

Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy, Sex Therapy and a Dominatrix's Dungeon, Helping a Couple Navigate Discrepant Sexual Desires

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I saw Rob and Elyssa, a white cisgender heterosexual couple, in couple's therapy over the course of 6 years. My approach involved integrating Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFT) with sex therapy to help them reconnect emotionally, heal from a relational wound and integrate a discrepant sexual desire into their shared life. After the first year of using primarily EFT to help them de-escalate and feel somewhat more deeply bonded and securely attached, Rob dared to reveal in the therapy his aching desire for BDSM, particularly but not exclusively his longing to be intensely spanked. The focus of the sex therapy work was on helping them find a way to integrate Rob's desires for kink, this unactualized erotic part of himself, into their sexual life together.

I will reflect on the goals of sex therapy and the relationship between BDSM and what Avgi Saketopoulou calls the experience of "overwhelm" and its healing potential. Saketopoulou describes "overwhelm" as a dysregulated state that can be created "when escalating excitations are pushed to the limit." The "more and more" of BDSM experience can create states of overwhelm which may induce "significant psychic transformations." This conceptualization provides one way to understand the profound allure of BDSM for Rob.

Lastly, the presentation will describe some of the specific challenges that frequently come up for therapists when working with BDSM. In addition, I will address the overlooked issue of the impact of the couple's sexual life on the therapist's own sexuality, how to think about this and why we do not talk about this more in our field. Looking at how deep work with our clients on their erotic lives can shape our own erotic life is a rich clinical question deserving of greater attention.

BEHAVIORAL LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Name two unmet attachment needs that frequently underly emotional distress in a couple.
2. Describe the primary focus and goal of the interventions used in EFT.
3. Identify EFT's view of the relationship between attachment and desire
4. Identify one possible therapeutic intervention for working with a couple when one member is interested in BDSM and the other is not

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Wendy E. Miller is a psychologist, psychoanalyst and an AASECT certified sex therapist (CST) with over 35 years of experience working with individuals and couples. She received her PhD from George Washington University in 1985 and is a graduate of the NYU Postdoctoral Program in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis. She has trained extensively in Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy as well as with the Tavistock Center for Couple Relationships in London. Currently, Dr. Miller is on the faculty of The Women's Therapy Centre Institute where she teaches classes on human sexuality in the two-year postgraduate program. She is a member of the Executive Committee of The Center for Optimal Living in NYC, where she also consults on issues involving couples and the link between sexuality and drug use. She has taught and given professional trainings on sexuality and out of control sexual behavior and runs a sexual health group for men struggling with OCSB. Dr. Miller is a therapy and research collaborator with Dr. Peggy Kleinplatz's Optimal Sexual Experiences Research Team of the University of Ottawa and conducts couple therapy groups based on this model for couples who want to improve their sex life. Her chapter, *Treating No-Sex Couples: Integrating Emotionally Focused Therapy with Sexuality Counseling*, was published in Tammy Nelson's recently released book, *Integrative Sex and Couples Therapy*. Her interests are in the intersection of psychoanalytic thinking, sex therapy and couples therapy. Her passion is helping people navigate the complicated task of being a couple and the even more complicated task of being a sexually vibrant couple. She has a private practice in N.Y.C.

DISCUSSANT

Ursula Ofman, PysD

Dr. Ursula Ofman is a Clinical Psychologist and Sex Therapist in private telehealth practice in New York City. A German native she came to New York City to study with Helen Singer Kaplan at the Human Sexuality Program at New York Hospital on a Fulbright grant. She subsequently continued to work with clients and co-ordinate

outcome research with Dr. Kaplan for a decade. She received her PsyD from Rutgers University and went on to work with HIV patients at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Later she completed a fellowship in psycho-oncology there, working with patients with urologic cancers. Dr. Ofman has been in private practice in New York since the early 1990's.