



**Wild & Sublime® Podcast, Season 2 Episode 23**  
**“My partner stopped wanting sex...”**  
**May 20, 2021**

**"My long-term partner stopped wanting sex a few years ago. I bring it up from time to time, but nothing happens...Suggestions?" Our panel of sexperts tackles this tough question from a supporter as part of our exclusive monthly Q&A for Patreon members. Plus, Karen's Sermon on the Pubic Mound on vulnerability and change.**

**Host: Karen Yates**

**Guests: Brandon Hunter-Haydon, Tazima Parris, Jason Best**

[Wild & Sublime theme music]

Brandon Hunter-Haydon

What are the ways — especially for long-term relationships who find themselves in these desire discrepancies, one of the top issues that people come to relationship therapy for — what are the ways that you get to see each other being courageous and strange? How are you having opportunities to witness each other, to witness within one another, these elements of being courageous, and elements of being strange? I think that's really important.

Karen Yates

Welcome to Wild & Sublime, a sexy spin on infotainment®, no matter your preferences, orientation, or relationship style, based on the popular live Chicago show. Each week, I'll chat about sex and relationships with citizens from the world of sex positivity. You'll hear meaningful conversation, dialogues that go deeper, and information that can help you become more free in your sexual expression. I'm sex educator Karen Yates.

Today, our panel considers a question from a person in a long-term sexless partnership. Plus my Sermon on the Pubic Mound® on the deeper story of what keeps us from vulnerability. Keep listening. If you're a Wild & Sublime fan and love what we do, consider joining The Afterglow, our Wild & Sublime community on Patreon. For as little as \$5 a month, you get my weekly audio creator notes, a bonus Q&A session with experts every month where you get to ask the questions, and more. Plus the tingly

feeling deep inside that you're helping to pollinate a sex-positive world. If a monthly membership is not your thing, consider throwing some bucks in the tip jar in appreciation for our work. More info is in the show notes.

Hi, folks. What do you do when your partner no longer wants to have sex with you? It's a difficult subject, and a common one. Sometimes we think we are alone, we are the only ones going through it. And that's simply not true. I thought I would present today a selection from our monthly Patreon Q&A panel. As I mentioned at the beginning, each month Wild & Sublime Patreon supporters get to submit anonymous questions that our rotating panel of sexperts answer, and then everyone receives the audio as juicy bonus content. Some membership levels can watch the live Zoom conversation and ask the panelists questions on the spot. What you'll hear today is one question of three that were answered back in November 2020. One panelist starts off by giving a full answer, and then we open the conversation up to everyone. You'll hear first from sex-positive therapist and intimacy coach Brandon Hunter-Haydon, who will then be joined by sex coach and pleasure mentor Tazima Parris, and sex-positive therapist Jason Best of Best Therapies, an inclusive group practice here in Chicago. Enjoy.

Brandon. [reading] "My long-term partner stopped wanting sex a few years ago. For a while I was patient, because I thought it was temporary due to things she was going through, but now I don't know. I bring it up from time to time, but nothing happens, and I'm frustrated. Any suggestions would be helpful."

Brandon Hunter-Haydon

Yeah. So the first challenge to this is — especially since I'm such a relational worker, too — is, ideally I would be in the room with someone, so that this could be really sort of a line of inquiry dialogue, a more gentle-paced exchange. And if I could really have my way, I'd have both people in the room with me to really handle this. But barring that, a couple of things that I'd want to notice too, just in the in the question, is I'd want to know what sex is. I want to know exactly what that is, what that has been like, what the history of that is between them. I also want to know, what were the things that were gone through? What were the circumstances? And what do they understand of their impacts, you know, that their partner had? And I also want to know, how is it brought up? Because the way something is brought up, the frequency, the tone, the timing, does it only come up when there's been a failed interaction, when there has been an overture and then that is rebuffed, and then it's brought up as an argument — you know, does it come up as more of a passive-aggressive comment? Does it come up as, you know, genuine attempts to foster intimacy? You know, I'd want to know what that means. All these things play a role in what is actually transpiring. So, getting

curious about all of that would actually be my first step. And I would invite that person to think about these things, right? What are actually all these terms that you're referring to? What does it really look like? And think about how that's going. Other than that, there's sort of three main things that I'd want to offer up for consideration. And the one is the sort of dialectic truth, which is that the person who wrote the question absolutely has a right to their desire and their sexual pleasure. And they absolutely are not entitled to having their desires acted out with anyone, including their partner. So both of those are true, and that can be a hard thing to hold at the same time, is that, yeah, I actually do have a right to feel the desire that I have, and to have it, right? To experience it in the first place. And my own sexual health and pleasure, I do have rights to that. And at the same time, I'm not entitled to the acts of that with any person in the world, ever. I'm never entitled to that. And that can be a frustrating contradiction to have to hold. But I think it's important to both of those simultaneous truths. The point number two is, I'm thinking of Emily Nagoski, and I'm thinking of how she talks about the "magic circle" in "Come As You Are," and delineating spontaneous desire and responsive desire. Because I wonder about how those things have lived out. Right? Spontaneous desire, is there an expectation that maybe there was a lot of spontaneous desire, which also happens during what we might call a golden projection era — there's a lot of spontaneous desire, there's the friction of mystery that's playing on top of the loading of all the projections, that can be really saucy. And sometimes it just feels like this stuff just happens so naturally, and now it doesn't anymore — what's wrong? What happened? And so, thinking about how, later on in a relationship, the intentionality of creating what Nagoski calls the magic circle — what's the setting? What's the setting of your erotic encounters? What's the setting of creating a mood together? Like, the actual physical location, what are the circumstances? How do you speak to each other? How do you check in? And I would say, making it speakable in the relationship, the questions about what is spontaneous, what feels spontaneous, and what feels more like responsive now. What do you notice your body doing during certain interactions, certain touch interactions, even ones that are not sexual? And bringing awareness to the self and the body, I think, would be a starting point. And I typically would work kind of slow with that. But just to start noticing where these things happen — like where is the spark? Where is the electricity, even if it's not in a sexual arena?

And then I would also say, like, what are the ways, especially for long-term relationships who find themselves in this — because desire discrepancy is one of the top issues that people come to relationship there before — is, what are the ways that you get to see each other being courageous and strange? How are you having opportunities to witness each other, to witness within one another, these elements of being courageous and elements of being strange? I think that's really important,

because there is a tension. I think Esther Perel talks about the delicious tension, right, between known, the intimate, like, being known, being fully seen by a partner, and also the mystery. And those things kind of create this delectable concoction of the erotic, and especially in long-term partnerships. And so I'd want to be really curious about like, when do you feel courageous? And when do you feel like your partner has really seen you be brave — and that includes being vulnerable. So I don't mean brave in like, a bravado sense. I mean that courageous is the same thing as being vulnerable. But something maybe that has not been seen or really witnessed in its fullness. Do you let yourself get angry in a way that is authentic? That's a really big one for a lot of folks. Right? Anger has a lot of power. And the shutting down of that, the withholding of that, can create a really toxic effect that can really dull a very necessary friction in a relationship, and being able to navigate conflict. So, conflict avoidance, I'd wonder well, where that lives, how might that have a role? Yeah. And then how about strange? You are two whole people who are constantly living and evolving. What things have gone unspoken, unsaid, unexplored, you know, within your own lives, maybe that you haven't even had the chance to entertain yourself? And then what would it be like if you shared them with each other? To get strange again, to introduce some of that?

Karen Yates

I love it. You know, as you were talking, initially, and you were talking about, like, how you didn't know exactly what was going on behind the scenes of this question, I imagined — and then you started unwinding it — I saw like, this map, that at one point was a superhighway. The question looks like a superhighway — I'm not getting my needs met, screw that, I'm frustrated. And then these moments of inquiry, which then create these routes off of the highway. Like, oh, if I go down this untraveled route, what happens? Will I go past the apple orchard? Will I find something really cool? Will I learn something? And I think so often, we have a rut. We have a transactional rut of some sort, or some sort of relationship, right? And the groove gets deeper and deeper. And it's simply because we haven't stayed curious, we're not looking for the strange, we're not allowing ourselves to be strange. I love the word strange, because it just — it's a word you don't hear a lot, but it's great. And I would love to hear from the other panelists. What do y'all have to say?

Tazima Parris

One thing that I share often, when I talk to people who are in couples, and are in a similar situation, is that you update your phone, and then it works better. But we think because we know someone that we don't need these daily updates — or at minimum, like a weekly update. Because all kinds of things have happened! Even with people who are quarantining together, who are in the same space a lot. There's still different

experiences that are happening. And there are those strange things, those unknown moments, can be revealed as, "Oh, this is something interesting that occurred with me." So I really love that aspect of it. And I love the superhighway. And like, versus the — kind of being curious about moving into this other space, is that unfortunately, if in the longer-term relationship, if you've got patterns of ways of being, then it's really easy to just say, well, what's wrong? And then, you know, you just kind of slip back into that rut. So it really takes both partners, or everyone who's involved — it's not just twos, sometimes — to step out of the rut and consciously say, Hey, we are — you know, kind of announce, have a different kind of conversation. This is a deliberate kind of conversation, where you're identifying, hey, let's take a step out of what we've been doing. And let's move over here to have a conversation about the rut. And as you do that, it's important that you get on the same side of the rut, instead of opposite sides of the rut. Because when you feel like you're against someone — and this can literally — I suggest this and I use this myself — don't sit directly opposite each other when you're talking about it, if you're in the same physical space. Literally sit either side by side, or at least kind of next to each other, so that you can have it — if you're on the phone, it's probably pretty good. Zoom, I think, might also feel a little confrontational, because it is kind of face-to-face. So, for people who are at a distance, having that kind of face to face, when you're in a challenging conversation, can sometimes exacerbate it, as you talk about it. But I love what Brandon was saying, about kind of taking a look, stepping back, taking those layers, and looking at the layers instead of continuing to just see the big old cluster of challenge. It is possible to break it down. And it takes some doing. And that's why there are people who can help and support, professionals. But I don't recommend asking friends. I do recommend talking to someone who's a professional, or a professional that you know as a friend who can give you kind of a better perspective on it.

Karen Yates

Jason, do you have a thought?

Jason Best

Yeah, absolutely. You know, I thought those are great responses. And one of the things that I see a lot with couples that are coming in with a desire discrepancy, and especially if it's been going on for years, there's been, you know, some sort of maybe incident or something went kind of weird up front, and now things have grown stagnant. I absolutely think the right attitude is to be curious — something is going on here, even if it's the fact that one person, you know, has no interest in sex, and that's not getting maybe communicated in a way that it could. Oftentimes, there can be things like, you know, maybe someone's depressed, maybe someone is having a

chronic pain issue or chronic health issue. Maybe, as Brandon kind of alluded to, maybe the fact that there's five dogs on the bed every time it's time to mess around is a little bit of a boner killer. To be able to kind of look holistically at the problem, and start to try to dismantle — like, Okay, what might be going on here? Because sometimes there's some underlying things that need to be addressed and treated. Also, because of my specialty and working a lot with kink and poly, one of the things I'm interested in is, is there some desire that's not making its way into the conversation? I've had a lot of folks who are kinky come in after years of really being kind of dead in the bedroom. And they're like, well, the deal is I want to be tied up, but I'm afraid my partner is vanilla, and so I just can't say anything. And when you suppress your emotions, it is not a surgical process. You don't just suppress the one, you end up suppressing typically more than you mean to. And so, oftentimes it can kind of smother some of the connection. Even if it's painful, even if it's difficult, talking about some of these things, expressing needs, being clear. And sometimes people have been like, oh, I've had this fantasy, and their partner's like, "Oh my god, me too! But I never thought that you would be into this, because it's so weird." Well, I thought it was weird, too, but I'm into it.

Karen Yates

For more information on Brandon, Tazima, and Jason Best, go to the show notes.  
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The work I do in Biofield Tuning, an energy modality that uses sound waves to help repattern your bioelectric field, can support you in getting out of stuck behavior and become more aware of different choices. If you are interested in working with me or learning more about my weekly group biofield tuning sessions on Zoom on a variety of topics, including increasing intuition, expanding consciousness, balancing your energy centers and more, go to [karen-yates.com](http://karen-yates.com). That link is in the show notes.

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[organ music]

I think desire discrepancy is one of the thornier issues to address in long-term relationships, because it can have so many branches. And the panelists today addressed a lot of them. I think of a situation I was in for years, and how it really kept me from excavating at the deepest level and being completely vulnerable, was that we might end up at an impasse. And the idea of leaving or being left was too frightening to contemplate. My partner and I, over the years, had tried therapy, had heart-to-hearts, done exercises and incorporated fun ideas. But eventually, everything fell away. It was hard for me to go into a more fearless inquiry with him, because I was just too afraid to excavate truth. The truth being that maybe this was it, it wasn't going to get better. And now what was I going to do? It was easier to be resentful and then fall into an everyday unconsciousness than to take action. Well, I shouldn't say I was completely unconscious — I remember a very clear moment when I thought, I don't know what to do. I don't know how to get out. And I just need to surrender to that, and know that someday I will know. And that it's okay for now. I stopped shaming myself for my inability to do it differently. And eventually, the answers came. Truth emerged painfully. For us, it meant the ending of the relationship. But that isn't the point of what I'm saying. It's about asking: What is the reason I am staying in this holding pattern with this person? What is at play here? Is there a very old story I'm telling myself? Relationships are complex. And as was said today, we deserve to have the sex we want and not tyrannize our partner in the process. It's a gentle dance, and it's one that begins with ourselves.

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