



Monsters in Love and Sex

This is for the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists. So, after setting the context with history, sociology, et al., your audience will expect you to provide them with insights and guidance for their professional practices.

One such focus could include providing multiple examples of:

- What couples and individuals say, think, and imagine is their issue.
- What is clearly visible to them and the therapist through the window.
- What is not visible, but what is actually happening, because of WBS, history, etc.
- How to look for and spot these things.
- How to raise these items, talk about them, and interrogate them with clients.
- How to educate clients about these unseen things.
- How to handle clients' shock and surprise when they discover that what they thought was the issue isn't the issue—or what they thought was personal was something much larger. (This slightly parallels couples who come in thinking they have a problem of communication or expectations, but the actual problem is that one of the people has BPD or APD or serious NPD.)

Spend roughly the first hour exploring and talking with the interviewer about the foundational pieces. Say something like, I want to explore some foundational pieces first. Because unless people understand these underpinnings, everything else about dealing with couples isn't always going to make sense. Then you can spend the last hour and a half to two hours fielding questions about the foundational pieces, and discussing the other questions that the AASECT people sent.



The Central Concepts Around Sovereignty

- We typically give credence to things like sex drive, compatibility, and so on. These have some validity, but they've crowded out other pieces, like the historical questions of who has sovereignty over themselves and who has sovereignty over others.
- There is a meta-narrative into which both white-body supremacy and patriarchy fit. That meta-narrative is: *Certain people get to have sovereignty over the bodies of other people.* If you accept that narrative, it cascades through every relationship you have. It impacts what happens in peoples' bedrooms, lives, and understandings. But this narrative has become decontextualized and appears to be personal. In fact, it is historical, intergenerational, and persistent and institutional.
- Someone can shed certain specific manifestations of that narrative, such as white-body supremacy and patriarchy, yet still carry the meta-narrative around in their body and head. And that shows up in peoples' bedrooms. This is the foundation for all of what I'll talk about today.
- If we trace all of this back far enough, to the Middle Ages, we see that it started with the king or queen having absolute sovereignty over the bodies of serfs. Because what is a king or queen? A sovereign.
- Absolute sovereignty over other bodies is what many white people believe they should have. That is their understanding of freedom—sovereignty over others. That's why, for many people, "freedom" means restricting abortion for others, or pulling books off library shelves, or refusing service to gay people—or the conviction that they have the right to their partner's body when they get horny.
- Most of us are willing to let other people to borrow our sovereignty over ourselves if we believe it will get us what we want. We trade our sovereignty for security, or money, or the continuation of a relationship, or praise, or all kinds of other things. With our partner, we might do this temporarily, in certain situations—or it might be part of the foundation of the relationship.
- People may try to dodge an awareness of this by saying, *I don't need access to your body all the time—just when I'm horny. I don't want to own your body; I just want a time share.* But that's not how it works. Instead, you need to learn to manage your own erection or your own wet pussy.
- This operates horizontally as well as vertically. It's easy to see how this issue of sovereignty plays out with white bodies vs. bodies of culture, or male bodies vs. non-male bodies. But we've all ingested these pieces around sovereignty, because they're in the air and water. They can appear in our relationships with family members, with friends, and especially with our partners.



What This Means for Therapists

- All of this can show up in couples' bedrooms—and then in the therapy room.
- Many of us believe, without even being aware of it, that we're entitled to another's body. We're particularly unaware of where this belief comes from. It's not biological. It's been passed down for many centuries and many generations as a relationship between the powerful and the powerless or less powerful.
- In my book *Monsters in Love*, there's a story about a hetero couple in my therapy office. The man complains that his wife doesn't want to have sex. Eventually he says that she should have sex with him because she's his wife. So I ask him, "Okay, so you want to screw her because she's your wife. At what point did you stop wanting to screw her because you wanted *her*? When was the last time you sent her a vibe that said, *You're awesome, step into my arms?*" He said, "Ten years ago." It is any wonder that his wife no longer wanted to have sex with him? Sex had stopped being about attraction and connection and joy. To the husband, it had become a matter of sovereignty.
- □ If a partner thinks that sovereignty is knitted into their role as husband or wife or partner, and that this is what they signed up for, it's not going to produce electrifying sex. No one gets turned on by being told, *It says here in our marriage contract that you have to screw me*. Especially since it doesn't say that.
- This is why contracts don't work in therapy. Some therapists think that a contract is a solution. They'll tell a couple, *Contract to have a date every Thursday night*. Suddenly what could have been fun has been turned into a contractual obligation. Then both people give up their sovereignty—not to another human being, but to an obligation. That's not going to get anybody hard or wet. And then therapists wonder why both people, when they come back the next week, are furious at each other, and one of them has gone on Ashley Madison.
- When these things show up in your office, if you haven't done your reps—using the personal and communal practices and toys—you may not be able to see this clearly in your clients. **Here delineate what the practices and toys are.**
- This includes your *communal* development as a human being and as a therapist. So, regularly get together with one or two or three other therapists and do the reps—the practices and toys—together.
- If you have a white body, do this with other white-bodied therapists. If you have a body of culture, do it with other therapists with bodies of culture. If you have a Black body, you may want to do this with other Black-bodied therapists. **Explain why, for these purposes, it's important for white bodies to do the reps together and for bodies of culture to do the reps together.**
- This issue of giving away our own sovereignty plays out with therapists in another way. If you're not careful, the therapist/client relationship can turn into a sovereign relationship. Because people and couples come to your office thinking that you have all the answers. So they're willing to turn themselves and their bodies over to you in order to help them get out of a particular conundrum, or to something that's happening in the bedroom. You need to resist this.



- What can end up happening is that the therapist says, *Yes, I can help you through this. It's wise for me to have some dominion over your bodies, because I know certain things and have certain powers.* When a therapist does this, they give couples more of what's making them sick. You lock their conundrum in tighter. Because the underlying issue is about one body having dominion over another.
- What many people need to stop doing is turning sovereignty over their body or their life to somebody else in any context or relationship.
- I'm starting from the cosmological and the philosophical energy around blackness: the blackness of creation, like the blackness of a seed in the ground—the potential, the emergence of something. It's the blackness of the womb, not the tomb.
- Racialized charge thwarts that emergence. It doesn't kill it; it does not have the capacity to destroy it. It can only thwart it and manipulate it and squirt it out the sides.
- In the US, racialized charge is a thwarting energy in which race and rape have long been intertwined.
- Plantations were literally rape factories. America was founded on rape as product, rape as production, rape as producing a product that would work for you for free for the next 30, 40, 50, 60. And, in the process, they would also breed more people for you.
- One of the organizing structures of sexuality in America was having unfettered access to other people's bodies. Many people—and all Black people on plantations—did not have any sovereignty over their own bodies. Plantation owners felt, *I should have dominion over your body; that is my birthright.* Today many white Americans still feel this way.
- And it's not just about Black bodies. A parallel idea among many white Americans men is, *We need to have more white babies.* This too is fueled by the plantation ethos. People think, *I should have unfettered access to white bodies that attract me, and if I don't, then you're a white traitor bitch. Because you don't want to have sex with me, a virile, upstanding, pure white man.*
- Since before Europeans landed on these shores, white women have been in danger at the hands of white men who were acculturated to believe that women are only an appendage to them. They're just Adam's rib. That they don't have efficacy or sense of dominion over their own bodies; they only have that to the degree that white men give it to them.
- That tension got assuaged by the introduction of the Black body. By giving poor white people dominion over the Black body, they were able to emulate the relationship of wealthy, powerful white men over white women and poor white workers.
- This sovereignty issue is huge and intergenerational.
- Racialized charge also has a huge impact on sex in white couples because the dominion and sovereignty piece is operating in the background, but rarely gets talked about. The only time most people talk about sovereignty is when they're talking about abortion.
- Although this sense of being entitled to dominion over another person's body was originally highly racialized and genderized, it can play out regardless of race and gender. I see it play out all the time between two bodies of culture of the same gender.



- Imagine I'm a black man and I'm in a relationship with another black man, and part of that relationship is that we've been together and committed to each other for the past 15 years. And we are contending with high desire and low desire. As the high-desire partner, I might feel that, as a good man, I should be allowed to enter your body when I'm horny. If I'm a good provider, a good, supportive, loving person, I feel that I have earned that access and should have some dominion over your body. That dominion piece shows up as charge and goes uninterrogated. But it has emerged from centuries of enslavement and rape, playing out historically and intergenerationally.
- But we don't talk about or interrogate these things with our clients. Instead, we therapists focus entirely on the things that we think are happening in a relationship, like compatibility. Things like *Well, we've fallen out of love with each other; we have to rekindle that*. Meanwhile, a dozen or more generations of racialized charge, and expectations about dominion over others' bodies, are operating outside of these discussions.
- So much of sexuality in this country goes back to an uninterrogated sense of *This is my prerogative; this is what I deserve from you. I might have earned it because of what I've done, or because of who I am—because I'm white or male or both. And it's your job and obligation to give it to me*. It's not about ethics or love or intimacy; it's about a sense of ownership and entitlement. And there's an enormous charge to this.
- Americans love to talk about the founding fathers. But who wants to talk about the founding fathers as rapists? Because many of them were. They owned plantations and raped some of their human chattel.
- In the Black community, we have yet to interrogate how we've ingested pieces about dominion; we have yet to interrogate how it shows up in our attitudes about trans black bodies, about gay black bodies, about missing indigenous women and children. Like everyone else, we've ingested it so much, and it has been so decontextualized, that we don't even see it.
- The key word here is *dominion*. If you don't understand dominion, you don't understand any of this. And any sense of dominion over another person—any sense of deservedness, entitlement—is deeply immature. It's part of the deep cultural immaturity that's imbedded in both race and sexuality in America.
- This is something we all have to interrogate, metabolize, and grow up out of. And we have to not only do it individually, but communally—and as couples, both in and out of therapy.

