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Exclusive video: "5 Questions About Sex I Wish I Asked Sooner"

Automated transcription by Otter.ai

Good morning and happy Sunday, I hope that you're having a beautiful day and a beautiful weekend. Today is your bonus patron resource because you pay my bills, and I love you so much. So let's get into it.

So a lot more people are asking me lately to talk about sex in any kind of relationship, and the complexity there and the negotiation involved there. I've always sort of been like, "I don't really know where the line is", insofar as how I can address it, because I'm not a sex educator, you know, so I can't speak to STI concerns or health measures, or risk awareness and all of that, beyond lived experience, and just what I do. but I can talk about emotional negotiations, internal exploration, and I'm happy to share personal anecdotes of my own, like healing from purity culture, and misconceptions of what sex even is, and what cheating even is. Today, I thought I would offer a couple of different prompts, that maybe if you are feeling any points of emotional tension around your sex life, maybe these questions will be helpful for you the way that they've been helpful for me.

Up front, y'all bear with me, on a little bit of a 101 exercise. I do think there's merit in doing it no matter where you are in your life around sex: "What is sex?" Right? I ask that question, because where did you get your sex education? it might be vastly different from your sexual partners' sex education. When I was growing up in the American South, I got very limited sex education from educators, I was shown graphic pictures of STIs, and given a bunch of metaphors of how a woman who has sex "too many times" is like a chewed up piece of gum. "Now go forth, be abstinent or you're going to hell", you know what I mean? And that was a lot of purity culture and religious myths in the public school system.

Now, the problem – there are so many problems with that – but what I've encountered in adulthood, is people received some kind of sexual education around that, and then supplemented it all with porn. They learned about different sex acts and about different ways to play and do things through porn. But porn sites are drug dealers, right? Like, it's a fantasy, it's an experience, it is designed to get you off. it is not porns responsibility, necessarily, to teach you how to negotiate, have consent, that it can be awkward, that you can stop and start again, the realities of sex are not (or rarely) represented in porn. You really have to look for it. There can be a lot of violence represented in sex, that is – look, I'm kinky, but it's not negotiated in porn. There was a lot of trial and error with people who also didn't really know what they were doing. And so in that way, we can really hurt each other despite even having good intentions, you know, we can really cross lines that we didn't know existed.

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That continues into adulthood with new partners that I add in non monogamy. I have supplemented a lot of my sex education in adulthood, but people that I meet might not have. They might not understand that oral sex is sex, right? They might not understand that what they call "foreplay", I call "sex". How many religious Christians have you met – at least me in the American South – who thought anal sex wasn't technically sex, because a person's hymen wasn't broken. And so they were having sex and calling themselves virgins. Those misunderstandings about sex have very real world consequences, even if a person leaves that ideology, and leaves that kind of community and wants to open up and move on from that, they might still have some of those old messages that show up in the present day.

It gets messy when we're talking about cheating. We're talking about finding the line between what we do and do not know about, what we do and do not consent to, what STI risks are there, and are you taking precautions and what kind? If we don't agree on the basic definition of sex, then that can create this domino effect of miscommunications.

If you are wanting more sex education in adulthood, and especially if you relate to coming from a purity culture background, I can recommend Erica Smith, @ericasmith.sex.ed on Instagram, she also offers peer support as I do. She's a sex educator and she's a really compassionate and funny and knowledgeable person that I have learned a lot from as well.

So that's more of a basics question, but I do think it is a very important one. My next question is, "is there any obligation in my sex? in our sex?" Is there any sense that I need to do something, that I have to do something, that I should be able to do something. Do I ever push myself to be "okay" with something, to tolerate something? What messaging do I have around what I should and should not do? Why, and who gave me that messaging?

I can give a couple of examples from my own life. I cohabitate with someone and from the outside looking in, we are straight passing. Both of us are pretty queer. But yeah, even the optics of a straight passing man-and-woman couple, that I have that internalized messaging of "if you're living together, the woman owes the man sex." It was really helpful to have it mirrored back to me how absurd it was, to have this assumption that I should be sexually available all the time, despite what I want, as well as this idea that I would have sex with somebody if I love them. And if I'm not doing that, then I don't love them. That was really profound messaging to unpack well into my 30s at that point.

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I would say another way that obligation can show up, in a quieter sense, in my non monogamy, is the idea of keeping score. the idea that sexual novelty, and sexual freedom and liberation is more valuable. So yeah, so I would, especially with newer partners – like if I'm seeing someone for six months or a year, and then they start seeing someone new – there might be less of a sense of security than people who I've been with for five years or nine years, you know. And so there might feel this subtle but very present competitiveness that, "oh, you're spending a lot of time with this gorgeous person who wants all these kinky things that I don't want. Let me keep up, so that I keep your attention, so that I don't lose." All of that really insidious messaging of "we need to be the best" or "we need to be the most something."

Just to really have a lot of gentleness with ourselves about what it is we want, and to not compare or keep score, or assume that our partners are ranking us. That is a vestige of mono normativity in my experience. That is something that, ideally, people are not doing anymore in non monogamy. But yeah, I don't think monogamous people should do it either. You shouldn't be ranking your current partner against your exes, that's I think, the term "toxic monogamy" floats around. I think it is a trait of that more than anything else.

So I'd be curious to hear other ways that obligation shows up for you, if you feel like it does. Because I have heard just so many stories over the years of people just feeling like they need to bypass their own desires or needs in order to be "normal" or "hot" or fill in the blank.

I think that might be a helpful segue into my next question of, "am I trying to adhere to the sex escalator?" Similar to the relationship escalator – this idea that a romantic and sexual relationship should have a certain escalation – you date, you move in, you get married, have kids, right? This expectation of one thing following another with increased intensity. There can often be that same thing in sexual spaces. Of course, this varies culture to culture. I can only speak to North American and European dating and sex cultures. That's the only thing I've participated in. There has been this idea that, okay, if you're kissing then you need to kiss heavier. If you are making out, if you are petting, then it's going to escalate to get into the bedroom. I wound up having so much stress around the first parts of those things, because I expected that the next things would happen. And so over the years, I have in a variety of ways, paused while kissing someone and said, "I don't want to have sex".

Now, I don't think there's anything wrong with clarifying what you want for the night or what you don't want. Maybe the other person did have the expectation that things would move in that direction too. So it's a needed clarification. But kissing someone does not mean that they are proposing sex to you. And it has been

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something that I am helping a lot of people that I date try to unpack for themselves as well. Because over the last season – like autumn and winter – I was dating somebody who was feeling like really depressive and having a really low libido, but loved to cuddle and make out, and so when we would make out it would be a lot of touching. I might move from sitting next to them to sitting on top of them. when I moved to sit on top of them, they were like, "I don't want to have sex". And I saw myself in that, right? Because I knew they didn't want sex, that was kind of established. we'd never had sex the entire time that we were dating. That's what I wound up saying, "that's fine. Can I still sit here and kiss you?" And they're like, "oh, oh, yeah, yeah, totally". This is what it feels like to snap out of the sex escalator, to snap out of this assumption, that one thing always follows another.

Continuing with that thought, if we always assume a certain series of events, then it can be really murky around consent. like "you agreed to do one thing. So why are you now suddenly saying you don't want to do this other thing? I thought it was all a package deal." And I don't know about you, but I get confused by those kinds of social scripts that are not explicit. I'm such an explicit direct communicator that I'm like, "Okay, well, if you said a thing, then that's what you meant."

I went on this first date once with a guy that was like, "I'll meet you at this bar, and then we'll go to a pizza place and get food after." and we got to drink at the bar, and walking to the pizza place, his apartment was on the way. And he was like, "Oh, I gotta run upstairs and get something real quick. You want to come?" And I was like, "okay, that's fine". And I got upstairs, and I thought he was going to get something real quick. And he turned around, and he started kissing me. And I was like, "um, what?" And he said, "why'd you come upstairs, then?" Not malicious... though maybe malicious... but, really, he was confused about what I was consenting to. He thought that I knew any ruse to get a person upstairs means you're gonna start making out and having sex. whereas I was hungry. I wanted to go to the pizza place. "Are we done? Did you get your thing yet? Can we go get a slice?" You know, this complete misunderstanding of consent. "You said yes to coming upstairs. So therefore you were saying yes to a kiss." Now, that is an extreme example. But we were maybe mid to late 20s. We were not children. And there was a big margin of error for expectations there.

If you are wanting any more exploration on what consent is and how to navigate it, there's a lot of really cool, complex conversations over at @consent.wizardry – that is an account that really has educated me a lot. I believe they're a sex educator, but they are also professionally an intimacy coordinator on things like sets, film sets and TV and stuff, that if there is a sex scene, making sure everybody feels comfortable,

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and that communication is really thorough. And so yeah, that account, if you want to continue this kind of exploration with a professional, I can recommend them.

I think in a similar vein, another helpful question is, "Does my sex or does our sex have any lingering heteronormativity, cis-normativity, anything like that?" There was a woman that I worked with a year or two ago, and she was dating this guy for a few weeks, and he revealed, "oh, I don't go down on women". there was a lot of misogyny in his approach to sex of like, he would be less of a man if he ate pussy. Okay, that's, some people think that way... She was really taken aback and said, "Oh, okay, well, then I'm not going down on you." And he sincerely said, "but... that's part of sex." I think that goes back to: has your partner been educated by porn? Because if a straight man is watching porn from a straight man's point of view, that fantasy often – if not, almost always – does include oral sex with penetrative sex and other ways. And so it sounded like this man sincerely thought, part of a package deal of sex included oral sex for him. One assumes he didn't really see oral sex for his partner as part of that. And so he thought that was optional. And because of internalized messaging from misogynistic patriarchal cultures, saw it as gross to offer that. and so therefore, felt perfectly fine saying, "I don't do that". That's so wild to me. And, again, we're talking about adults here. it goes to show that we really don't know where someone is in their own personal development, or in their own education around what happens in the bedroom.

The way that heteronormativity, cis-normativity can show up in our sex is similar. like valuing or calling "more serious" sex acts that are P-in-V, or having any form of disgust with men having sex with other men, or with trans people having sex, you know, and it can also show up with people not taking as seriously queer sex, especially vulva on vulva sex. Like, "oh, you hooked up with them? That's not a big deal. But if you're hooking up with this person who's got a dick, now it's a problem." And we'll see a lot of "one penis policy" come out of this, thinking that one kind of sex matters more than another. All of that, we got to look at it. we got to ask why? Where's it coming from?

You know, and I try to not have any judgment. It's not as productive. It's like, "ok you think this? Are you willing to ask why and try to not act upon those thoughts? Are you willing to do work around those thoughts?" That's kind of more where I go with it. Because who am I to act holier than thou when I came from a really conservative space, and have had to unlearn similar messages? So I don't take it as AS much of a red flag if somebody still has thoughts like that and is battling with their messaging that they're trying to unlearn; it's more of a red flag if they don't think it's a problem, and don't want to do anything about it.

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I think that goes nicely into my next question of, "is there any shame in our sex? Is there any disgust in our sex?" Maybe those could be two separate questions, but a lot of times they go together, right? "I feel ashamed of something. Therefore, I am disgusted by it." or "I equate doing a thing with being a bad person, or not being able to do something as being not good enough. I'm too broken."

I thought that for a long time, that I'm too broken. Like "I'm around all these sexually liberated polyamorous people who are going to kink clubs all the time, I'm too broken." And that kind of shaming self talk is not productive, right? It's just information, as I always say. what's causing it? because it's just trying to tell me something. And I don't think it's bad to not want to ever do something like that. Some people just never desire that. Just as you're not bad if you want sex in a space where abstinence is the norm, you're not bad if you *don't* want to do something, or if you're a bit more vanilla in a polyamorous space where kink and experimenting is more of a norm. whatever it is that you want and need, is just what you want and need in that moment. And if you're dissatisfied with that, if you want to work on it, if you think that it's rooted in something that you want to work on, okay. but I don't really pathologize it all the time, either, because sometimes we just have different flavors and different desires. For me, I just kind of look more at, is it disinterest? Am I like, "Nah, I'm good", because then it just might be a part of my personality. Or is it a fear? Is it freezing up? Is it an anger that you would even ask me to do that? am I having an emotional reaction to the idea of a sex act or an event? Then in that case, Can I ask more about why? Whether that's shame, disgust or another expression of fear or anxiety.

This can extend to disgust at the idea of our partners having sex with other people, that's a common one in non monogamy, especially early on. some people from the jump, they think it's hot, they love fantasizing about it, right? but I would say that a good number, a good percentage of people that I talk to who are new to nonmonogamy, find it absolutely so destabilizing to imagine their partner having sex with somebody else. they can't get the mental picture out of their head, they're so grossed out by it, they don't want their partner to touch them when they come home. You know, they want them to take a couple of showers, there is a really visceral response to it. And what's interesting is, those same people over time might notice a change in that. and I can count myself as one of them.

When I was at peak unresolved sexual trauma, when it was really being activated frequently, but not being explored in therapy yet, I was a lot more having a hair trigger. Little things could make me feel inadequate, make me feel disgusted, make me feel angry and not okay. And so yeah, I remember a partner had this new partner

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who was a professional dominatrix and really hot and really cool and all of that. I was feeling those peak insecurity and inadequacy feelings. They would go out with them, and I was just imagining everything that they were doing and feeling just really sick about it. I couldn't sleep and all of this. And today, they are still with that person. And now when I imagine them together, I'm actually feeling happy for them and warm for them, "Oh, that's so great because I'm never going to be your Domme."

It's about, "do I see this situation as a threat?" Are you disgusted with the idea that this is a betrayal, that you are not safe? You know? Do you still have a lot of internalized stigma about STIs, and think that people who have STIs are dirty? And so have a disgust response as you might to dirty garbage. A lot of that can be unlearned, because it is not necessarily any of it true. A lot of people have positive STIs and it's not a big deal at all. a lot of times a positive diagnosis does not mean it's transferable. And either way, you can have different safety measures. it's a medical diagnosis. It's not a huge deal. To have a physical reaction to any of the above, or a moral condemnation to any of the above, I like to ask a little bit more about why. And if you don't want to feel that way, there is a different path available. It doesn't have to stay that way forever.

Those are the five conversation prompts and questions that I wanted to bring forward today. It is more loosely structured, anecdotal, completely from my point of view, as always. There are a lot of really great sex educators online, on the apps. You know, if you find one that doesn't really resonate with you, there's always more and that's something that's really beautiful. I love the volume and the variety of voices that are in this space. And so I humbly add mine, with all of the caveats that I have a lot of limitations around what I can provide with sex specifically. but as far as the emotions go, and unlearning old messaging, I got you there. I got your back. Feel free to reach out. Let me know if this is helpful. And if there are other adjacent conversations that you think might have some value, moving forward. Sending you lots of love. Have a beautiful week. Bye

xxx