

Scenario: Dr. D and Gabriella

From *Counseling the Culturally Diverse* (7th ed.) by Derald Wing Sue & David Sue, pp. 38-39.

The following is the third counseling session between Dr. D. (a white counselor) and Gabriella, a 29-year-old single Latina, who was born and raised in Brazil but came to the United States when she was 10 years old.

Dr. D: So how did it go last week with Russell (white boyfriend of 6 months)?

Gabriella: Okay, I guess (seems withdrawn and distracted).

Dr. D: You don't sound too sure to me.

Gabriella: What do you mean?

Dr. D: Well, from the last session, I understood that you were going to talk to him [Russell] about your decision to live together, but that you wanted to clarify what moving into his apartment meant for him.

Gabriella: I didn't get a chance to talk about it. I was going to bring it up, but I had another attack, so I didn't get a chance. It was awful (begins to in the chair)! Why does this always happen to me.

Dr. D: Tell me what happened.

Gabriella: I don't know. I had a disagreement with him, a big stupid argument over Jennifer Lopez's song "Booty."

Dr. D: "Booty"?

Gabriella: Yeah, he kept watching the video over and over on the computer. He loves the song, but I find it vulgar.

Dr. D: Lots of songs press the limits of decency nowadays... Tell me about the attack.

Gabriella: I don't know what happened. I lost control and started screaming at him. I threw dishes at him and started to cry. I couldn't breathe. Then it got really bad, and I could feel the heat rise in my chest. I was scared to death. Everything felt unreal and I felt like fainting. My mother used to suffer from similar episodes of *ataques*. Have I become like her?... God I hope not!

Dr. D: Sounds like you had another panic attack. Did you try the relaxation exercises we practiced?

Gabriella: No, how could I? I couldn't control myself. It was frightening. I started to cry and couldn't stop. Russell kept telling me to calm down. We finally made up and got it on.

Dr. D: I'm glad things got smoothed over. But you always say that you have no control over your attacks. We've spent lots of time on learning how to manage your panic attacks by nipping them in the bud... before they get out of control. Maybe some medication might help.

Gabriella: Yes, I know, but it doesn't seem to do any good. I just couldn't help it.

Dr. D: Did you try?

Gabriella: Do you think I enjoy the attacks (shouts)? How come I always feel worse when I come here? I feel blamed... Russell says I'm a typical emotional Latina. What am I to do? I come here to get help, and I just get no understanding (stated with much anger).

Dr. D: You're angry at me because I don't seem to be supportive of your predicament, and you think I'm blaming you. But I wonder if you have ever asked yourself how you contribute to the situation as well. Do you think that fighting over a song is the real issue here?

Gabriella: Maybe not, but I just don't feel like you understand.

Dr. D: Understand what?

Gabriella: Understand what it is like to be a Latina woman dealing with all those stereotypes. My parents don't want me living with Russell... they think he benefits from having sex with no commitment to marriage, and that I'm a fool. They think he is selfish and just wants a Latina... like a fetish...

Dr. D: I think it's more important what **you** think and want for yourself, not what your parents would like you to do. Be your own person. And we've talked about cultural differences before, in the first session, remember? Cultural differences are important, but it's more important to recognize that we are all human beings. Granted, you and I are different from one another, but most people share many more similarities than differences.

Gabriella: Yes, but can you really understand what's it like to be a Latina, the problems I deal with in my life? Aren't they important?

Dr. D: Of course I can. And of course they [differences] are... but let me tell you, I've worked with many Latinos in my practice. What it comes right down to it, we are all the same under the skin.

Gabriella: (period of silence)

Dr. D: Now, let's go back and talk about your panic attacks and what you can do to prevent and reduce them.