

## Ep #30: Your Internalized Gaze



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With Your Host

**Dr. Sonia Wright**

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You are listening to *The Midlife Sex Coach for Women Podcast*, episode 30.

**Female Announcer:** Welcome to *The Midlife Sex Coach for Women Podcast*, the only show that combines a fun personality, medical knowledge, sexual counseling and life coaching together. To create unique sex coaching that helps busy women awaken their libidos, address intimacy issues and learn how to express their sexuality for the rest of their days. Here is your host, certified life coach and sexual counselor, Dr. Sonia Wright.

Hello Diamonds, how are you doing this week? Well, we are wrapping up March and I just wanted to finish up strong, celebrating Women's History Month. Just the fact that we're in this month has got me thinking about women who have personally inspired me in this journey called life. And really there are so many and this is just a short list of a few of the women that really inspired me.

I think early in my life women such as Harriet Tubman and Ida B. Wells and Fannie Lou Hamer. They really inspired me to be and do more than what I thought was possible for a poor Black immigrant kid in this country. And when I think about women's sexuality then I think about Betty Dodson who I mentioned on a previous episode.

And I also think of the women of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective. Wait, what? The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, what exactly is this and who exactly are they? You may be asking yourself. Well, the Boston Women's Health Collective is an organization of women that I was first introduced to in the 1980s as an undergraduate at Stanford University when I discovered their book *Our Bodies Ourselves*.

This book really informed me about my body, my choices, my sexuality as a woman in this world. It gave me permission to own all of my body and not define myself as a sexual object or a tool for procreation. While reading this book I realized I actually had a right to own and to enjoy my body for me.

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And I was entitled to sexuality. So as we wrap up the celebration for Women History's Month, I wanted to take a moment to celebrate the Boston Women's Health Book Collective and their book *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. The last publication of this book was in 2011.

And the organization has recently scaled back and switched to an online platform which is supposed to be up and running in late 2021. So I just want to say thank you. Thank you to all the women of the Boston Health Book Collective. You've all made a big difference in my life and you planted the seed for the work that I do today, hopefully making a difference in the lives of my Diamonds, so thank you so much.

While I was reading *Our Bodies, Ourselves* for the first time I realized that I actually owned my sexuality and that I was not a sexual object to be admired or controlled by another person, specifically a man. It had never occurred to me previously that I could be the protagonist in the story of my sexuality.

Now, there's this concept, it's a concept called the male gaze. And I'd really like to spend a few minutes discussing that with you today. So the male gaze depicts women in society as an object, specifically a sexual object for the pleasure of heterosexual male viewers. And I'm not trying to bash men. I love men, I definitely do. But this is something that we have to look at. It's a way of dehumanizing women and focusing upon the external attributes and actions which need to be pleasing to others in order to gain approval.

It's a lens through which the greater society views women and ultimately a lens through which we critique ourselves. You know what? We a 100% buy into this. Our society assigns value to a woman based upon how well her appearance and her actions align with the male view of what is acceptable for a woman, her body size, her shape, her weight, her height, her skin color, her actions, her level of intelligence, her clothes. It's all designed to please the male viewer.

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We don't even have control of the appearance of our vulva. We're constantly shaving and waxing the vulva in anticipation of the pleasure for others. And now vulvoplasty is on the rise thanks to pornography, even our vulvas are not pretty enough anymore. It's like society is creating the ultimate sex doll and we're signing up for this. Society defines what is acceptable for a woman based on criteria meant to please the heterosexual male. It's like an impossible tightrope that we have to walk again, and again, and again.

A woman has to have a pretty face. She has to have this height to weight proportionality of her body which is usually be seen a size zero and maybe a size eight, not too thin, not too fat. Curves are nice but not too many curves. She must be the right race which is usually Caucasian, or at least have a lighter skin tone and 'good hair'. She must dress fashionably, the skirt can't be too long and it can't be too short, it has to show some leg but not too much leg. Maybe she has to be a lady in the streak and a freak in the sheets. Why? Why? Why does she have to be like that?

She has to be passingly intelligent but not too smart. And you know what? Studies show that middle school girls stop being competitive and really be engaged in their academics because they're afraid of being too smart to be liked by the boys. And continuing with this list, she must be somewhat independent but not too strong-willed, not to have too many of her opinions.

She has to be ready for sex but don't initiate it and don't be too ready for sex, more like ready when her partner wants it. Otherwise she's considered a slut if she wants too much sex or she's frigid and she does not want enough sex. But who decides what's enough? Who decides what's too much, what's not enough? Usually it's the partner, usually it's the male partner that's defining this and our society is in agreement with this. She needs to earn money but not too much money and she definitely does not want to out-earn her male partner.

Really the list goes on and on. I know that you can add to this list. But let me tell you, it's physically and mentally exhausting to be constantly

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scrutinized. And the sad thing is we as women have internalized the male gaze so much that we are never safe from the scrutiny. The internalized male gaze plays havoc on a woman's mental health. We can never get away from our critic. We are constantly evaluating ourselves and finding fault. We live in a state of anxiety, body shaming and not enough-ness.

The more I think about it the anger I actually get. I'm angry for me, and I'm certainly getting angry for my daughter. My daughter is so amazing and beautiful just the way she is at the age of nine years old. I want her to grow up to be a fully realized version of who she is meant to be, not a limited pruned down version of herself in order for her to be acceptable to a larger society. I want to see her at a 100% capacity, not at maybe 40% so that she can fit in with society's ideas of what a woman should be. That's not living, that's not living. That's not what I want for my daughter.

So that's got me thinking, who would I have been without this pruning down? What would I do? Do you ever think that as well, Diamond? Who would you be, Diamond? Who would we be if we were not constantly in the spotlight of the male gaze? What if we only had to worry about the spotlight of our own gaze? That's really what I want. That's what I want for me. That's what I want for my baby girl. That's what I want for you. That's what I want for your baby girl. That's what I want for all women.

What would our own gaze look like if we were given a chance to create it for ourselves? Would it look the same as the male gaze? Have we been so brainwashed and conditioned that we just recreate it again or will we choose something different? I'd like to think that we would choose differently. If I could focus and create my own gaze I think I would choose differently.

Here's some of the things that I would choose. My first rule would be women are not sexual objects. Women are fully actualized sexual beings. I get to own my own sexuality, it's not for somebody else, it's for me. I'd also decide that all shapes, and sizes, and colors are beautiful because there's not one standard of beauty. Exclusionary practices would be excluded.

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Have as many curves as you like. Every woman's vulva is beautiful just the way it is and there is no need for cosmetic vulvoplasty.

Another rule I would have is women get to act whatever the way they want to act, whatever they want to act in the street and as well as whatever the way they want to act between the sheets. A woman would not be defined as a good girl or a bad girl. She would be defined as a woman, period, a woman who could own her own sexuality, a woman who could decide how she wanted to express that sexuality. Yes, she could initiate or not, and it really would not mean anything about her as a person.

Another rule I would have if I'm dealing with my own gaze is women are as intelligent as they are. And they have permission to meet their full intellectual capabilities. Girls can be intellectually as competitive as they like and they would not have to dumb themselves down in order to find a boyfriend. Women can wear whatever they feel like wearing as an expression of who they are, not necessarily to attract other people. A woman's worth would no longer be tied to her appearance.

And women would get to earn whatever level of income that they wanted to earn, it would not matter if their partner earned less or if their partner earned more than them. It just would not be of consequence. What else would you like to add to this list? What else would you like to make part of your rules for creating your own internal gaze?

Diamonds, I have a secret to share with you. The amazing thing is that it's all available to you right now if you decide it's available to you. All you have to do is to decide that you define your own gaze, that you are worthy right now. And you're able to live your life right now by your own standards. You can decide that you're fantastic and amazing right now. You can decide it's time to live your life and love yourself right now. Get rid of the internalized male gaze and whatever the hell else is keeping you down and decide that you create your own world.

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As a 4'11 round brown woman in my 50s, I stopped defining myself by the male gaze. And I'm giving you permission to stop too if you choose to. I'm switching up the game. I'm making my own rules and you can too. I am worthy right now. I am beautiful right now. I am perfect right now. I can take up space and I can breathe. I matter and you do too. I am dismantling that internalized male gaze.

I have decided to redefine my life from my own perspective, the perspective of a 50 something year old Black, queer, short, round, nerdy, sexy, spiritual and amazing woman. I'm going to spend even more time figuring out what that looks like for me. So I have a question for you, how would you like to redefine your gaze? What would you like to internalize? And more importantly what would you like to get rid of? Just remember Diamonds, it's all available to you now. All you have to do is make a decision. All you have to do is decide.

Okay Diamonds, that's all for this week. Lots of love as usual, Dr. Sonia is out.

Hey Diamonds, do you want to reignite the passion that's gone missing from your life? Do you want to want to want it again? You know I'm on a mission to end the emotional pain and isolation that women experience associated with sexual difficulties. And many of you also know that I was once in that place where I was experiencing little to no sexual intimacy in my life. And I kept thinking that there was something that was wrong with me, that I wasn't enough. I wasn't attractive enough. I wasn't good enough. I wasn't smart enough to fix this problem.

And I was worried all the time that my relationship was too far gone because of this lack of intimacy. Well, you know what? I was right about one thing. The relationship didn't last. But even though the relationship didn't last I committed to doing the work that I needed to do to own my sexuality. And now I have this amazing sex life and it's everything that I wanted it to be. And I'm also committed to helping my Diamonds by

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teaching them the same strategies that I figured out in order to revitalize the intimacy in their life.

So if you want to stop feeling broken, if you want to stop feeling shame and guilt about sexuality, if you want to feel more comfortable with your sexuality and tap into that pleasure then I'm here for you Diamonds. First of all know that there's nothing that's gone wrong with you. You're not broken. And you know what? You can solve your intimacy issues. You can let go of that shame and guilt, and you can tap into that passionate person that's just waiting to come out.

Let's get on a strategy call together. And let's discuss how we can work together and how I can help you. And know that a strategy call, it's like a 100% a safe place, there's no judgment. We'll talk about your intimacy situation which is what's going on right now. We're also going to talk about your intimacy goals, what you would like your intimacy to look like in the future. And then we'll talk about how we could possibly work together to come up with a personalized strategy plan for you so you can get the results that you need.

So, Diamonds, I'm here for you. Don't wait another minute, book that consultation call with me today. And I can't wait to talk to you. You can get that consultation call by going to [soniawrightmd.as.me](https://soniawrightmd.as.me) and the link is also in the show notes. Okay, have a great day. I can't wait to talk to you. Take care.