

Developmental Case Conceptualization: Cecily R.

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Introduction

Cecily R. is a 24-year-old Puerto Rican woman diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Her current symptoms include night terrors, flashbacks to the triggering event, and physical symptoms when near objects that remind her of that event. While working as an adult film actress, Cecily experienced a traumatic incident where she was trapped on set as it caught fire. Through counseling, she hopes to regain sleep, manage hypervigilance, and build confidence in her life choices.

This paper will conceptualize Cecily's case using Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, identify cultural dynamics that could impact her treatment, and suggest strategies for Cecily's counseling journey. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) "posits that people learn from one another via observation, imitation, and modeling" (Wong et al., 2021). This approach will help Cecily build emotional regulation skills and encourage any necessary behavioral changes. Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory tracks development by dividing life into eight stages. This approach will assist Cecily in identifying how developmental gaps may contribute to her PTSD symptoms. Some studies have shown

Case Conceptualization

Cecily has been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to her traumatic experience of being trapped on a burning movie set, which includes symptoms such as intrusions (flashbacks and triggers of the event), avoidance (difficulty going to work), negative feelings about herself (thoughts of death and irrational blame regarding her involvement in the porn industry), and increased reactivity (irritability and hypervigilance). In PTSD, "intrusions of

memory, hypervigilance, and excessive arousal are experiences as fragmented mental states” (Siegel, 2020). Any theoretical approach should help Cecily address her symptoms and prevent them from interfering with her daily functioning. Cecily may decide to make lifestyle changes, and treatment plans should empower her to make that decision with confidence.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory (SLT) has served as a bridge between various cognitive and behavioral theories. This theory suggested a “structured approach to explore the effects of a continuous reciprocal interaction among cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors on human behavior” (Hu & Huang, 2024). SLT suggests that children primarily learn through experiencing and observing social interactions, which leads to imitation and modeling behavior. Social Learning Theory builds upon the understanding that “humans are active information processors and think about the relationship between their behavior and its consequences” (Wong et al., 2021). Humans utilize thoughts (also known as mediational processes) to analyze observed behaviors before deciding whether to imitate them. The four basic mediational processes include: attention (how much we notice the behavior), retention (how much we remember the behavior), reproduction (ability to imitate the behavior), and motivation (willingness to perform the behavior). SLT indicates that our minds observe behaviors, process their benefits, and replicate the most rewarding behaviors.

A social learning approach can help Cecily develop effective coping techniques, correct maladaptive beliefs, reinforce adaptive behaviors, and reclaim control. Cecily’s first goal mentions that she “wants to be able to sleep again without waking up thinking [she is] on fire.” An SLT-based approach to this goal would include interventions that focus on modeling, reinforcement, observational learning, and skill rehearsal. Cecily needs to build internal and

external perceptions of safety. Modeling could include a therapist modeling sleep routines during a session. This session should teach Cecily specific techniques such as deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and grounding visualizations. Reinforcement through trackers with milestones and small rewards would help Cecily feel supported in developing a safe sleep routine. Observational learning can come from videos or interactions with other PTSD survivors. Cecily can see others struggle and/or succeed in their healing, which builds her self-efficacy.

Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory

The Psychosocial Development Theory presents a model “emphasizing the challenges and tasks presented across one’s lifespan as key to understanding human development” (Wong et al., 2021). This theory posits that individuals pass through eight stages of development, each characterized by a unique psychosocial crisis. Successfully navigating these eight stages results in the development of virtue and personality.

While Cecily was growing up, many of these developmental stages were disrupted. Through counseling, she can reclaim control and combat her anxious hypervigilance. Cecily must be willing to work through each developmental stage with a counselor to address the negative outcomes from her childhood. For example, her early caregiving environment lacked safety and consistency. A psychosocial developmental approach would help her reestablish trust by creating a secure therapeutic alliance. This can alleviate her night terrors because the counselor can assist her in developing a safe sleeping environment. Her ability to develop autonomy as a toddler was chaotic and compromised by unsafe caregiving. Now that Cecily is exhibiting symptoms such as hypervigilance and triggers related to fire, counselors can employ techniques for self-reliance and independence. Interventions can include teaching breathing exercises, grounding techniques, and tapping. Role-playing can also help Cecily practice

responses to triggering situations. A psychosocial development approach can provide Cecily with the support and safety she needs to work through her PTSD and address her other goals.

Culturally Relevant Strategies

Many cultural factors influence Cecily's current symptoms and development. She is Puerto Rican, grew up in an environment marked by poverty and neglect, reports a current high socioeconomic status, works in the adult film industry, and lacks a stable family structure. Culture impacts clients throughout their development. During adolescence, young people become more aware of cultural differences and require support to navigate challenging situations that may conflict with these cultural factors. As they enter adulthood, they establish their sense of cultural identity. "A firm grasp of individual and ethnic identity can help individuals from an array of diverse cultural backgrounds navigate through challenging life experiences" (Wong et al., 2021). As counselors, we are ethically bound to provide culturally sensitive care or refer the individual to another counselor.

Two major cultural factors stand out in Cecily's case: her involvement in the adult film industry and her family culture. Because the details and nuances of the adult industry may be unknown to counselors, open-ended, non-judgmental questions are crucial for creating a safe environment. Culturally humble counselors are described as being "respectful and considerate of others and maintaining a genuine interest in, openness to, and desire to understand the other's perspective" (Benuto et al., 2021).

Cecily's early introduction to the adult film industry presents two important perspectives. First, her view of sex was both shaped by and influenced her involvement in the adult film industry. She experienced sexual abuse and assault starting at the age of 6. During these developmental stages (preschool, school-age, and adolescence), children often begin to develop

autonomy, confidence, and competence. “Women with childhood abuse histories are at increased risk for anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and they are more likely to engage in health-risk behaviors such as illicit drug use, risky sexual behavior, and attempted suicide” (Bosch et al., 2020). Because she could not determine **whether** she was engaging in sexual acts, Cecily used her independence to decide **when** to engage in sexual activities by entering the porn industry. Her attitude towards sex was shaped by the foundational belief that it was transactional. These attitudes and beliefs have now become part of Cecily’s culture.

To help treat Cecily’s PTSD, counselors should be mindful of these beliefs and how they affect Cecily’s treatment. A culturally sensitive SLT strategy might include finding videos of individuals who have left the adult film industry. As Cecily listens to them, she should pay attention to how they **make decisions**. Afterward, assign Cecily activities that acknowledge how she has exercised her autonomy regarding sex, work, and other life choices. As she becomes more aware and confident in her decisions, she can create a safe environment where her choices are respected.

Second, she entered the industry because she did not require any formal education. Since Cecily struggled in school and lacked family support, she sought career options that matched her abilities. Adolescents seek to understand themselves and their place in the world. Cecily chose this path in search of stability. A counselor should approach this cultural aspect with care. A culturally sensitive approach would involve educational activities that are nonjudgmental. For example, one of Cecily’s goals is to “stop watching everything that goes on around me like I am in some kind of stupid movie.” Developing coping mechanisms would help Cecily work toward this goal. However, these coping mechanisms should align with Cecily’s culture and her need for stability. A person from a stable family environment may use family connections as a coping

mechanism. For Cecily, a different coping mechanism may be needed, such as meditation, grounding, or visualization.

Above all, Cecily's culturally relevant factors may significantly influence her treatment plan. The counselor should approach treatment with an awareness of both self and others, coupled with a willingness to adapt it for Cecily's benefit.

Summary

Many lessons can be learned through this Developmental Case Conceptualization. First, a client's history may influence current symptoms and struggles. Second, all treatment plans should focus on the client's goals and well-being. Finally, effective counselors should be self-aware, non-judgmental, and willing to make reasonable adjustments for clients.

Cecily's symptoms and goals stem from a specific traumatic event as well as a traumatic upbringing. Her goals address symptoms that began after the traumatic event. A Social Learning approach can assist Cecily in developing safe and secure routines and relationships through observational learning and modeling. A Psychosocial Development approach can help Cecily confront her current trauma symptoms while mitigating the adverse effects of early developmental stages. Culturally relevant strategies can enable Cecily to build confidence in a supportive and safe environment.

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