Case Study 1: Sara and Amy

Sara is White, middle-class and in her early thirties. She has been referred to you by her gynecologist because she is currently experiencing a lack of interest in a sexual relationship with her partner Amy. Sara has been living together with Amy for 1 year. Amy is Black and in her late thirties. The couple is very much in love and happy to have started a life together. Sara also reported that she is in good health overall. The only current medication that she takes is a daily multi-vitamin.

Having lost her job in corporate America, where she used to earn a good salary, Sara now maintains two jobs and works long hours. Amy works at a garden store. When Sara arrives at home, she is tired and sex is the last thing on her mind. At times, she feels like sex is just another chore on her “to do” list. Revealing feelings of rejection, Amy voiced frustration and sadness about being the initiator of all sexual activity in the couple’s relationship.

The couple explained that they have frequent arguments. They told you that all their arguments start because of Amy expressing how she wants sex more often. Sara gets very frustrated when arguing with Amy, because Amy is a yeller and loses her temper easily, and cannot let go of an issue. Sara says she would prefer to revisit a subject later than to go around in circles about it. The couple reported that after a couple of hours, Amy is able to calm down and they talk.

The couple is currently having sex once every two weeks. Sara does not have any experience with masturbation and prefers to just have partner sex instead.

Even though Amy was reluctant at first, she has accompanied Sara to the counseling appointment and they are open to your advice about whether they would come to therapy as a couple or Sara would attend the sessions individually. Amy’s initial reluctance was expressed in session when Sara explained that Amy said this is “her issue.”

The couple reports that sex is good, but that they are shy to talk about it. At this time, their love-making sessions last around 20 minutes. Sara reports that she has orgasms more than half of the times and that she enjoys being close to Amy when they are intimate. She reports that she likes affection, but she and Amy have not been affectionate outside the bedroom, because she is afraid a hug or kiss may lead to sex.

They also reported that they are good friends and rely on each other for life decisions. Sara tells you that she wants to enjoy sex and that her lack of sexual interest is putting a strain on her relationship.

The couple reported not much involvement in their local lesbian community. Both stated they rely mostly on each other for emotional, financial and other areas of support. The couple lives far away from both families. Only Amy’s family recognizes the couple’s lesbian relationship. Sara is an only child. She described growing up as difficult because her family was very conservative and deeply religious. They believe homosexuality is a sin. They do not believe in dating outside of one’s race either. Marriage and children are highly valued for a woman in the belief system of Sara’s family of origin.

Amy is the eldest of 3. Amy described her family as moderate and loosely religious. They do not have strong views either way on homosexuality. They value education for both women and men.