



EPISODE #26

What's the Difference Between Healthy and Unhealthy Sexuality? With Laura M. Brotherson Part 1

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

"Sex is God's wedding gift to a husband and wife." That's what Laura Brotherson believes! She's a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) and Certified Sex Therapist (CST). One of the best things any young adult can do to be ready to enjoy that divine gift is to see clearly the differences between sexual health and the unhealthy, distorted expectations and behavior that come from current media and culture. Don't miss this first part of her conversation with Creed and Crishelle about her insightful list of 20 characteristics of healthy and unhealthy sexuality.

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Creed:

Welcome back listeners. We are so excited to have you because today we have Laura Brotherson with us today. Laura Brotherson is a licensed marriage and family therapist, certified sex therapist, certified family life educator in Provo, Utah. She is a part of the Marital Institute and she is a bestselling author for a few books named And They Were Not Ashamed, Knowing Her Intimately, and her latest book From Honeymoon to Happily Ever

After: 23 Keys to Prepare for a Sextraordinary Marriage. And that is what we're talking about specifically today is how to have a sextaordinary marriage, specifically using a list that Laura has created called raising the bar on intimate relationships, characteristics of healthy and unhealthy sexuality. So we're going to talk about that list, a few aspects of it with her and you can access this list on the show notes on our website, in the description that you find for this episode on your favorite podcast platform. But we are so grateful and honored to have Laura with us today. Thank you so much for being here.

New Speaker:

Wonderful to be here guys.

Crishelle:

So, so, so good to have you on this podcast. Laura, I cannot express enough how much you've changed my life when it comes to my view of healthy sexuality and what my intimate relationship could look like in the future. I'm so grateful for all of your work and I know that the things that we're going to share today are going to touch all of our listeners. So I hope you're all listening and I hope you're all taking mental notes and maybe even real notes in your phones because this is going to be so good. So so good. But Laura, would you help us understand what healthy sexuality is?

New Speaker:

Yeah, I mean it's just, I was listening to one of your other podcasts where you guys talked about healthy sexuality and I think the thing that's going to be different for us today is that, you know, a lot of us kind of understand sort of what healthy sexuality is like. Like I had a client once that said, when I said, okay, so what is healthy sexuality? And she says, you know Laura, I don't even know. I know I should have a voice in the bedroom and it shouldn't be all about him. But that's about all I know. And I think the thing that we're going to do hopefully today is actually give tangible characteristics of what healthy looks like, what unhealthy looks like. So the people can walk through that themselves. I mean, there's 20 characteristics so I can't even answer your question in a real simple way. I mean, obviously it's mutually fulfilling. It's connected, it's multidimensional. We'll get into all of these based on, you know, which ones we talk about, but there's a lot of pieces. But what I had found was that nobody had sat down and compiled something that said, here's at least, I mean,

it's not like this is the right answer, but it's an attempt at an answer. Whereas nobody had even really attempted it before. Where nobody had ever sat down and said, okay, here's kind of what healthy looks like. Here's kind of what unhealthy looks like. We had only had what unhealthy looked like. So this list actually started from you might be familiar the Porn Trap by Wendy Malts. She started the you know, healthy sex and porn related sex. So some of that starts from her list. But then as a sex therapist where my focus is really healthy sexuality and that's why I've written three books. I'm trying to find, I'm trying to help people figure out how to really focus on the healthy part. That was a long answer to it. Quick question.

Creed:

Perfect. I love how it's, it's so multidimensional and there's so many aspects and pieces to it. You can't just describe healthy sexuality in one sentence. It's an ongoing learning process and education and I mean if only we could all be sex therapists.

New Speaker:

I know! There needs to be more of us. So, Hey, if any of you guys want to join, let me know.

Crishelle:

Most definitely. So I want to talk about, maybe let's break down some of these characteristics because I love that you're giving us that contrast. I really love contrast. I think when we look at the dark versus the light, we're able to see clearer, right? That's what creates beautiful art. And so being able to see this I think will help us all so much. And so the first one that I wanted to talk about and in no particular order is how do we view ourselves and our bodies in maybe the unhealthy sexuality and then the transverse of that, the healthy.

Laura:

Yeah. I mean like, so I mean one of the characteristics number one is you know, accepting, embracing, being comfortable with your body, your body parts, having kind of that sexual self confidence and the unhealthy version of that is being uncomfortable, ashamed, critical of embarrassed about and or dissatisfaction with your spouse's body. So pressuring them to like surgically alter or improve their body. So I mean, just on this characteristic alone, this

one you know, is especially important for women because probably one of the number one things that we struggle with sexually is our body image issues. And so part of healthy sexuality for women in particular is embracing, owning, you know, just claiming their sexuality and accepting their imperfect body and going with it's good, you know, kind of a good enough acceptance of it. But, and then on the flip side for the men is they've kind of also got to be accepting of their wives' body. And especially when there's kind of been that pornified concept, sometimes the husbands are looking for a wife to look like —and not even just pornified I should just say just being in our sexualized society, you know, sometimes that can lean into the unhealthy if husbands are kind of not turned on by their wife's body because it's not perfect. So there's kind of a little taste of what that might look like.

Crishelle:

I really love this and I think it's so interesting because never would I have like labeled myself as an unhealthy sexual like person. I really always like strove, you know, tried to have healthy sexuality, but I totally see myself slipping into viewing myself and my partner in that unhealthy light and recognizing that it is a spectrum and that doesn't mean that I'm broken or I'm hurt or that like I'm going to have a horrible relationship, but rather that I can come back to the other side.

Laura:

Yeah. And it's like healthy sexuality, good sex, is a learned behavior. So I mean we're just spelling out a nice little template for people to walk through. But you bring up an important point that something that this list will do for people is they're going to see where almost every single couple, the wife and the husband, are going to find some places where they fit in the unhealthy category. Just that's what's going to be.

Creed:

So what, for example, any suggestions that you have for male and female, both in a relationship or still single? How can, what do you, any suggestions for how we can prepare to have a healthier body mindset and to own our bodies? Be okay with it? What practices or things can we do to get there?

Laura:

Yeah, I think you guys had talked about this before, but I think part, part of it is even just working on things that change your mindset about sex. And that would include things like getting educated, you know, reading books like mine. I often, regularly assign to women in particular to get any of my books on audio and play it just in the background of their mind. Because what you're doing, I mean, 'cause for men they tend to think about sex a little bit more often than we do. For women we almost have to insert it a little bit and there are healthy ways to do that, which does a couple of things: builds confidence because knowledge is power and builds...When you've got that confidence you are more familiar, comfortable with. And so this sex as a topic and sex as an action become less weird and scary and taboo and anxiety inducing because there's more just comfort and familiarity with it in a healthy way.

Creed:

So getting comfortable and familiar with it. So cool.

Crishelle:

That is so powerful and I love that idea of having that healthy, those healthy ideas playing in the background and really like wiring that template in place. Right? And it doesn't have to be right up in your face, but it can be something that you're just listening to on your commute or you're listening to as you clean or cook or while you're working on a project, it can just be there so that you're listening to that. And I've actually found that to be very helpful.

Laura:

Yeah, for sure. I mean that's one of what, one of my number one steps for women that are trying to embrace and develop and kind of reclaim, own their sexuality. And kind of back to what we talked about earlier that you mentioned is just sexy for, you know, for men and women. But women tend to struggle with this a little bit more. That mindset is that sexy as a state of mind. It's a feeling that says, I like who I am, I like and accept my body as it is and I'm happy to share it with you. So all of that can be done as a single person to get that.

Crishelle:

Yeah. Yeah. That makes so much sense. That makes so, so much sense. And I think back to 20 year old Crishelle and even like 23 year old Crishelle who was in so much pain and did not like her experience or her family's experience and just, I was so frustrated and angry and hurt and it took me getting educated. It took me really figuring out like that there could be a different way to have hope and to come back to being in a safe spot where sexuality was a part of my story again. So I love this and they definitely work everyone, all of these tools work.

Laura:

And you know, Crishelle, I've been through most of this myself. Everything I teach, I've learned myself because I mean, if you're alive and you're breathing and you live in our society, you're going to have some stuff to clean out, to undo, to repair, to get straight.

Creed:

Totally. That's what mortality is about. None of us is exempt.

Laura:

Nope, you're right.

Creed:

So another one that I would really like to talk about is this, number four, the healthy sexuality is bridled restrained, respectful. While the unhealthy sexuality is unrestrained, impulse driven, and simply just for gratification.

Laura:

Yeah. Yeah, for sure. Yeah, that's huge. I mean, I have kind of another whole angle that I approach this with, because for women, you know, for women, sex is almost a decision, whereas for men that testosterone drives it and so it's a little bit more just kind of impulse-ish, spontaneous, and so for women in particular, kind of on this healthy side, if a man in particular has not developed some sexual self-mastery around that God-given wonderful sex drive that men have, then they are going to have a hard time freely choosing in because they're kind of just responding to his need. Does that make sense? And so that bridled, restrained, respectful is...the higher desire person, often the husband, just has to develop

some of that mastery so that a woman who has to do a little bit more work to embrace and develop and even warm up in the actual lovemaking experience, they have a little bit of space to, for them to kind of join together instead of him always being way ahead. Does that make sense?

Creed:

Yeah. So I feel like this kind of ties into even number three where healthy sexuality is agency, freedom to choose, whereas unhealthy sexuality is entitled, sex as an expectation. So it takes the husband or the wife—'Cause sometimes from what I understand, even the wife can have more of a sex drive than the husband. So the one who has the more sex drive, it's not solely, it's more mindful, right? It's more like "Ok, I'm getting excited here. Let's mindfully choose, do I want to have sex right now or do I want to talk to my partner about having sex right now? Or is this just a moment just to connect affectionately, emotionally instead of just going straight into sex."

Laura:

Yeah. Yeah. That's good. And I think maybe at the kind of the extreme version that makes it maybe a little easier to understand too is just when there is kind of a compulsive or obsessive type/ compulsive type sexuality, I think you guys had Dr. Busby on who talked about kind of that obsessive sexual style passion style. That creates a real dilemma because if there's just kind of this constant pressure, this constant need for, I mean, we need to do it every day or twice a day or whatever, you know, that just gets out of balance. And unfortunately, they often are married to a woman who's in the inhibited category. So there's just work on both sides to get that to be a little better. But that's where really that owning and developing some self-mastery around that drive becomes really important for it to be a mutual experience. Given how God wired us both very differently, I need to have a talk with him when I get up there. Actually I've had many talks with him about it already.

Creed:

I'm so glad he's teaching you. So my follow up question I think will always be any suggestions for how we can begin to learn or process and become better at sexual self mastery so that we can have healthy sexuality. Any thoughts on that?

Laura:

So like one of the things that I often, one of the first few things that, that husbands will often do is they will actually have to do a little, or I suggest that they do some process writing just about a man's feelings around their sexuality because chapter one of the husband book that isn't done yet is a lot about affirming that God given sexuality because a lot of men are very shamed for their sexuality. They're shamed for their sex drive. I mean women's ways of feeling loved is affirmed, but man's ways of feeling love sexually or physically is kind of denigrated. And so sometimes they even just need to have a conversation with themselves and God is kind of how I suggest it, like a written conversation just like you would with a person about their sexuality. And they start to kind of make friends with their sexuality a little bit as well, you know? And then you know, within marriage there are other things that men can do. Like another tool that I give men is focus on all the positive things, everything you like, love and appreciate about your wife intimately. What, what are some of those things and to focus more on those because if you're constantly thinking about I'm not getting enough or it's not this or I want that and it's never—you know, you're just constantly focusing on what you don't have it. It's that downward spiral concept. So those are a couple of tools.

Crishelle:

Thank you so much. I really love that. Would you have any suggestions for maybe the lower desire spouse or the wife typically of how they can maybe understand that and meet it better?

Laura:

Are you talking about understand his desire, his sexuality or..?

Crishelle:

Yeah, And maybe like step out of being so restrained, if that makes sense. Like I like to think of it—I grew up riding horses, right? And when I was scared I would have that bridle so tight and that was not good for my horse. It was also not good for me. Like it was exhausting. It was a battle. Right. And so how do we let go while still feeling safe?

Speaker 3:

Yeah. So the three steps that I give women: first (and all of this is kind of spelled out in the Knowing Her Intimately book where this is chapter one) embracing your sexuality and people do need help with that. But, number one, we kind of already talked about, start listening to my book in the background of your mind, just so it's like that elevator music that's playing in the background of guys' minds and we're just trying to give it something that's similar

Crishelle:

Or this podcast, another good option.

Laura:

And so even just getting that into the system, you're reprogramming your brain because, you know, it's not like we have Young Women's lessons on healthy sexuality, unfortunately, yet, so far. And so you're getting that into the system. That's kind of step one. A second step for women and men actually often have to do some of this process writing that I was talking about with men. They often have to go through and clean out a lot of sludge that they've got in their mind about sex, about sexuality, about men, about male sexuality. You know, 'cause everybody's had a few negative experiences, vicarious trauma from reading the news or seeing the news. So you got to clean out some of that. So that's almost step one, clean out the garbage, start listening to positive, affirming, healthy sexual material to get that in your system. And number three is kinda my favorite is women need to practice and develop their flirtiness. A woman is not naturally usually super flirty, at least not in the sexual ways that their husbands are longing for. So when a woman can actually, and I've got a handout on that and a whole chapter on that in Knowing Her Intimately as well. But when a woman has to work on walking up and smacking her husband on the butt or, you know even just, you know, even just a lot of women really struggle to let their husbands see them naked. You know, just things like this. And that's part of being flirty. You know, being willing to let that happen when you have to be, when you're working on flirty, you really are having to really figure out, okay, can I own this? Can I do this? Because otherwise it's super awkward and it will be in the beginning anytime you're learning a new skill, but that really ministers to women embracing and owning and developing that.

Crishelle:

I love those ideas. I think this is so helpful.

Laura:

They usually have to be told, okay honey, I'm working on my flirtiness and Laura said, I need to tell you that you need to know that it's not going to lead to anything, so I'm just practicing. Don't think you're going to get lucky.

Crishelle:

I think that kind of comes back to another principle that we skipped, number two, which is affection for affection's sake and flirting for flirting's sake, that it doesn't always—just 'cause I'm making out with you right now doesn't mean that I'm ready right now. And just going back to maybe like that dating phase where we were just flirty all the time, that's really, really important in relationships.

Laura:

And Crishelle to be fair to your darling husband, you do might want to let him know that because you might just say, "Hey, I would love to make out with you right now, but just know that that's it. Can you handle that or do I not even start?" That's just what couples can learn how to do so that she can step into her sexuality so that we can have, "I want you" sex, not "duty," sex. And that's the big part of what Creed was just asking me about with that. Bridled and agency and all of that.

Crishelle:

Yes. So wonderful. So wonderful. The next one, and this is so hard because I literally want to talk about every single one of these because they're so golden. So if you haven't already looked at this because you're like, wow, I'm loving this discussion. Look at it now, listeners. And so unless you're driving, don't look at it now. It's so, so good. The next one that I wanted to, to hit on was being fully present and engaged versus detached mentally and emotionally.

Laura:

Okay. That's a good one. Really good one. So, yeah, think about, so again, I am putting it a little bit in gender stereotypes just 'cause it's pretty common. That's more generalized and

more frequent, but like fully present and engaged a lot of times for women where sexy is a state of mind. We are the worldwide web and so we're kind of multitasking everywhere. And if we don't shut down all those open tabs on the computer screen of our brain, then we are really not present and we're kind of just there, you've got my body, but that's it. Don't, you know, and so women, this is a big one for them. They've got to practice being fully present, fully engaged, a little bit more active. I want to, in one of my chapters, the transition chapter of knowing her intimately, I have these five different tools of things that people can do to stay more present and active, you know, for example focusing on receptive touch, you know, focus on how you're being touched, how you're being kissed, a step up from that would be more active in your touch.

Speaker 3:

I mean, so get, you can do things to learn the skill of being actively present. Okay. So that's kind of on the healthy side, the unhealthy side of just, if you're detached mentally or emotionally. And that isn't, isn't just, you know, the husband or their wife, either of them can be having unrealistic expectations. Just even inaccurate, distorted concepts inhibited thoughts. So that goes back to women again. If they've got a lot of inhibited thoughts, they're distracted or they're thinking about, you know, did I lock the door? Can the kids hear us? You know, whatever, whatever. So that's kind of on both sides really important. And one other one that's, yeah, I mean it's just fantasy also was kind of a big part here. If you feel like someone is fantasizing or someone is fantasizing, that can also be a challenge 'cause you can kind of feel that you can just kind of feel when people are present and when they're not.

Crishelle:

Totally. I love this example and I love that you use the example of the tabs because that's so real. And my husband and I's life, he has no issue in just like exiting out of all of his tabs without even looking twice. And I'm like, you just exited out of all of my tabs. I wasn't ready to do that. I had like 10 things going on literally on my computer all the time. So it's so, so real where it's so interesting how like naturally I'm not very good at letting go of everything because if I let it go then it might not happen.

Laura:

Right. And this is a natural gender characteristic thing, Crishelle, because women kind of more multitasking. We're worldwide webbers and men have, you know, that skill of being a little bit more compartmentalized and they both are good things to have on purpose, but I think God is all about wholeness and completeness. And so women just have to work a little bit more in these certain areas of shutting down those windows and being focused and present, you know? And maybe men have to work on other areas of maybe practicing being a little more multitasking, you know?

Crishelle:

Totally. I think a more immature version of myself was frustrated about these differences, but the more that I work on it and the more that I practice the skills that I'm not good at, the more I'm so grateful that I get this experience of learning a different way of connecting, but I'm not naturally good at.

Laura:

Yeah, that's exactly, and I think Crishelle, I think that's a little bit what God was thinking when he made men and women so different is that both husbands and wives are kind of gently required to work on some things that are not their natural forte in order to create what I would call wholeness and that that is how you can really create this awesome kind of oneness sexually and everywhere else but sexually as well

Creed:

Love it. And I remember something that you said also for another one is to enjoy what you enjoy and find what you enjoy and not focus on what is lacking or what you would rather want. That's so not present with what's happening right now. Focusing on what you can enjoy and feeling it, enjoying it. That just sounds amazing and doing otherwise is not helpful.

Laura:

And Creed, just a quick tool for that is one of the things that I talk about is brakes and accelerators. So I have plans go through or just someone reading the book where you sit down and actually write out, okay, what are my turn-ons, what are my turnoffs? And so

when you can kind of do that, then you're actually learning each other. I mean the biblical term for sex is to know and you're learning each other intimately in every dimension.

Creed:

Love that. This is so good and we want to continue but we'll have to split this up into another episode. So we're going to take a pause from this conversation and continue it for our next episode. So listeners, please go and read this list, Raising the Bar on Intimate Relationships found in our show notes. We're so lucky and honored to have Laura with us. Tune in for the next episode as well.