



EPISODE 10

Bonnie Young: Seeing Subtle Harmful Expectations Created by Sexual Media

[Breaking the Silence Podcast by Reach 10](#) with hosts Creed Orme and Crishelle Simons

How are we being influenced by the sexual media that surrounds us? Creed and Crishelle talk with Bonnie Young, therapist & researcher, about the influence of sexual media on expectations of what sex should be like. Pornography shows the antithesis of healthy sexual relationships, and even subtle ideas that sneak into relationships can cause pain. Bonnie explains sexual scripts and encourages young adults to be aware and choose carefully what they believe.

SEE THE SHOW NOTES AT REACH10.ORG

Creed ([00:00](#)):

Welcome listeners to breaking the silence. Today we are breaking the silence with Bonnie Young and today we are talking about what we should and shouldn't be afraid of about pornography. So we are so grateful to have Bonnie with us today. Thank you for being here, Bonnie.

Crishelle ([02:09](#)):

Yeah, and I'm stoked because Bonnie is joining us from Spain and it's been forever since I've seen you. And so it's so good to be able to chat with you and to learn from your wisdom, Bonnie. But

we want to know a little bit about yourself. Help our listeners to just understand where you come from, how you got involved in this, and just a little bit about Bonnie.

Bonnie ([02:34](#)):

Okay, cool. Well first off, I'm really happy to be here and to have this conversation with you guys. I was joking with my husband before this that I have only talked to a toddler today, so it's really fun to have these important adult conversations especially about a topic that I feel really passionate about. So a little bit about me. I am from the Seattle area. Went to BYU for my undergraduate education. Kind of random, majored in History, studied religious women's experiences, especially during the 19th century. During that time started just kind of waking up to the reality of like this really sex saturated world and recognizing that I was not at all educated and like recognizing the necessity to really educate myself specifically about pornography. I saw it come up in a lot of my relationships and I noticed that I responded with so much fear, like so much fear. And now looking back, I understand, I have compassion for myself that why I responded like that. At the same time. I think I could have could have replaced a lot of that fear with more constructive responses. Anyway, so I started getting involved in research with some professors at BYU and then decided to go into marriage and family therapy. Kept on the research route. Started tying in my research with a lot of my clinical work with my clients. And then worked for a while at a sex therapy clinic. I still do a lot of sex therapy with clients now, but yeah. So now I work as a therapist and I'm a mom and a wife and a mom of one, almost two.

Crishelle ([04:50](#)):

And I love that you're from Seattle. My husband's from Seattle and it is so beautiful up there. Yeah. So great. So help us understand this, this phrase, why we should and shouldn't be afraid of porn. I think that's something that we don't talk about a lot. I think we like, Oh, porn is bad and we just like are afraid of it. And I think we have a lot of awesome reasons to be afraid of porn. It's hurt a lot of people and a lot of us have a lot of evidence of why it's something to be afraid of. Or it's hurt us personally. Right? But help us, help us understand kind of how you woke up to that, and what you've realized.

Bonnie ([05:39](#)):

Yes. So I'll start off by saying the more I have studied pornography the less I have become afraid of it, the less I've—my fear has diminished. A lot of us are really afraid of porn because it depicts sex, right? And all of us are afraid of sex or we grow up learning to be afraid of sex. Right? And I would

even argue that it's the same fear. It's that same fear that we have towards pornography that also keeps us from actually seeking out healthy resources about sex. Right? Sex is off limits. Sex is inappropriate, sex is bad. That's why I don't watch porn. Well, if I have the same beliefs about sex that's not in porn, I'm still not going to seek out healthy resources to become educated about sexuality. So that was a little tangent, but

Crishelle ([07:16](#)):

Well I think very true. I think of like my mind frame and like even my sexual template like it took a lot to help me to wake up to the fact that like sex wasn't bad and that like, it was okay that I was attracted to people and it was okay, you know, to explore the sexual side of myself and that was an okay part of me. And I wish that I had learned that sooner, you know, because I think it created a lot of pain and hurt and separation in my life that was unnecessary and separation from myself. Separation from God and separation from other people, like it affected every aspect of my life. And so I think that that is so true. And I'm so glad that you're saying that and I'm so glad that you, you feel so passionately about that. Yeah.

Bonnie ([08:08](#)):

And I would say Crishelle, I love that you said like, it's taken me time to feel like my sexuality is okay. And I think that my hope for myself and for the people that I work with is not just that it's okay that I'm sexual, but it's wonderful. Like it's so good that I'm sexual and I don't even know if personally I'm there yet, right? Like, it's, this stuff is so ingrained in us that we have to be super deliberate about what we find ourselves thinking about sex, how we're interpreting sexual messages. The thoughts that we're having about sex have a lot to do with how we feel about our own bodies and about the sex that we're having in our relationships. So anyway, I kind of want to get back to your original question cause I am taking us on a long tangent. But, so your original question was what is to be feared about porn in ways not to be feared about porn? Right. And so yeah, porn is scary because we know it hurts people. But porn is also scary because there's lots of myths that exist around porn and a lot of those myths are taught to us as research based. And so we hear these really, really bold statements. Like if you watch porn, you will become addicted. Right. that's one that I hear a ton and there's a lot of people that I work with that have come into my office and we talk about their pornography use. And by no means is it a good thing. It's not something that they want to keep in their lives. It's not helping them, it's not helping them connect to other people or to feel in tune with themselves or with God. But by no means what I call their use addictive or even compulsive. And I think we have to be really careful about what we believe

about pornography as far as the effects of pornography go. Having said that, there there is a body of research within the pornography literature, pornography research, that is really reliable and that is the research that's been done on sexual scripting and pornography. And I'm not sure if you guys have talked about sexual scripting very much.

Crishelle ([11:36](#)):

We actually haven't, and I would love to hear, I think our listeners would love to hear more on this.

Bonnie ([11:43](#)):

So sexual scripting theory is based in a broader scripting theory. We developed certain scripts for how sex should work. So we're learning the who, what, where, when, why, how of sex through the scripts that are being portrayed through sexual media. And there's lots of pornography out there. There's endless content out there. And so it would be wrong to say that there's only one script that's being portrayed by today's pornography. Having said that, there are lots of patterns that we see in the pornography today and the scripts that are being portrayed in that pornography are like the antithesis to a healthy sexual relationship. And that is what we have to fear, in my opinion, is what pornography is doing to how we view sex and how sex should work or how sex should happen between two partners.

Creed ([13:05](#)):

Yeah. Because if someone were to view sexual media, especially the kind of pornography that is, represents sexuality or sex in a damaging or actually unhealthy way in reality, right? They learn these scripts that they then take into their own relationships, which is just unhealthy for the relationship. Is that correct, Bonnie?

Bonnie ([13:30](#)):

Totally. I would say that the average person who has looked at porn before or who has, I don't know, I don't even know if we need to limit this to pornography. I think any sexual media, right, will create a script, a chick flick, right? Or a TV show where people are hooking up or whatever, right? Which is everywhere. Or a commercial, right?

Crishelle ([14:11](#)):

Or music that we listen to. And like we claim that we like aren't listening to the lyrics, but sometimes I'm like, do I believe that at any level? I hope not.

Bonnie ([14:23](#)):

Definitely. And it's everywhere. And I really don't think that as hard as we try that we could avoid those influences. But what I'm talking about here when we're talking about sexual scripting, I think all of us know, like there's pornography out there that is very degrading and very, I don't know, violent or very coercive. And I think all of us know very clearly that is wrong. Most of us would never bring that into a sexual relationship even if we have been exposed to that. Right. I think what we do have to be afraid of is the more subtle stuff that we kind of absorb from the sexual media around us. Like, what do I have to look like in order to be sexy or when should sex happen in our relationship? How often should it happen? How often should I desire sex? I'm trying to think of clients that I've worked with that I've, cause I've had lots of clients that come in with these really harmful beliefs about sex and these beliefs that really, really inhibit their relationship. And we have these conversations about, okay, where did you learn this? Most of the time they can't pinpoint. "Oh yeah, my mom told me this," or "my great aunt told me the story of...", Right, it's not like one thing. It's this collection of being influenced by the sexual media that surrounds us. So yeah. One that I think is really simple but I think is a very frequent thing that happens with couples is how sex gets brought up. Most couples that I work with when I ask about, okay, so how do you guys communicate about sex? Or how'd you guys decide when sex is going to happen? They're like, Oh, well, it's just supposed to happen, right? Like, it's not sexy if we talk about it happening. That kind of kills the mood. Right? And in my head, I'm like, maybe for like the first month of marriage that could work. But I have a friend who, who also works as a therapist and she said once, "planned sex is still sexy." And, and I love that because that really fights this idea that, you know, sex should be this spontaneous thing that both people just automatically want. And if you don't want it, that means that you're not attracted to your partner or that you're asexual or that right, something's wrong with you. That's just an example of one of the scripts that I think is really subtle but is also very embodied by most of us.

Crishelle ([17:27](#)):

and can be really damaging on our relationship and, and like for a person to believe in. And I think that like dive into the subtleties that we've like bought into because of sexual media. I think that's so important. And I hope our listeners are really like grasping that and want to share that from rooftops because I think it needs to be, the subtleties are I think the most dangerous because it is obvious to be like, okay, that's not healthy and that's not working. But those subtleties are sneaking into our lives, are sneaking into our relationships and they're sneaking into our, especially

our sexual lives and really causing a lot of pain. And so yeah, keep telling us more of these. Because I think that, I think that it's so important and I don't think it's something that we're all like, Oh my goodness. Like I've bought into that, that subtlety.

Bonnie ([18:23](#)):

Yeah. And I think we have to be really gentle with ourselves too, right? Like if we have bought into these subtleties, it's not like, Oh, it's the end of the world. I'm damaged, how can I, right. We just like, we've had the experience of maybe kind of having these beliefs influenced us. We also have the choice. Now we're aware of it. Now we get to choose what we do with that. Right? And so I think this is, I by no means am I hoping that this is damning information for anyone like, oh no! You know, this is, I hope this is hopeful that once we wake up to this do these things that, okay, now I have a choice. Now I get to choose what to do with this. Now I can talk to my spouse about this. Honey, I think we've let this kind of creep in our marriage what do we want to do about it. So I think another thing that that I see a lot again with my clients when it comes to sexual scripting is, and pornography and sexual media, is this idea that women are objects of sexual desire and that is their primary role in sex is to be an object of desire and this, I think there's a little bit of nuance in here because for a lot of women that's actually very exciting. It's very exciting for a wife to know that she's, she turns her husband on or that her husband wants to be close to her internet with her at that I think it would be untrue to say that that's a bad thing. That right. I think where it does become harmful is when she is not a being, but only an object in that sexual relationship. And most of pornography does not portray a woman as a being with feelings and thoughts and ideas and opinions and potentials and creativities. Right. She's, there for one simple purpose and that's to please the husband or the partner. And then so because of this, because this is what we're seeing in sexual media. A lot of women bring that to their sexual relationships and really are not active participants in the sexual relationship. The sexual relationship is more about him than it is about her. And her sexual potential is never realized because it's not focused on her. It's about his pleasure. It's about his experience. She's just there to facilitate that. And I think a lot of women get really comfortable in that position because it doesn't require a lot of work. Right? You just have to show up, you have to be a body. And I've had clients before and these stories like break my heart and they make me also angry. Clients that talk about this idea of star fishing. I don't know if you guys ever heard of star fishing before, but if you can picture a starfish, what does a starfish do? It just lays there right? And a lot of women, I think because they do not view themselves as active, equal participants in a sexual experience end up being basically just a body. So that the husband gets to where he wants to go. And then she doesn't have to worry about it for another week or

whatever it is, right. She can kinda check it off her list. And this happens so often and I would even argue in relationships where it doesn't even happen that often, every time it happens, it leaves a mark on the relationship and it's reinforcing messages about sexual worth and that sexual relationship and what that sexual relationship is about. And some people might be really disgusted with the male partner. How could he ever do that? And I would argue he's probably not really enjoying this either, right? If his partner is not involved, doesn't want to be there, isn't reciprocating, he's probably not having a very fulfilling experience either.

Crishelle ([24:08](#)):

Yeah. So, so good. So good. Thank you so much. Thank you so much for all of your wisdom and for sharing, for taking the time to share with us some of the things that you've learned through your research and through your work as a clinician and through your life. I appreciate it.

Creed ([24:08](#)):

Oh yeah. I've been so captivated this whole time and there's so much to learn as wonderful to have this type of conversation. So thank you so much for being with us, Bonnie. Good luck with all, all of your work.