversity in psychotherapy. This study unravels how psychotherapists deal with the dilemma of how to address and interpret 'culture' in their practice. Drawing on a critical social-psychological framework for discourse analysis, we analysed 31 semi-structured interviews with psychotherapists in Flanders, Belgium, and present the discursive patterns they articulated on cultural conversations. Therapists construct the importance of cultural conversations and position themselves while perpetuating wider societal discourse on cultural diversity in their clinical practice, relying on five different repertoires: an action hesitancy repertoire, an experience as expertise repertoire, a paternalistic repertoire, a self-evident repertoire and a de-culturalisation repertoire. Each repertoire has specific strengths and pitfalls for effective therapy with minoritised clients. As therapists are primary authorities in diagnosis and treatment, their practices greatly impact care quality and have the potential to either uphold or challenge existing disparities in mental healthcare.

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[SY-99-02] Rethinking Othering: The Added Value of a Lacanian Psychoanalytical Perspective

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Keywords : Othering、Lacanian Psychoanalysis、Qualitative research

Research shows that ethnic minority patients are often confronted with racism, significantly increasing their risk of developing mental health problems. At the same time, studies across Global North countries indicate that these groups receive far less, or inadequate, mental health care compared to dominant ethnic groups. Postcolonial scholars have identified the process of 'Othering' as a potential explanation—where different subject positions (hegemonic vs. subjugated) are produced through discursive practices. This study investigates how mental health professionals working in outpatient centers in Flanders, Belgium, construct the 'cultural' or 'racialized' Other, and the strategies they employ when working with these patients. By applying Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts—namely the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real—this study seeks to enrich postcolonial understandings of Othering by linking its societal dimensions with more individual, subjective processes. We conducted a thematic analysis of five focus group discussions with outpatient mental health teams across the five Flemish provinces. In these discussions, the figure of the cultural Other emerged as a 'hot topic'. While professionals expressed a strong need to address the challenges of working with ethnically diverse patients, there was also a marked fear of saying the wrong thing or overcomplicating the issues at stake. Different strategies for constructing the Other emerged: while all participants emphasized openness and curiosity, their practical approaches varied. Some professionals acknowledged their limitations and highlighted the singularity of each patient's experience. Others positioned themselves as experts in transcultural work, which risks what we term 'Othering to the second degree'—a dynamic in which professionals are divided into those perceived as competent in this work and those who are not.

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[SY-99-03] Navigating Ethnic Diversity in Forensic Mental Health Care: A Qualitative Perspective on Professional Approaches and Needs

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Keywords : Ethnic Diversity、 Forensic Mental Health Care、 Professional Approaches

The forensic mental health care system faces significant challenges in addressing the needs of clients from migrant and ethnic minority groups. This qualitative study explores how forensic mental health professionals navigate ethnic diversity, examining their experiences, approaches, and professional needs. Based on semi-structured interviews with 11 professionals and participatory observations across five forensic wards in Belgium, our findings revealed a lack of formal training in culturally sensitive care. While professionals commonly provide religious accommodations, language education, and non-verbal therapeutic strategies, few actively explore clients' normative views on mental health and transgressive behavior. Many acknowledge how their own identity and lived experience influence their practice and therapeutic relationships. However, no formal organizational policies support culturally sensitive care in forensic mental health services. Participants expressed a need for structured or experiential training, interdisciplinary collaboration, and greater diversity within forensic teams. These findings underscore the need for systemic changes, including policy development, anti-racism measures, and improved access to interpreter services. By addressing these gaps, forensic mental health services can better meet the needs of ethnically diverse client populations.