

Case Study #1 : Vee

Vee (they/them) is a 27-year-old, white nonbinary person who self-refers for therapy to request a “verification letter” (their words) to begin hormone replacement therapy. When assessed, Vee meets ICD-11 criteria for [gender incongruence of adolescence and adulthood](#), as well as Dysthymic Disorder (DD) and Generalized Anxiety disorder (GAD). Born and raised in the Sacramento area, Vee comes from a Russian American family of origin. Vee reports minimizing interactions with them due to their family’s conservative religious beliefs.

Vee has been married to Dana (she/her) for five years. Dana is white, 33, from a middle-class family, and owns her own veterinary practice. Vee describes Dana as “my best friend,” noting that Dana really “helped me to connect to queer culture” when they first met, and adding that “we used to have a lot of fun together” until their child, Frederica “Freddy” was born. Freddy is 3 years old. After Vee gave birth to Freddy, it was decided that Vee would become a stay-at-home parent since their income as a dog groomer barely exceeded the cost of daycare. Dana also has a firm belief about the importance of not utilizing daycare and having their child be home with one parent. Vee is financially dependent on Dana, who oversees all the finances for their family. Vee reports the family lives in a nice home and is financially stable, but Dana is critical of Vee “overspending” on household items and sets a very strict budget for Vee to follow.

Vee came out to Dana as nonbinary two years ago, but no one else yet. Vee explains that “Dana was actually really hurt when I came out,” and accused Vee of being “secretive” about their gender, and “lying to her about being a lesbian”. Vee notes that Dana gets really upset whenever the topic of Vee’s nonbinary identity arises, stalling Vee’s attempts to further their social and medical transition. When upset, Dana “argues” for hours until Vee concedes. Vee wants to come out to the couple’s friends, but Dana strongly disapproves, saying that it is too soon and claiming that their friends would not be supportive as “a lot of our friends don’t believe in that nonbinary stuff”.

Vee persisted in seeking an endocrinologist referral so they could start HRT (hormone replacement therapy). Dana checked their phone one evening and saw a reminder text from the doctor’s office. Dana became upset and told Vee, “I can’t support your mental health crisis. You’re clearly just anxious and aimless from being bored at home all day,” and insisted that Vee find a therapist to work with instead who could “evaluate” Vee. Dana claimed that if Vee was able to [get a letter from a mental health professional](#) who could “prove to me” that Vee’s identity was “medically real,” then Dana would reconsider her objections to Vee starting HRT. When you note that there seems to be tension with Dana, Vee acknowledges they sometimes think about trying to separate, but they don’t feel very hopeful because Dana has told them in the past that if the two ever split up, Dana would fight to get full custody and require Vee to pay child support.

Case study #2: Luis

Luis (he/him) is a 46-year-old Nicaraguan-American man who is monolingual Spanish speaking. He reports that he was previously married, in Nicaragua, and separated a few years later. He has one child from the marriage, a son named Antonio who is now an adult. Luis came to the US “several years ago” to escape political violence and seek better paying work, which he found in a machine shop. Due to Nicaragua’s “[denationalization policy](#)”, Luis cannot return to his home country to visit Antonio. The two have drifted apart in the years since Luis came to the US. Luis does have family in the US (four of his six siblings live here), but one sibling is in LA and the rest are on the East Coast. Luis reports he often feels lonely despite trying to make friends here; between the language barrier and his coworkers being busy with their families, he ends up focusing on building romantic relationships.

Luis shares more about his relationship with his ex-girlfriend, Anita (43, she/her) who is Mexican American and a US citizen. They began dating 6 years ago and lived together for 4 years. During that time, Anita insisted it was Luis’s role to cover both of their expenses since he was ‘the man of the house,’ even though she had a good income as an engineer. Luis describes frequent tension in the relationship and that Anita often escalated arguments by ‘screaming at me,’ throwing things, and causing minor property damage. On a few occasions she slapped him in the face. This behavior reminded him of his ex-wife back home. Growing up, Luis also witnessed his father yelling and punching walls. Luis acknowledges that “the fights were ugly” with Anita, but when things were calm, he liked the companionship. Luis also spent time with Anita’s friends, although he never felt totally comfortable since many of them preferred to speak in English and sometimes seemed to make jokes at his expense. Despite the “ups and downs,” Luis felt the relationship was going okay until two years ago when he found out that Anita cheated on him with one of her friends. When he confronted her, Anita retorted that Luis was not an adequate partner to her and she had to go elsewhere, so it was his fault she cheated. She added that she felt insecure because he was gone so much and she would only feel better if Luis agreed to the following conditions: him staying at home on the weekends, sharing his phone location 24/7, and checking in with her during every break at work. Luis agreed out of guilt and a desire to “save the relationship”.

However, Anita’s behavior continued to escalate; arguments became more frequent and severe, she began threatening harm, and she began destroying his possessions. Luis became worried she would hurt him, or hurt herself and blame him, and about six months after Anita cheated, Luis decided to leave. Once he moved out, though, Anita began stalking him. She sent him harassing text messages throughout the day and frequently drove by his new apartment or even had friends drive by. She also demanded that he continue to support her financially and threatened to send his information to ICE if he didn’t comply. Luis reported the blackmail has been relentless and he has no more savings left but Anita continues to hound him. He is also very worried that she will follow through with her threat of reporting him to ICE, simply out of spite. He has thought of getting a restraining order, but the paperwork is really complicated and it’s all in English; a *notario* said they could help fill it out for \$2,500 with an additional \$1,000 filing fee which he can’t afford.

Case study 3: Jessica

Jessica (she/her) is a 36 year old Black woman who lives with her husband of twelve years, Dan, and the couple's two dogs. Jessica's family of origin is from Tennessee. She works full-time as a dental hygienist. Dan (47) is white and works as a law enforcement officer. His family of origin is from Montana. Jessica is seeking therapy related to depressed mood and explains she's been having some trouble conceiving (infertility). In the past few years both Dan and her family have been making critical remarks about her lack of children, and Jessica describes feelings of shame and inadequacy. Family members often assure her that "it's in God's hands" and she needs to "pray on it". Jessica became pregnant once, about a year ago, but ended up miscarrying after 7 weeks. Jessica expresses fear that "I'm too negative" which is impacting her health; however, she is wary of continuing to access medical care due to negative experiences with doctors being dismissive of her concerns and saying racist things.

Jessica describes how being with Dan can be challenging at times but she feels he wants to be a supportive partner. For instance, if he is critical of how she eats or exercises, Jessica interprets this as "trying to make me better" or healthier. She notes that he does sometimes use unkind language but rolls her eyes and says "that's just how he is". She notes that she likes how "manly" he is, although occasionally he "takes it too far". For instance, he has choked her during sex, without her consent, on a few occasions. Jessica downplays this and says it was never to the point of her blacking out or not being able to breathe for longer than a few seconds. She does feel frustrated sometimes with how "old school" he is in terms of not being very emotionally supportive. She shares how, after she miscarried, he appeared upset and made comments about how she was "worthless" to him. He then went to the shooting range with his friends and came back seeming calmer. Jessica notes that this experience caused her to feel very sad and upset but she doesn't want to be "selfish" and wants to see his point of view, too. She reasons that "he must have been really sad, too" and that she's glad he has friends to support him.

Although Jessica empathizes with Dan, lately she's felt more uncertain around him. For instance, one day she got to leave work early and went for coffee with a friend. While sitting on the patio facing the street, she thought she saw one of his coworkers drive by in an unmarked car – then noticed that same coworker seeming to circle the block. Another time, she told Dan she was going to the store and ended up stopping at the bank as well; Dan asked her why she had gone to the bank, too, saying that he saw her transactions on her debit card – but she didn't use her debit card at the bank. Jessica feels like Dan does not respect her privacy and noted that he often expects for her to "hand over my phone for him to review". In the past he got "really upset" at Jessica messaging a male cousin and accused her of cheating. Jessica has stopped seeing or messaging any of her male friends, coworkers, or even family members to forestall accusations of cheating. When you express concern over Dan's controlling actions, Jessica defends him and states that "his ex wife cheated on him so he's got some trust issues" and she's happy to do what he asks if it will "keep the peace".