

# STREAM INQUIRY:



A Case of  
Transgenerational  
Somatic Recall

This story is shared with the consent of the client with whom I worked. It's the story of a person with a vulva who came to me because of painful sex and a tight pelvic floor. She (her preferred pronoun) had never been pregnant and had no history of vaginal injury. During our intake, she told me that her hips had always been tight, and sex had been painful from the very beginning.

She told me she had no history of sexual abuse or trauma. This seemed unlikely, since the moment I barely touched her outer hip muscle (tensor fascia lata or TFL for short), she nearly jumped off my massage table. Sublimated notions of sexual permission and self-esteem live near this muscle, at least in my way of mapping the emotional body.

I wanted to know more. I asked if my client had been educated in a Catholic school. Over the years, I've noticed a very particular flavor of jumpy response, typically found in Catholic school survivors. It's quite specific, distinct from other strict religious upbringings such as Mormonism or fundamentalist Christianity. She told me she was raised in a traditional Catholic family, as I noted silently that TFL and adductor muscles rarely lie.

But this is where it gets interesting - my client told me she would faint at the very mention or even the thought of childbirth in her past. She would have to leave the room if one of her friends began to tell a birth story or worry about pregnancy, for fear of losing consciousness. Since the world is full of people and some of them are pregnant, she felt compelled to normalize her ability to be around pregnancy. To deal with her extreme reaction my client took a hypnobirthing class (and was the only non-pregnant person there).

Her hypnobirthing adventure worked, and now she was able to contemplate pregnancy, see a pregnant person, and hear about childbirth while maintaining normal consciousness. I noted this with interest but deferred judgment until I had the opportunity to examine her pelvic floor muscles (PFMs). As she lay face up, I got onto the massage table with her legs straddling mine. My legs were straddling the table. I asked her to relax, and although she seemed quite at ease, she was unable to let go of the tension in her inner thighs and buttocks. As we worked, I found her PFMs were extremely tight, both back-to-front (pubococcygeus muscles) and at the sides of her vaginal walls (obturator internus muscles).

It felt like she had tight rings of rubbery calamari inside her vaginal opening (introitus), and the top of her vagina (vaginal vault) felt like it was grinding into her vaginal floor. It was easy to understand why penetrative sex was painful. This tension felt like what used to be called vaginismus, and I told her so. She was very inquisitive and said she didn't understand why she should be holding such extraordinary muscular tension.

She told me sex had been so painful she had learned to anticipate pain, which made her tighten up even more. After wincing during slow, well-lubricated, and shallow penetration with my gloved index finger, my client relaxed a bit. I asked her if she actually felt any pain, and she said no, but just the anticipation made her wince.

I held my finger on a muscle on the side of her vaginal wall (obturator internus or OI). When penetration is painful, this muscle is often the culprit. Rather than massaging it at all, I just held my finger there with no agenda other than to see what might happen if I simply gave this muscle my full attention. Then I felt her OI begin to unwind in a gyroscopic motion like it was doing a dance in the shape of an infinity symbol. I stayed with this contact as her whole right leg let go, and her hips opened up.

The weight of her legs on mine got heavier, which told me she was connecting to her mental map of self. She had found the agency to release at will. Now that she was able to deliberately let go, she told me she had never been able to "make herself" relax before this moment. She'd endured twenty-five years of painful sex as a result.

Next – and to my amazement - she told me her mother had been forced to clamp her legs tightly together while she (my client) was being born. Her mother's attending OB had gone home for the night, and the hospital staff was not anticipating that birth was imminent. It was a strict Catholic hospital, and not one of her mother's attending nurses (who were nuns) was prepared to catch her baby for fear of being chastised for working outside their scope of practice.

My client's mother was told to squeeze her legs together and pray not to give birth until the Doctor arrived. So she did. This memory emerged seemingly out-of-context, which I've come to recognize as a hallmark of somatic recall or body-memory. It surprised both my client and me, and the unpremeditated nature of the memory is another hint that emerged from her body, rather than her cognitive awareness.

I suspect my client's body encoded and retained the memory of her mother's extreme fear and discomfort while giving birth to her. She stored the somatic recall of her mother's experience as acute tension in her own pelvic floor muscles. So much so, this became deeply ingrained as a habit that haunted her entire sexual history. Nothing else explained her aversion to the mention of childbirth, such that she needed desensitization to avoid fainting at the mention of the word.

I believe this event was our smoking gun, causing my client's seemingly irresolvable pelvic floor tension. It was my first experience of transgenerational somatic recall. It got me thinking - how many of us carry these kinds of transgenerational memories in our bodies? Seven weeks later, I got this email:

Hi Ellen,

I want to give you an update since our session. I waited this long because I wanted to have something solid to report. I have been fascia blasting for a couple of months now, so I assume the walnut sized fascia lump is gone. I read up on fascia blasting and started blasting all over my body, legs, abs, hips, even arms. I noticed after a few days that I felt very emotional but didn't initially tie it to blasting. A friend also started fascia blasting around the same time and she mentioned that she was depressed and sad and I thought there might be a connection so I did some research and found that working on your fascia can often cause emotional release. I decided to continue (better out than in) and in a couple of weeks I felt much better. I now blast regularly without physical pain or emotional upset.

I have been massaging the 'biceps', obturator internus muscles with castor oil almost every day and have noticed that I don't get micro tears anymore. That's huge! I also noticed that sex felt a bit more comfortable and less tight. I've also had multiple orgasms and that's new. Whooo-woo!

I also had an experience during a breathwork session that was profound, and I'm sure had I not done the work with you would not have happened. I took a weekend workshop about Birth and Relationships. I have taken the workshop a couple of times before and even taught it once so I'm familiar with the material. I think I shared with you during our session that I am what's known as a held back birth. In other words I was crowning and my mother had started pushing but was told by nurses to stop until the doctor arrived, I think it was some time until he did so I was essentially stuck in the vagina struggling to get out and being held in against the contractions.

During the breathwork session I felt a huge pressure building in my vagina, obviously there was nothing there physically but energetically it felt as real as can be. The pressure grew until it felt like there was a big head stuck there. It wasn't painful but very heavy pressure. The facilitator coached me to let it go but nothing worked until I intuitively started to 'push'.

I know that sounds mad but I dug my heels into the bed and started to push as if I was giving birth (which I never have) and quite quickly the sensation started to move until it was all the way out. Almost immediately it felt like there was a smaller but just as heavy pressure, like a thumb pressing on the left edge of my vagina and I felt intuitively that was where I caused a tear in my mother during delivery. I did some more breathing and that also released.

Ever since then sex has been completely different. The tight ring is gone, there is much more sensation and I no longer brace against anticipated pain. It's like my body is working with me instead of against me. The session with you, everything we discussed and everything you recommended opened me enough physically and emotionally to make the final piece connected to my birth possible. I cannot thank you enough, it all feels miraculous.

In deep gratitude,  
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