

**CASE NOTES; MALE FEMALE RELATIONS, WHO'S IN CONTROL? A FEMALE CLIENT SHARING IN THERAPY.**

Here is a brief vignette of a client's sharing. She came into therapy quite upset at what had happened, felt frightened, a bit ashamed, and wondered what should she do. After you read it, how would you answer her final question from your perspective?; What do you think she's feeling? What do you think the focus of therapy might be; and how could it best be explored?

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I feel trapped in my eight year marriage, and feel I have no freedom. I don't think my husband finds me attractive anymore, He never compliments me, and I'm feeling lonely. We have a traditional marriage. He works, is a good provider, but I'm feeling empty. We have no kids by mutual agreement. I am often told by my husband and my "friends" that I am too meek and unassertive.

I've been exploring going back to school, trying to find a direction but that is a slow process.

Last week he was going to be out of town on business and I decided to dress up and go to a nearby city, to a bar where some jazz was playing. I'm not exactly sure why, maybe to show that I'm not as meek as everyone says, not a wall flower, and that I don't have to just sit home but can enjoy myself and listen to music. . Maybe secretly I also wanted to see if anyone might find me attractive still.

Once there a man approached me. He seemed kind and nice. We made small talk. He complimented me on how I looked. I actually think I blushed, but it felt really nice. I was proud of myself for taking the initiative to go out. I took the initiative and asked him if he'd like to get some dinner. He said he was staying at the hotel, and we could order in room service if that would sound fun. I thought, why not?

I had a couple glasses of wine, but since I don't drink very much I felt a bit tipsy. I thought maybe it was time to say good night, thank him and head home. I felt I had shown courage and independence and that I wasn't meek. And I had shown that I was still attractive.

He said that would be fine, but did I feel I could drive, perhaps I could lie down for a few minutes and get some coffee. I agreed, and when he began to massage my shoulders, it felt comforting and tender. I enjoyed the touch. But I also sat up. I told him that I remember my mom saying to me when I was younger, "keep your shoes on, and on the floor." He laughed and said that was fine, whatever made me feel comfortable.

After about fifteen minutes when he started to remove my blouse to "massage your shoulders directly," I wanted to protest but it did feel enjoyable, and if I'm honest, I started feeling aroused, excited and fearful. Part of me kind of knew where this was heading, and wanted to let go and just enjoy. it a little bit longer.

Time sort of just stood still and it seems maybe an hour passed, and I asked myself what was holding me back. He was so patient and kind and gentle. Hadn't I wanted to be found attractive? Hadn't I actually sought this out I wondered?

When he asked me if I wanted to take my shoes off and relax a bit more, I did. We kissed and caressed for a long time. I snuggled into his arms and I felt very reassured and protected by him. I felt free from my husband's dominance, and indifference., from my parental strictness. I really wanted to let myself go. I took some initiative and put my hand on his leg. He did the same.

Yet part of me was still wrestling, feeling even at this moment confused, unsure. It felt things were going faster than I wanted. All of a sudden I gave a start, and looked at him and asked

“Who is in control here?”

Questions for students?

What would you say the main issues that need to be explore are? How would you show empathy, understanding for what she might be feeling? After inviting her to share her feelings how about the event, you might ask her what her goals her now?

If she asks, “Should I tell my husband”: what would you suggest and how would you proceed?

At some point it would be important to look at

--What are ways to share your concerns to your spouse that led to this: e.g her feeling his lack of attention and tenderness?

--How they could work on that? Her feelings of “lack of direction” and feeling maybe she was “unassertive” and what would be some positive ways she could work on that in terms of gaining a positive sense of control?

If a male therapist, what would be issues of transference and counter transference that you would want to be sensitive to?

**Commented [JS1]:** The question posed at the end is really interesting – it would be interesting how she answered it; how the man answered it; and how the therapy students reading the case might answer it. My counsel would be slow down! She is obviously not clear about who is in control, and especially with a stranger, no matter how “kind” he seems, it sounds like the woman started out with the intention to show she wasn’t unassertive, but wasn’t clear on her limits and boundaries. and that both of them ended up doing some “seducing”