

Mike Domitrz: Welcome to the Respect Podcast. I'm your host, Mike Domitrz from Mikespeaks.com, where we help organizations of all sizes, educational institutions and the US Military create a culture of respect and respect is exactly what we discuss on this show. So let's get started. Our special guest this week is someone I've known now for a few years and as I've talked to many times in the past, that his Dr. Jen. Jen Gonzalez is a sociologist and national speaker on healthy sexuality, intimacy, consent and mindfulness. So Dr. Jen, thank you so much for joining us.

Jennifer: Oh my pleasure. I'm so happy to be here to have this conversation.

Mike Domitrz: Absolutely thrilled that you are the person leading the conversation. I'm going to dive right into it because we're all about the Respect Podcast, where and how disrespect fit into intimacy.

Jennifer: Intimacy is about, I think, being able to be open and raw and vulnerable with ourselves and being able to share that with someone else, and we need to have a level of respect for ourselves and respect for others to even consider wanting to go to that place and see the value of it.

Mike Domitrz: When you say raw, what do you mean by raw?

Jennifer: Okay, so we have this idea that what it means to be a strong person is to not have fear or to not feel emotions. In my interpretation, that's really putting armor up and numbing ourselves or running from the mindfulness of what it feels like to be in any present moment and its joy and its pain. So to me it's very raw when we're willing to take that armor down for ourselves and really look at what's there, gently look at, kindly look at what's there and know that we're still a worthy human beings, we're still worthy of love and in all of our messiness and beauty, and that's a very raw tender place to be and to be able to share that with another and to build or create a safe space that they can do the same and vice versa. They create the safe space for you. That to me is what true intimacy is.

Jennifer: In a lot of way, I'm a sociologist, so in a lot of ways we're taught to not respect ourselves in society, not respect our bodies, not listen to our bodies, not respect the views of others in front of us. And so there's-

Mike Domitrz: Let's pause. Let's pause there because I think you bring up a really good point there. Can you give the listeners an example of a way that people are not or that are taught not to respect themselves, their bodies?

Jennifer: Yeah. So a couple of things come to mind. One, my specialty areas is female sexual empowerment. I think from birth, many girls and women, we're trained to view our bodies as the enemy because it doesn't look good enough. It doesn't look perfect. It doesn't look the way it looks in media. We often get feedback from a young age that we get value by looking pretty or looking nice, or as we

become teenagers, looking sexy and getting sexual attention and that's your value and worth. It's a real double-edged sword there because then you diet to the point of hurting yourself for exercising, overexercising or anorexia and bulimia and this quest for a perfect body that we're taught is what gives us value or importance in society or in the eyes of others, makes us disrespect our own bodies because we're not taking care of ourselves.

Jennifer: We're not honoring, this is a vessel that we have to move through this life and let's make it as strong and capable as possible. There's so much emphasis put on looks versus capacity and that can cause us to disrespect ourselves, and I know men are often raised in our society and with masculinity where they are not supposed to be in touch with their emotions, not supposed to be in touch with their bodily needs, like, for example, I'm doing a new podcast now and the host was sharing a story about how he was on a long road trip, and I mean in this man was probably in his mid 40s at the time and he drove and drove and he was with a friend and he's like, "We're not stopping. We're almost home. We're not doing this," and he peed his pants. To me that's because he was just totally overriding and ignoring his body signs and wisdom and at a fundamental level that's disrespecting our body and the only one we've got.

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, let's dive into that. Because it's not uncommon sexually for people to disrespect their bodies in a way that often is not discussed. For instance, you're not in the mood, you don't feel you want to be sexually intimate, but you think you owe it to your partner, and so you engage in sexual activity out of guilt, not out of pleasure, want and something that you really want to really treasure and have a mutual experience with. But just, "Well, I just need to do this for them." Not because you want to do it, because you feel it's your role. It's a total disrespect of the body. It's a total disrespect of our sexual boundaries in this idea that, "I owe." So how do you help people realize you don't ever owe someone a sexual act?

Jennifer: Yeah, and that is super complicated topic. I'll say I, as a sociologist and somebody took a lot of women's studies classes, I was definitely trained with the idea like you never do anything sexual that you don't want to do, and I still stand by that because particularly as women, but I was just talking to a man last night and he's like, "Oh yeah, on a third date." He goes, "I always just have sex because I think the woman expects it." I was like, "Oh, I've never heard a guy say that. I've always heard women say that they think it's expected." This goes all ways in terms of doing things out of expectation or we don't have autonomy over our own bodies and we owe it to somebody else for their pleasure or their needs over our own pleasure and needs.

Jennifer: However, a complication comes in and I've been doing coaching work with individuals and couples for the past 10 years and I work with a lot of couples in longterm relationships, marriages, whatever. For example, I tend to see couples where the man, I work a lot with heterosexual couples and so the man still has quite a bit of desire and sexual desire, and the woman hers has declined quite a bit over the years and you're left in this funny place because if you only go with

the belief that like she's like ... Because I talked to these women and they're like, "Yeah, no, I never feel horny. Like I never, my body never really wants it. Maybe a little bit mid cycle when I'm ovulating," but she never wants it.

Jennifer: So what do you do then when you're in a longterm relationship? You love your partner, you respect your partner, you have good communication and say his love language is physical touch and sex and that's how he feels most loved and connected. Hers isn't and but her body never wants sex. We learn the sexual model that we go into a sexual encounter and we should feel desire and then our body gets aroused and then we move towards climax or orgasm or something, some peak sexual experience. For many women, particularly in longterm relationships, the desire doesn't come first. The desire and arousal get flip flopped, and so there's this like leap of faith sometimes, right? You need to be with a partner you respect and who loves you and he'll go at your own pace to open your body up to a sexual experience, start feeling arousal, and then the desire kicks in.

Jennifer: So it's like our physiology and especially gender differences around it can be so complicated. This can be done in a very respectful way and always needing the right to be able say, "Hey, this just isn't working. We need to stop," and that level of respect for yourself to bring your voice up, even if you think it's going to hurt their feelings and that your partner will absolutely respect you and be like, "Okay, awesome. Let's cuddle. Let's do something else where we can get feel connected and intimate that doesn't have to be sexual."

Mike Domitrz: Well, I think the key there is that that's two partners who want to be present for each other, who want to be present for each other, being the keywords. So let's say I'm the partner who does not have any sexual desire, but I want to please my partner. So that's different because I want to, even though I don't have the desire, I think what I was referring to earlier is the one who does not want to. I don't want to, I'm not in the mood, but I think I have to. That's a different category.

Jennifer: It's a very fine line though in the work that I've done because as we know in our work, our mental states and that you come into something create everything. So if you can switch it from a ... Check in at least, "Okay, if I'm having sex once a week with my partner and it feels obligatory, where is that?" So you're still doing it. So there's your meeting some need that you have in that relationship. What is that and where's that coming from and what is the want? Is there a way to shift it? Because if you're still doing it, because I work with couples like that. She's having sex once a week. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, we're going to do this for the rest of your life. Let's at least look at this. Either stop doing it or figure out how to bring yourself pleasure or look at it as a gift that you're giving your partner." Can you shift your mental state if you're going to be doing it anyway?

Jennifer: This is, I mean, this is very nuanced because again, like I never want anybody to do something they really don't want to do because then it's like a violation and they're not respecting themselves, their partner's not respecting them. But

there is so much nuance between where that line is and we can do more with that line than I think people give themselves credit for.

Mike Domitrz: Well, and the key there is being willing to explore and do so in a respectful way. So I'm not feeling this, but I want to do this for you. The key there, once again though is still, I'm doing this because I want to for whatever reason, right? Either I want to for you, I want to for me, it's mutual because I want to and you want to do. Now, it doesn't mean it's mutual on the exact level of want, right? That could be different, but I'm still choosing this and that's a big difference.

Jennifer: Right. There's different wants. I mean, the want can be for sexual pleasure. The want can be for physical touching. The want can be to feel desired. The want can be to feel pretty or to feel connected.

Mike Domitrz: The want could be to celebrate, right?

Jennifer: Yes, yeah.

Mike Domitrz: I mean, we know people that, yeah, that do it just to celebrate, like, "Hey, this was an amazing day," and that it happens after that, one person got a raise or had this or that.

Jennifer: Yes, yeah.

Mike Domitrz: Just to celebrate. How do you help people with the exploration of desire and want and what they like and don't like? Some people out there, they don't know anything other than the standard. So how do you help somebody and they're not comfortable going anywhere else because they think to talk about anything other than missionary or these two or three sexual positions, to talk about anything more than that is deviant or is not right? How do you help somebody understand it's okay to explore, in fact, it's wonderful to explore?

Mike Domitrz: The key is the way you explore.

Jennifer: Yeah. The first thing that comes to mind is ... I mean if somebody's coming to talk to me, they obviously have some openness around sexual topics and recognize that they've got some kind of block.

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, so let's go with the person who's not coming forward. Let's say they're not coming to you.

Jennifer: Well, I mean just to normalizing that we are sexual creatures from birth. It's not uncommon for babies to reach down in their diapers and touch themselves because there's just a lot of nerve endings there. And we are built to experience sexual desire and sexual pleasure and to have more nerve endings around our nipples and around our genitals that give us a lot of pleasure. And the neurochemical release you get from that feels amazing. But the ability to be,

again, I come back to that word raw and vulnerable and intimate with someone else, is such a gift to share that with another human being. It's a very beautiful thing that often at that level of deep intimacy you don't share with that many people in your lifetime or only one person in your lifetime at that depth of connection.

Mike Domitrz: What are some questions that people listening could go back to the partner and ask to try to take exploration in a way they haven't taken it before?

Jennifer: One thing is I'd ask the question, "What does sex mean to you? And what does not having sex mean to you?" Because then you're getting at where each of your values and motivations are around this. And then looking at what fears do you have or insecurities about trying anything new sexually? And that's super helpful because then you're getting at the core of your insecurities about your body or looking foolish. You're not being good at something, or that it's shameful, or it's inappropriate. Or messages that maybe you learned growing up, it could be through your parents, your school, or early experiences, or religion, or the media. And really shining a bright light on this doesn't have to be your truth. This is messages you picked up from the outside world. You have a choice once you shine a light on that to start dismantling that shame and that embarrassment. And so finding out where these messages came from and shining a light on them, they start to lose their power. And then to recognize, okay, we do have a choice. Bit by bit maybe we could start choosing a different path that brings us closer together.

Jennifer: And then there's some websites online and also if I do this in a workshop with folks, I'll just make up a list of here's 12, 15, 20 different sexual activities and ranging from just cuddling to kiss to much more explicit sexual activities. And within this list, pick five things that you really like or are interested in. And then sit and do some journaling on it of like why. Why do you like it? What version of it do you like? What don't you like? And kissing is a simple one. Like, "I really like when we have a kiss that's slow and it's sensual. And we're sort of exploring. And what doesn't feel good is if it's fast or we dive into it. Or if it feels too wet or sloppy," or something like that.

Jennifer: And to realize within all these sexual activities even something as basic as kissing, there is so much nuance and some versions of it really make your body feel turned on and make you feel connected to the other person. And some versions of it don't. And to give yourself this space and the safety with your partner just to explore. And like I said, even just choosing five on the list or three on the list and just starting somewhere and then slowly working through that list. And then you could have things you're like, "I absolutely do not want to try this or ever do this." But at least ask why. You don't have to change your mind on it. But ask why.

Mike Domitrz: Let's pause there. You're saying ask ... because I think there's a key difference. You want to ask yourself why you want to do something. Because you don't want to pressure the other person by saying, "Why won't you?" But asking

yourself, "I won't do that." And then asking myself, "Why won't I do that? What's my fear there?"

Jennifer: Yeah. Exactly. And again this is to have a conversation I do like the idea of couples doing these type of things on their own and writing in a journal and then coming and sharing with each other. And then maybe further gently helping each other explore. But that needs to be super gentle with no expectations, no pressure, just to take with ourselves and with our partners this approach of gentle curiosity is a beautiful way to help ourselves bloom sexually and to give us space for our partners to bloom sexually. But this is always at our own pace not anybody else's pace by anyone else's expectations.

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, no. That's great. Now what do you think are some sexual either activity or playfulness acts that people really steer away from or are afraid to discuss but can bring a lot of pleasure? But people are afraid to even have the conversation.

Jennifer: Yeah, two things come to mind. One is stuff around BDSM or kink. And primarily like dominant, submission play. 50 Shades of Grey however long ago that came out, that really showed that our country, and particularly women in our country, have a whole lot more interest in playing with power play in the bedroom or at least it's a fantasy and a turnon for them.

Mike Domitrz: Let's pause there. Let's pause. Because the irony of that is that the kink community hated that movie-

Jennifer: Oh, yeah.

Mike Domitrz: ... because of the way it was depicted. The BDSM community and kink community is very consent-based. I mean incredibly explicit consent-based where that movie was sort of continuously let me truly dominant you, versus real BDSM and kink is I choose to role play in this. I'm not mysteriously being dominated. I've agreed to what we're going to do and not do. And then we have fun with that. Where the movie was you're going to be my subject and I'm just going to do this.

Jennifer: Right. And the age difference and the power difference in the movie and the books.

Mike Domitrz: Right.

Jennifer: The way BDSM was displayed in the books and the movie is problematic in a lot of ways. He basically stalked her at times and just showed up. There was a lot of emotional instability displayed there in the vein of romance which is what so many romantic movies have done in the past. We romanticize men just feeling so much desire for the woman they can't control themselves and they stalk her, and they don't accept a no because they just love her so much and they're so

attracted to her. That's romantic. Yeah, no. We have a pretty bastardized notion of romance in our country.

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, let's pause, because I want listeners to know what BDSM, healthy BDSM, looks like for those. Because when I'm speaking people come up to me and go, "Hey, Mike. We really believe in what you teach in the BDSM community, in the kink community, because ..." And then I love learning because I learned from their sharing of knowledge too which is, look, if you want to explore that it means the two of you should explore how you would like that to occur. What kind of experience you want to have, not just, hey, just go do whatever you want to me, because that can become very dangerous and very harmful. It's a real exploration they have beforehand.

Jennifer: Oh, yeah. The level of communication that folks in the BDSM community even just in general but certainly at its best ... The level of communication that they have just far exceeds pretty much any other population outside of the BDSM community around sexual topics.

Mike Domitrz: Without a doubt. I mean and they don't just generally say, "Yeah, go ahead have fun with me." It's very specific. Like, "Here's where I'd like you to touch me with that or to do that with me. And here's where I don't want you to ..." It's very specific. And they have an out word because even where they want to let the rules go, they still want to have a consent-based situation. So that's why that's all there. It's to set up rules and guidelines to create a safe, vulnerable environment, not where someone's controlling me and I give up safety. That's not what happens. So that's one of them. What would be the other area?

Jennifer: The other way is around anal play. And I particularly it became and anal sex became big in porn probably maybe about 15 years ago. And we tend to see that anything in mainstream pornography when that becomes popular, it tends to then hit the mainstream at kind of a tipping point about 10 years later. So mainstream sexual activities of what's considered quote unquote normal to do in a sexual encounter. And I hear so much and read the research that so often women feel pressured into trying that. Which sucks in so many ways, because our anus has so many nerve endings and can be a source of so much pleasure. And I know some women that maybe have trouble getting over the edge with an orgasm, a well-lubed finger in their ass can totally push them over the edge.

Jennifer: However, if you're feeling pressured, if you're not really having a discussion about this ahead of time, if you're not using lube, if you're not able to relax, if this is something that you think is dirty or wrong or don't want to do, all of those things and your body's going to tense up. It is not going to be a pleasant experience. I mean you could actually hurt yourself and you could tare. And so that still, it's become much more sort of assumed that it's something that should be tried with heterosexual couples. I don't think just like you said with 50 Shades of Grey and BDSM there's preparation to do. There's conversations to have. There's a closeness and a safety that needs to be created to be able to move ... You don't want to just spring this on somebody.

Mike Domitrz: And there's also the societal stigmas around it that play into it. It was illegal at one time, but so were many sexual acts. But there's this stigma around it that it plays a big role. I mean I can imagine when you said just a moment ago, "Finger in the ass." There are people listening going, "Oh, my gosh. This is inappropriate-

Jennifer: I know.

Mike Domitrz: ... for the RESPECT Podcast." But let's be clear. That was very biological. There was nothing inappropriate about the words.

Jennifer: I paused. And I was like, "God, should I change my language?" And I'm like, "I'm not even sure what to change it to."

Mike Domitrz: Right. I mean you could change a different word than ass maybe. But the point it's not biologically ... There's nothing biologically incorrect. There's nothing disrespectful about the language. Now you could find it uncomfortable listening to this. If you're offended because you're uncomfortable, that doesn't mean the language was

Mike Domitrz: Correct estate. It could be you're uncomfortable because of societal messages that have put it there.

Jennifer: Oh, I have no doubt. I mean, because we are such a shaming society around a lot of sexuality, particularly anything that's considered out of a rather narrow range of "acceptable activities." And our bodies are capable, are mentally, emotionally, physically capable of so much pleasure, and like I said, again, this raw connection with another human being, which is scary in and of itself to go to, because your armor's down. You're all there. You're vulnerable with someone else. But I do think that is one of the most beautiful things we can share with another human being. And our societal teaching around sex takes that away from us in a lot of ways, because it makes it shameful, or embarrassing, and scary, and not right.

Mike Domitrz: There's idea that if you talk about it, you have to do it or you are doing it.

Jennifer: Oh, gosh.

Mike Domitrz: That you can't just gain knowledge. Like people will hear you and I right now, and they'll be thinking, "Oh, well this must mean that Mike and his life must do anal, and Jen must like [inaudible 00:25:14] because they're talking about it, versus-

Jennifer: Do they really think that?

Mike Domitrz: ... versus, people will ... because they'll think, "Well, you can't talk about something if you're not comfortable with doing it," which is just insane. You can

have knowledge. Whether you choose to use that knowledge in a certain situation is a different conversation. And that's part of the problem. We think that if we talk about it, well then it has to happen. So we won't even talk about it. We should be able to talk about it, to explore ... "Do you want this, or not want ... " No, I don't want that. But I've learned a lot about it, so I know why I'm making that choice.

Jennifer: It's an informed choice.

Mike Domitrz: Right.

Jennifer: Yeah. So again, having that gentle curiosity ... Well, you and I, we're considered experts in our realm. To be an expert means that you have knowledge far beyond what you could possibly experience yourself, or frankly want to experience yourself. But we learn the vastness of what's possible out there, and hear other people's stories, and share them, and the nuances of what it is to be a sexual human being, or to be in a situation, in a conversation around consent. It's impossible for us to have experienced all of that.

Jennifer: And we have our own tastes and preferences of what we like and don't like. But we don't, as they say in like the Tantra community, we don't yuck other people's yum. If someone else is in a consensual, communicative adult sexual relationship with someone else, and this is something that they enjoy and brings them pleasure, I don't want to yuck that for someone else if they're doing it responsibly. They're just living their life, and we're all just to do the best that we can-

Mike Domitrz: Absolutely.

Jennifer: ... the path that we're on.

Mike Domitrz: And Jen, I can imagine people will think in your line of work ... How do you ... Like in my line of work, people ask all the time, "How did you start this work?" And obviously, there's a story behind that. What brought you to this area to ... Obviously, you're a sociologist specifically to sex.

Jennifer: Yeah. So when I was an undergrad at Lehigh University back in Pennsylvania, where I grew up-

Mike Domitrz: I've been there. Yeah.

Jennifer: Oh, yay. Yeah. Oh, it's a beautiful campus, isn't it?

Mike Domitrz: It is.

Jennifer: Yeah. That's why I went there. I fell in love with the campus. My sophomore year, my roommate became a sexual health peer educator, where you go

around to the dorms and you do condom demonstrations. You talk about safer sex. You talk about negotiation. Yeah, just doing the education around it, STIs ... And she was having a lot of fun with the group. And I was like, "Well, that looks like fun." And I actually joined because I wanted public speaking skills, because at the time I was afraid to even raise my hand in a class because I was afraid of looking foolish, or getting something wrong, or doing group projects and standing up in front of the group.

Jennifer: And I was like, "Well, this group looks like fun, and you get public speaking skills, and if you stand up and talk about sex, you can probably talk about anything," which is quite true. And then I just became fascinated about gender power dynamics, and how people make decisions around sex, and how that varies by how we've been socialized into "masculinity" or "femininity." That was 25 years ago.

Mike Domitrz: All right, very cool. And I was a peer educator myself-

Jennifer: Yay.

Mike Domitrz: ... going back farther years before that.

Jennifer: That's awesome.

Mike Domitrz: But you have a book coming out, From Madness to Mindfulness: Reinventing Sex For Women. You're expecting that around August of '19, correct?

Jennifer: Yes.

Mike Domitrz: And for everyone listening, I want them to be able to find that. That's Dr. Jenn's Den, and Jenn is two N's, so drjennsden.com. Of course, we'll have that in the show notes. Thank you so much, Jenn, for joining us.

Jennifer: Oh, thank you for this very nuanced conversation. I loved it. Thanks, Mike.

Mike Domitrz: Oh, you brought great insights. And for our listeners, you know what's next? That is the question of the week. Before I answer this week's question of the week, I'd love to ask you a question. Would you please subscribe to this podcast, The Respect Podcast with Mike Domitrz? By subscribing, you can make a huge impact. Now you might be wondering, "Mike, how does my subscribing to your podcast make a huge impact?"

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phone or whatever device you are listening to the podcast on. It happens automatically. So subscribing also makes your life easier.

Mike Domitrz: Now let's get into this week's question of the week. Oh, and by the way, you can always ask your questions of the week by joining us on Facebook and our discussion group. It's called The Respect Podcast Discussion Group. Go there on Facebook and ask whatever questions you would like me to answer and/or address in this segment of the show, And then listen to each episode to find out when your question is included. This week's question of the week is one I get a lot from the work we do around the world with people of all ages. And the question is, "Mike, what do you think is the impact that pornography is having on today's society?"

Mike Domitrz: Now, a lot of times when people ask me this question, they assume we're only talking about teenagers. But what I'm about to share impacts people of all ages. And people assume that what I'm going to share is whether violence and porn are correlated. There's research that shows that, and they think I'm going to go down that path. I'm going to go down a different path, and that is what it does as far as setting expectations and realistic understandings of sexual intimacy in the human body. The answer is it messes them up.

Mike Domitrz: See, what happens is if people don't have a healthy understanding of sexuality, and then they watch porn, or a healthy understanding of the human body, and they're watching porn without that healthy understanding, they think what they're watching on porn is the norm, is the standard, is the expectation. Even though people in the porn industry say what they do in porn is not realistic, it's fantasy. It's not what they would do at home and their own personal enjoyment, for pleasure, for love, connection. That's not what they would do. But people watching who don't have a healthy understanding, don't understand that or don't realize that, and they set that as their expectation.

Mike Domitrz: There's two quick dramatic impacts of that. One, is that people lose the ability to value their own bodies because they don't look like the ones in porn. So they lose confidence in their own body, and when you lose confidence in your own body, that can have dramatic impact on your ability to enjoy sexual intimacy with a partner, to feel good about yourself, has dramatic impact. Two, the way they see sex depicted in porn becomes their norm, and if they feel it doesn't happen that way, they can't feel that it's satisfying, that it's wonderful. That's really unhealthy, because porn, the way it's depicted, is not about satisfaction. It's about visual and audio fantasy, not satisfaction or mutual pleasure.

Mike Domitrz: And so this is really important people to understand. If someone's going to look at porn and evaluate, they need to have a very healthy understanding of their own body, of human sexuality, of mutuality and relationships, all of that to be able to see and censor in their own mind. I'm not saying censor people from seeing, but censor in their own mind, "What's right here? What's wrong here? What makes sense? What doesn't?" So that it doesn't have a negative impact on

their lives. That's my answer to the impact porn is having. Of course we could go on here for hours on this one, but this was a quick answer to that question.

Mike Domitrz: Do you know what I would love? I would love to hear your answer to this week's question of the week. So would you please answer what your answer would have been if you were asked that question today on the show? All you do is go to our Facebook page. We have a special group where we have these discussions, called The Respect Podcast Discussion Group, so The Respect Podcast Discussion Group, and share with us what would your answer have been to this week's question of the week. And if take a moment, post us a new question for future episodes. What question would you like to hear me answer on an upcoming episode? That's all done on Facebook and our special group, which is The Respect Podcast Discussion Group. Can't wait to see you there.

Mike Domitrz: Thank you for joining us for this episode of The Respect Podcast, which was sponsored by the Date Safe Project at datesafeproject.org. And remember, you can always find me at mikespeaks.com.