

The case of Bernard

Bernard, a 45 year old male, is married to Rebecca, and they have two boys and two girls. He has a very successful career, and Rebecca is a stay-at-home mom. Bernard has been secretly visiting gay bars for the past 10 years. He has also been in a secret gay relationship for 5 years. Rebecca found out about Bernard's double life, and she confronted him.

Sara, his therapist, has traditional religious values and objects to gay relationships on moral grounds. Sara discloses this to Bernard during their first session as part of the informed consent process. Sara admits that she is not knowledgeable about gay relationships. She commits to researching the subject and consulting with her colleagues, who have more expertise in this area. Sara now believes that she is qualified to work with Bernard.

After the fifth therapeutic session, it is obvious that Bernard's psychological condition is deteriorating. Sara believes that to stop counseling Bernard or to terminate the therapeutic session before the final stage means that she has failed. Sara further believes that her existential approach and being a role model will teach Bernard acceptable societal values. Sara begins by taking Bernard to a popular restaurant where straight couples socialize. Sara also takes Bernard to her church, which emphasizes that marriage is a union between a man and woman. Bernard eventually appears to be receptive to the warm, empathic, and mentoring relationship Sara has established. Bernard expresses his gratitude, and Sara believes that counseling has been successful.

- What are the implications from a diversity perspective in this case?
- What are your thoughts about Sara's self-disclosure in this case?
- What ethical, legal, professional, and clinical issues does this case suggest?
- How would you counsel Bernard?

Commentary. Therapists ensure their competence to work with specific presenting problems and client types by undergoing appropriate education, training, and supervised practice. Sara was not competent to work with a gay or bisexual client. She blurred boundaries in her treatment plan for Bernard. It is both inappropriate and unprofessional to counsel a client based on the therapist's personal beliefs.