

Case 8.1

Identifying Information

Client Name: Nicole Gibson
Age: 25 years old
Ethnicity: African American
Marital Status: Single mother
Children: 2 children, ages 5 and 6

Background Information

Nicole Gibson is a 25-year-old single mother who has two children, a boy and a girl, aged 5 and 6, respectively. Nicole works for a nonprofit organization supported by AmeriCorp that offers self-improvement programs for at-risk youth. Green House is an organization designed to teach young people home-building skills while they earn minimum-wage salary and an annual stipend of \$4,000 to pay for college tuition and books. Additionally, the program provides paid time off to pursue a GED or high school diploma along with individual or group counseling opportunities several times a week. Nicole also participates in a program that allows her to live independently in a low-income housing unit while attending school and working.

Nicole is raising her two children on a salary of \$800 per month and an infrequent child-support check of \$200 per month. She has no telephone or car and must travel by public transportation to work and the day-care center. Traveling from her apartment to work, including dropping her children at the day-care center, requires her to take six buses each way every day. Nicole must get up at 4:30 A.M. in order to get her children to day care and herself to work by 8:30 A.M. She gets home at 7:30 at night, despite the fact that she finishes her work day at 4:30 in the afternoon.

As a case manager at the housing unit, you meet Nicole during a home visit. Nicole expresses a desire to obtain counseling to assist her with her life skills and family-of-origin issues that have made it difficult for her to function well at work. You agree to see her for counseling once a week for 2 hours. One hour will be used to assist Nicole

with life skills such as parenting and home maintenance skills. The second hour will be utilized for counseling.

Progress Note from Your First Session with Nicole

As a child, Nicole lived in New Orleans with her parents and older sister, Marcia. Nicole's parents remained married until she was a teenager. Nicole's father sexually abused her from the time she was 8 years old through her mid-teens. He forced her to have sexual intercourse with him approximately three times a week. Several of her father's friends were allowed to sexually abuse her as well.

Nicole's mother was physically, verbally, and mentally abusive, often striking her, calling her names, reading her private journals out loud to other family members, and watching her in the bathroom. On one occasion, Nicole's mother struck her across the face with a belt buckle, leaving a permanent scar above her upper lip. On another occasion, Nicole's mother took a poem that Nicole had written and submitted it to a magazine under her own name. Her mother claimed a prize but never acknowledged the fact that it was Nicole's poem. Her older sister was also physically and verbally abusive to her.

Nicole left home when she was 18 years old and married the father of her two children. She referred to this as "getting married to escape hell," stressing the fact that although she couldn't stop the "torture" of her family situation, she could leave it behind by getting married. She stated that she left the marriage because her husband was a very "passive" person, and she didn't want to turn into someone like her mother.

Before her marriage, she fell in love with a man named Douglas with whom she now has an estranged relationship. Nicole and Douglas were never sexually involved even though they have been intimately involved on and off for about 8 years. Nicole stated that sex makes her feel "dirty, ashamed, and sick to her stomach." She hasn't spoken with or seen Douglas for about 6 months, as he will not return her calls.

Nicole has severed all ties with her family of origin since if she speaks with them she will only end up “feeling like dirt and getting real mad.” Although Nicole is not involved at the present time in an intimate relationship, she does find support at her job with coworkers and has one close friend, Vickie, in whom she can confide.

Nicole has had difficulties at her job, however. She stated that she gets very upset when anyone gets “in her space.” When the pressures at work become more than Nicole can handle, she feels angry and panicky and “just wants to be left alone.”

During the first session, Nicole stated that she didn’t want to do anything but lie in bed. She stated that she often cries all weekend, becomes easily

angered by her children, and often resorts to yelling and spanking them.

Nicole also stated that she was having difficulty doing chores (e.g., going to the Laundromat or grocery store, cooking, cleaning). There were piles of laundry in her bedroom and trash everywhere, including old food, which reeked. She stated she has had difficulty sleeping at night due to recurrent nightmares of “childhood stuff” and always feels “too tired.” She avoids any situation that reminds her of “family stuff” but is afraid that she’s turning out just like her mother.

Nicole possesses a great deal of intelligence and has the ability to seek out support and help when it is needed. She also has a very good sense of humor that she displayed throughout the interview.

8.1-1 What diagnoses are you considering at this time? What will be your primary area(s) of exploration at the next session?

Second Session with Nicole

Nicole begins the second session with you by describing a situation that occurred during the week at work. A male coworker asked her if she would like to go out for dinner after work one evening, and when Nicole declined the invitation, the coworker lightly touched her shoulder and said, “Oh, come on Nicole, you need a little fun in your life.” Nicole states that she overreacted to this gesture by swinging at the man and striking him on his chest. She tells you she doesn’t know what came over her, but she felt like she was warding off an attack of some kind and couldn’t tolerate having this man touch her.

When you ask her if this type of thing has happened on other occasions, she admits that she doesn’t like to be touched by anyone. “It even bothers me sometimes if my own kids grab me when I’m not prepared for it.”

Nicole states that she was so upset by this incident that she stayed home from work the next day because she was just “too tired” to get there on time. “My supervisor gets real mad when I’m late, even though I tell him I can’t do anything about it

if the bus isn’t running on time. I just didn’t want to deal with it the other day.”

You ask her why she thinks she reacted so strongly to her coworker’s touching her the other day. Nicole pauses for several moments and then sighs deeply. “I think it’s related to all that ‘childhood stuff’ with my father. I just can’t get it out of my head. I think it’s going to haunt me for the rest of my life.”

Nicole describes several depressive episodes to you in which she felt she just couldn’t move because it took too much energy. During those times, she would forget to eat and would be unable to get to sleep until early in the morning. Her children would constantly ask her, “What’s wrong, Mommy? Why can’t you play with us?” Nicole states that her children’s comments made her feel like a “terrible mother.”

When you ask her about her goals for the future, Nicole states that she really doesn’t have any goals, although she would like to go to college and become a teacher. She says she isn’t sure she’ll live long enough to complete an education.

8.1-2 What are some of Nicole's strengths?

8.1-3 Are you concerned about the potential for Nicole to commit suicide? If so, how would you assess the potential for danger in her situation?

8.1-4 What resources might be available to assist Nicole?

8.1-5 What would be your preliminary diagnosis for Nicole?

8.1-6 What cultural and psychosocial factors may be impacting this diagnosis?

- For every Black woman that reports her rape, [at least](#) 15 Black women do not report.
- Approximately 60% of Black girls experience [sexual abuse](#) by age 18.
- According to a 2014 [study](#), about 22% of Black women reported being raped and 41% experienced other forms of [sexual violence](#).
- Black women students in [various academic settings](#) who reported experiencing rape: 16.5% in a high school sample and 36% in a college sample.

Case 8.2

Identifying Information

Client Name: Celia Fernandez
Age: 30 years old
Ethnicity: Hispanic
Marital Status: Single
Occupation: Computer customer representative

Intake Information

Celia Fernandez, a 30-year-old Hispanic woman, contacted the Family Crisis Center on the referral of her physician and her employer, First Express Computers. She stated that she would like to see a counselor to discuss her job situation and something that happened while she was working. She didn't want to give any further details. An appointment was scheduled for her to see you the following week.

Initial Interview and Assessment

Celia appears to be a young, attractive woman with long brown hair and a slender build. She is dressed in a light blue suit and jumps up from her chair when you greet her in the waiting room. She appears to be somewhat anxious about the session but also seems very willing and eager to talk with you. She tells you on the way to your office that she has been given time off from her job to come see you but that she only has an hour before she has to be back at work.

You ask her if she'd like something to drink, and she accepts a glass of water. "What brings you to the Family Crisis Center?" you begin.

Celia hesitates for a moment and then says, "My boss thinks it might be helpful if I come talk to you about some things that happened while I was attending a training session in Careyville for my job at the computer center. It was about 3 weeks ago."

You are familiar with Careyville, a large city approximately an hour north of town. Celia sounds anxious about what she is about to disclose, and you decide to slow her down a little so she doesn't tell you too much, too fast.

"So, you work for the computer center. What is your position there?" you ask.

"Right now, I am a customer representative. I've been there for 2 years, since I finished my associate degree in business from the community college. I have been working on the help line, which is a pretty stressful job, but I went to the main office in Careyville to get trained so I could become a software specialist."

"So, the computer center sent you for the training? Is that correct?" you inquire.

"Yes, it was a 4-week training. I was staying in Careyville during the week and coming home on the weekends," Celia tells you. "I live with my parents in Oakdale just north of town."

"Okay, and you're single. Is that right?" you say to Celia.

"Yes, I was dating someone, but I broke up with him about 2 or 3 weeks ago," Celia says with a dismal look on her face.

"Did something happen while you were in Careyville for the training?" you surmise.

"Well, yes, that's what I thought I'd better talk to someone about. You see, the company put me at this motel that was close to downtown so I could walk to the training every day. It wasn't a very nice motel, and it wasn't in a good part of town. It's especially dangerous at night. Anyway, I had been there the week before and gone home for the weekend. Then I came back for the second week of training. On Tuesday, I had been in a training session from 8 A.M. until 6 P.M., and by the time I got back to the motel it was around 7 P.M. I was really tired and decided I'd just call out for pizza since I didn't feel like going out to eat. The motel didn't have a restaurant or anything—just a front desk. So I called the pizza delivery place, and they said it would be about half an hour. Well, I took a shower and put on comfortable clothes, and there was a knock on the door. Since I was expecting the pizza delivery person, I just opened the door, and this guy just pushed his way into my room and slammed the door shut. I was absolutely terrified. He grabbed me and forced me onto the bed and told me he had a gun. I've never felt so scared in my entire life."

Celia stares out the window. Her eyes are full of tears. She has been talking in a steady voice and doesn't appear to be in distress. In fact, she appears to be lacking the affect that you would normally

expect to see in someone describing a terrifying event such as this one.

“Take your time, Celia,” you say in a comforting voice. “If it gets too uncomfortable for you, you can stop anytime.”

“I’m okay,” Celia replies. “He told me to take off my clothes. When I hesitated, he grabbed my shirt and ripped it down the front. I didn’t want to make him angry, so I took off my blouse and my skirt. He lay down on top of me and jerked my underwear down, and he raped me—first with his hand, and then he took off his pants and forced me to have intercourse with him. I was afraid he was going to kill me.”

“That must have been a terrifying experience for you,” you say gently.

“It was horrible, the worst day of my life,” Celia says evenly. “I guess I’ve just been telling myself I’m lucky to be alive. The phone rang.”

“The phone rang?” you say.

“Yes, the phone rang, and the guy asked me who was calling me,” Celia said. “I told him it was my husband. He got the idea that I lived there and my

husband must be in another room at the motel. I told him he would be coming to the room to get me for dinner if I didn’t answer the phone. Then there was a knock on the door, and it must have been the pizza delivery person. He put his hand over my mouth so I wouldn’t scream. For some reason, that scared him, and he grabbed me and threw me in the bathroom and closed the door. A minute or two later, I heard the outer door slam shut.”

“So, he left you in the room alone?” you ask.

“Yes, I waited a few more minutes—it felt like an eternity—and then I opened the bathroom door and he was gone,” Celia tells you.

“Then what did you do?” you ask.

“I had seen these two girls who looked like they were in town on business, and they had the two rooms next to mine. I didn’t trust the guy at the front desk, so I called the girl in the room next to me and was screaming that I had just been raped and needed help. She came flying out of her room and got her friend who started running down the street looking for the guy. They called the police and an ambulance, and I was rushed to the hospital.”

8.2-1 What diagnoses are you considering? How do you hope to direct the interview from this point?

Celia continues to remain very calm while she describes the events of that night. She blinks back her tears and says, “You know the thing that’s bothering me the most right now is that I have these times throughout the day when I don’t feel real. It’s the worst feeling.”

“What exactly do you mean when you say you ‘don’t feel real?’” you ask.

“Well, it’s like I’m observing myself from a distance. I’m watching myself like a third, disinterested party. It’s hard to describe, but it’s a very unreal feeling. Sometimes, I feel like I’m real but nothing else is. Like everything in my surroundings is unreal, like in a dream or something.”

“That sounds pretty disturbing. Does it happen when you’re thinking about your experience in Careyville?” you ask.

“There doesn’t seem to be any rhyme or reason as to when it happens,” Celia says calmly. “It just happens periodically throughout the day. I can be talking to a customer on the phone and suddenly feel

like this conversation isn’t really happening. Like I’m watching myself and I look like a cartoon character rather than a real person. It’s like I’m not really in the picture or I’m watching my body go through the motions, but my real self isn’t there at all.”

“Let me see if I understand. Sometimes you feel like you’re watching yourself from a distance, and at other times, you feel like things outside yourself aren’t real. Is that right, so far?” you ask.

“Yes, and I guess I just feel numb, almost like I’m made of rubber rather than flesh and blood a lot of the time these days,” Celia states.

You notice that Celia doesn’t look upset or anxious when telling you about these horrible events. In fact, she appears to be almost in a state of shock. “Can you tell me how you’ve been feeling since this terrifying incident took place?” you ask.

“Well, I’ve had to go back to Careyville on two occasions to talk to the investigators. The first time was before they had a suspect, and the second time I had to pick a man out of a lineup at the

police station and give a positive identification," Celia tells you with little expression in her voice.

"How did that make you feel to have to do that?" you ask.

"A little nervous, I guess, but I knew he couldn't see me, so it wasn't too bad," Celia replies. "I just want to forget about all of this and get on with my life."

"How have you been feeling since you've been back to work?" you ask.

"I've been okay except for that feeling like nothing is real or I'm not real. That bothers me a lot. I feel like I'm going 'crazy' or something. Sometimes, I have to lock up the store at night, and that makes me nervous. I told my boss I don't want to be the only one left alone if I've got to lock up. It reminds me of being alone at the motel, and I start to 'relieve' that night."

"How have you been sleeping since this incident occurred?" you ask.

"The first few nights after I came back from Careyville, I had a hard time getting to sleep, but after a week or so, it was better. But I'm still not able to sleep through the night without waking up with weird dreams that really scare me," Celia says. She slowly uncrosses her legs as though it requires a great deal of effort.

"Are there any other things that have become hard for you?" you ask.

"I did have some problems with my boyfriend touching me. I just didn't want anyone to touch me because it made me feel 'unreal,' and I don't think he could understand that at all. This whole thing just threw him for a loop, and I told him I didn't think we should see each other for a while. It was just too much for me to handle."

"Have you been feeling depressed or anxious about things?" you ask.

"I've been concerned about my job. My boss has been extremely nice to me since this incident happened, and I think it's because the company is worried that I'll sue them since it happened while I was working. It wasn't a good motel, and it was not in a good part of town, and they should have put me in a safer environment. I don't want to jeopardize my job, though, and the other women who work there are talking behind my back and making me real uncomfortable."

"What are they saying about you? Do you know?" you ask.

"Well, a friend of mine said she overheard a group of them talking about what happened to me and

that I was getting special treatment now," Celia says glumly. "I'm hoping I'll get transferred to another department soon, though, and get away from them."

"What about your family?" you ask. "How have they reacted to you?"

"My parents have been very supportive, but they think I should just put it behind me. I think they've tried to make me feel safe at home. They won't leave me there alone at night. That's probably good right now. I'd probably get nervous at night if I were by myself."

"Do you think about it a lot?" you ask.

"I try not to think about it at all. I try to get my mind on other things. I haven't been out much with my friends since this happened, and I probably need to start doing things with them pretty soon. I've just felt so weird and unreal that I haven't wanted to do much of anything," Celia says.

"Okay, so let me see if I can summarize what you've been telling me today. A man who broke into your motel room raped you while you were working in Careyville a little less than a month ago. Since then, you've been having feelings of observing yourself from a distance or feeling like everything is kind of unreal. Sometimes, you feel somewhat nervous about being alone either at work or at home, and you're not real sure about going out yet because of some of these 'unreal' feelings you've been experiencing. Is that correct so far?"

"Yes, exactly," Celia says.

"You've also been feeling kind of numb, like rubber almost. Is that correct?" you ask.

"Yes, like I'm not quite real," Celia says.

"But you haven't had any nightmares about the incident or felt real anxious or depressed? Is that right?" you ask.

"Yes, just numb, I guess," Celia responds.

"And you've been concerned about your job," you say.

"Yes, not that I think I'll lose my job, just what other people are thinking about me, I guess," Celia haltingly explains.

"Okay, and are there any other feelings you've had since the incident?" you ask one more time.

"No, that's about it," Celia says.

"Okay Celia, I'm really glad you felt you were able to come in and talk to me today. You are a very courageous person. It takes a lot of strength to deal with a traumatic event like the one you've been through. From what you've told me today, I think I can help you with those 'unreal' feelings

you've been having. Those feelings don't mean you're 'crazy.' It's not unusual for someone who has been through such a terrifying experience to have feelings like you're having."

Celia sits back in her chair and looks relieved for the first time during the session. "I'm so glad you don't think I'm crazy," she says. "And I feel better just having talked to you about the whole thing."

"I think it might be helpful if we set up an appointment for 1 day a week so we can work on those feelings of unreality. Would that be okay with you?" you ask.

"Yes, I'd like to come talk, and my boss said he'd give me the time off to come here," Celia states.

"Okay, we'll set up an appointment and see how things are going next week," you respond.

8.2-2 What impact has the sexual assault had on Celia's social support systems?

8.2-3 Are there aspects of her environment that you would like to explore more at the next session? Are you thinking of any particular areas that might require intervention?

8.2-4 What is your preliminary diagnosis for Celia?

8.2-5 Are there additional diagnoses that you would "watch out for" in working with Celia?
