

## **Interview with Jody Moore and Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife**

Jody Moore: I'm Jody Moore with Bold New Mom. This is episode number 62: Interview with LDS Sex Therapist Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife.

Hey you guys, how's it going? I had the great privilege and honor of talking with Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife. Some of you, I know, are familiar with her work and I have referenced her work before. She does the important work of helping us to navigate our relationships and her emphasis is in regard to our sexuality and our desire, and how to have the type of sex life we want in our marriages, all of us, to feel what we are getting what we need and to really understand that part of us that Heavenly Father gave to each of us that seems to be rather complicated. I don't know about you, but to me it's a complicated thing to understand, especially given the law of chastity, the world we live in, and many other factors. So, I will say that Dr. Fife was so wonderful and patient. As we conducted this interview, we had some technical problems. The sound cut out every now and again and I think I've been able to edit in such a way that you really won't notice or be affected, but if you do, that's why. That's what was going on. Also, at the end of the interview, I'm going to share a few wrap up thoughts with you guys that I have after talking to Dr. Fife and clarify. Just a couple of other things I know from studying her work. So, without further ado let's go to the interview.

So, thank you so much. I'm really appreciative for you for coming on the podcast. I wanted to tell you just kind of how I found you and then I'm going to have you just briefly tell my listeners kind of, you know, what about what you do.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Sure.

Jody Moore: I had a friend who called me about 8 months ago. She said, "Haven't you heard of Jennifer Finlayson-Fife? She's a Mormon sex therapist." And I was like, "What? There is such a thing?" And so, I immediately Googled you and found your web site, and then I found the Rational Faith podcast that you guest on pretty frequently, right?

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Yes. Uh-huh.

Jody Moore: And then I immediately began binge listening to every episode you were on. And I just—I just devoured it because I think it's so on-point, it's so brilliant, it's so necessary in our world today. And then even my husband got on and listened to all of them. So anyway, I love what you teach and I'm really excited to have you here today. Will you tell for my listeners who aren't familiar with you, just give us a little bit about what it is that you do and how you got involved in it?

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Sure. So—well I, the way I got involved in it was that I was doing my PhD and I was trying to come up with a topic for my dissertation, and I was also asked at that time if I would teach two undergraduate courses, which is kind of typical that they ask PhD candidates to teach undergrad courses—and they asked me comically to do human sexuality and drugs and alcohol. I was unmarried at the time and I had like no core experience with either and I thought it was hilarious that they were asking me to teach these two courses.

Jody Moore: The single Mormon girl.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Yeah. Exactly. So I actually accepted only one which was the human sexuality one, and I started doing a lot of research on looking at the text books that they had suggested. That's a long answer, but in essence it drew me to my dissertation. So I wrote my dissertation on Mormon women and sexuality. It was a really fascinating—I interviewed active members of the Church who had grown up in the Church and they were currently married. I talked to them about their premarital experiences with dating and negotiating sexually intimate decision making, meaning when to kiss somebody, when to engage further, then, how they transitioned into marriage. It was a really fascinating study, and then I opened my practice. I was home with my kids for several years, and then I opened my practice about 8 years ago and primarily do work with Mormon couples and more particularly Mormon women about relationship and sexuality issues.

Jody Moore: Okay. Cool.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Yeah.

Jody Moore: At the end I'll have you share about more where we can find you and where people can get help from you.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Sure.

Jody Moore: So, to begin with, I have just a few questions I was hoping you could address today. So, first of all, I loved the message you send sexuality being something that each of us is responsible for, individually, and that we need to keep the ownership over it and come to understand it, and cultivate our own desire. So I was wondering if you could share a little bit about your philosophy there, and how, as LDS women, most of my listeners are LDS women, but certainly I know that this applies to any one, but how can we keep that ownership and cultivate it for ourselves?

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Yeah, well I would say keeping it is sometimes just creating it in the first place, for many of us. I think that there is our theology and then there's our culture. I think we have—many of us have been inculturated with the idea that sexuality, particularly as women, is legitimized by using it to serve or service a husband. So many of us are kind of even coming into this question that you're asking from the paradigm of—that my sexuality is only legitimate if it's about taking care of someone else. And, it's only legitimate if he arouses it and he cultivates it within me. So, many of us have been taught the idea that sort of our sexuality doesn't exist or it shouldn't exist until we're married. Then it should sort of be woken up by your husband. That's a fantasy. Okay?

Jody Moore: Right

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: It's just not true and it's not the way that it works for people. That is to say, we're sexual from birth, we're inherently sexual. You know, that it's just a part of our divine bodies is to be sexual and embodied. And of course, your sexuality is immature when you're born. You don't have much of

a relationship to it, but as you come to even know your own body as a younger person, you come to become aware of your body's capacity—many of us become aware at some level of our body's capacity for pleasure and arousal and just sensuality, which is all fundamental to our sexuality. And so, the reality though is that many of us don't engage in a natural progression of deeper self awareness and deeper self knowledge around just your body and your sexuality and your sensuality. For girls, in particular—I think it happens for boys too but in a different way—but for girls, especially, there is this feeling that my sexuality or my sexual feelings are incongruent with my femininity and my goodness, therefore, my desirability as a woman, and for many of us we work hard to kind of repress and suppress this natural part of ourselves. I obviously think part of that is important, you know, especially when you obey, when you believe in obeying the law of chastity there is a certain amount of redirection and management of those feelings that's important. But what I'm talking about here is more of a kind of instinctive shame, anxiety about the presence of sexual feelings that works against the integration of our sexuality. So I'm very interested in helping people in the creation of sexual integrity. Meaning, the literal integration of their sexuality in line with their moral values. Many of us struggle with this, men included. But, you know—for example, the women that I interviewed in my dissertation, there were two groups. First, the majority did not integrate well, the minority did integrate better. The ones who did not integrate their sexuality well, had, you know, one of the questions that I asked was do you remember your first experience of arousal? And for those who didn't, one version of this, but those who didn't do well, they had a shame response to this reality. And they had this feeling that something was wrong or bad or scary about these feelings. One woman who, reflecting back on her childhood, remembered sitting a doll, the head of a doll, and that it was arousing to her that she could feel her body responding. She said that she immediately stood up and the words in her head were bad, dirty, bad. She felt that she had done something wrong, this was a dirty part of herself. The women who integrated their sexuality well had, they would somehow become aware of their own body's capacity for arousal and they would respond to it and they were like, "Wow. That's cool. That's cool that my body can do that." Some even masturbated and became very aware and even

repented of it, they felt like that this was not what I wanted to do. It wasn't high shame or high anxiety, they made a decision about it, you know, "I'm going to save this for another time when I'm married." But it was—they saw their body as having possibility and capacity, and they saw it as a positive reality. So the women who did well, who had—who moved comfortably into marital sexuality, who were enjoying sex as a married person—they had all achieved a certain kind of integration with their sexuality, even if it was early in its stages. That is to say, that they had a sense of their sexuality belonging to them, before they got married. They saw themselves as already sexual, they already anticipated that this would be a wonderful, good part of their life. And then, when they got married, it was more of an experience of sharing their sexuality with their partner, with their husband—not that, now he will legitimize it, having sex with him will legitimize it. He will awaken it. For the women who didn't do well, they did see it that way and they saw it like, "My sexuality is made legitimate through servicing him." That is to say, that our sexual relationship and my sexuality is really about my partner. It's really about my husband. It's about keeping him happy, and that's why, you know, that's why I can be sexual. I think that is a blasphemy, in my opinion, I don't think that it's the right way to think about sex and our sexuality, and when we do think about it this way it kills our desire immediately.

Jody Moore: Totally. I agree. Can I ask you a question real quick?

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Sure.

Jody Moore: As, you know, many of my listeners are parents and so I know one of the things that comes up to me when you talk about this is wanting to do my best to position it for my children. So, how do you recommend that we teach our children the law of chastity and yet not create this shaming culture and not send the message that those arousing feelings that they will have long before they are married are not anything to be ashamed of?

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Yeah. So, first of all, I would say that shaming is antithetical to what our goal is in the sense that shame—first of all, in my dissertation research and this is supported in a lot of other research is the more shame and anxiety someone feels, they were the ones that were less likely to

obey the law of chastity. Not because they felt so much desire, but because they felt so little ability to anchor into their own integrity. It was such high anxiety behavior that they often, there is so much I could say about this because it's particularly true for girls, but if you think about it in this way: If you were to grow up saying, just the fact that you want sweets means you're a bad person. The fact that you want sweets makes you a very, very bad person. Don't think about it, don't look at it, don't want it. You're going to create one or two realities. Either somebody who is anorexic or somebody who is bulimic, but not somebody who has integrated a good part of life into a healthy way into their larger values and goals. And so, we want to think about sexuality in much the same way. Sexuality is not good or bad, it just is. We are sexual inherently. How we relate to our sexuality has a big impact. Part of the reason we're all so stressed out about sex, parents included, leaders included, is because sexuality is a very high power currency. The way we engage with our sexuality has high impact on those we are in relationships with and with ourselves. You know, when we say that sex is next to murder, this is where I agree with it, is that sex exploitation is next to murder in the sense that there's really nothing more destructive than being exploitive towards another person with their sexuality. Sexually abusing a child, for example. And so with a very powerful way with engaging with yourself and another person and doing it wisely really, really matters. And so, you know, I'm certainly just like I would be with food, I'm certainly understanding of the fact that my child would be drawn to sweets, that they would want to eat only Halloween candy for breakfast. I'm not going to shame that. It certainly makes sense to me, so I'm not—I'm acknowledging of the desire, and sexuality too, I'm acknowledging of the feelings, of course, that's just a natural part of being human. It's connected to survival. It's a very important desire. Something would be going wrong if my children never did feel any desire, or never felt any sexual feelings. I want them to have those feelings, but talking to them about how they direct them, and how they, what it is that they're aiming for. So, taking it back to the metaphor for food, if I have a goal of being a healthy person, then it integrates sugar in a way that's congruent with my larger goals of being healthy, but also having pleasure in my life and not living a stoic life. How am I going to integrate this desire and this passion in a way that's congruent with what I

ultimately want for myself, that I believe is good? It's the same with sexuality. Of course the feelings are going to be there. If we all acted on our feelings at any time we would all be in jail because you, you know the meaning, we are constantly, even as adults, redirecting our impulses and our feelings. That's just part of being human.

So what is it that you're striving and aiming for? Part of the issue I have with the way we talk to boys, particularly, and girls, if we do, about porn is that basically in the world we live in now, it's like our kids are in a candy shop all the time. Porn is everywhere. Then when you have a 13-year-old who is in the candy store because he's on his computer and he has access to something and he gets curious, and he's compelled by it, then he has the parent who comes in and the shaming of the fact that he's doing what would be completely natural and developmentally normal is for him to be curious—or in the metaphor, eating that candy—we both put our kids in candy stores in a sense that it's everywhere and then we shame them with the fact that they are staring at the candy as if Satan's now in their heart. As opposed to, you're doing something that would be normal and developmentally appropriate in the sense that you're doing what you're sort of wired to do, but it's not good for you. Okay? So how do we help you with your sexual feelings? It's to get you out of the candy store, for one thing, to manage the Internet and access to the best of our ability, but given that we can't fully control that—how do we then talk to our kids about the fact that these realities are there and what is it that they are really striving for? If you want to be in a loving, committed relationship with another person, looking at porn every day is probably not going to help you create that reality. It's not going to help you shape your sexuality in a direction that's prosocial and really capable of a deeply, loving intimate relationship. It has to be a much more straight forward and less-shaming conversation, less high anxiety conversation with our kids.

I had a friend who was telling me she was so afraid of her children becoming a porn addict, and her boys were three and five years old. She was literally throwing herself in front of the magazines in the grocery store stand when someone was in a swimsuit or in a suggestive position. I said, "You're turning them into porn addicts. With all due respect, your high anxiety—you're basically

saying you don't trust your boys and you are showing them how high anxiety this is. You are forging curiosity. You're forging true feelings in them." High curiosity because what is it that mom is throwing herself in front of magazines and trying to keep it from me? You can't hide fear that whatever this is that it's dangerous and it's bad. Those two ideas pressure porn use. I can't actually integrate these feelings inside of me in a prosocial loving way, it's toxic. What's inside of me is destructive. I can't have access to it. It's being forbidden. There's so much anxiety. It's like the idea you can't ever have sweets. Next thing you know, you're eating half a pan in the pantry.

Jody Moore: Right. So is the message, then, you're saying, not look at porn because that's what people do, but let's not look at porn because it's not going to create what you want in your life. It's not going to forge relationships you want, the bigger picture?

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Exactly. So the short answer is I'm really not in any way shaming of my kids' sexuality. They see that I'm comfortable with being a sexual being. They can feel the attraction I have for their dad. I will sometimes comment on how attractive he looks. They can see the comfort with it, but it's also saying—there's no shaming of the feelings but there's high focus on, what is it that you want to create and how do you want to relate to these feelings and that there's high value in saving this for this special person that you will meet and love deeply down the road, to not trivialize it in the way that the larger culture can and does.

Jody Moore: Really helpful. Thank you. So, last question. I know this doesn't happen for everyone. I've heard you quote that about 30% of your clients, the women is the higher desire partner, right? So I know that can happen. But what I hear commonly that I hope you can address is this experience where, I don't know if it's more prevalent in the LDS culture but, you know, where the sexual desire feels very alive and strong while you're single and while you're dating and while you're engaged, even, you're trying to resist it, and then you get married and now everything's allowed and in fact expected and it feels like your desire is suddenly is gone. It feels like a trick, I've heard people say.



Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Yeah. Absolutely.

Jody Moore: Tell me why that happens and what we can do to remedy it.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Sure. So what I would say is our sense of self belonging to ourselves is more important to us than our sexuality. That's true for men too. So, if we don't feel that we belong to ourselves, we will engage with our sexuality to remedy that. What I mean is when you're dating; you meet this man that you love. You're very attracted to him. You're not sure if he likes you back. You're not sure if you guys have a future. There's a lot of uncertainty. So the desire is sort of like I want to merge with this person. I want to connect with this person. I want the validation of his desire for me. So the desiring is reaffirming of the self. It's expanding. It's like I love this person. I want this person and being with him makes me feel like bigger, more whole, more complete, more lovable. It feels good to desire them. So desire is in full force. When you get married, and especially in the way that we have been inculturated in our LDS culture is that if you get married and now you think, "Well, now I'm supposed to be sexual. Now I'm supposed to be sexual because it's my duty. And he's the one that's the sexual person, I'm just—I just want sexual validation. I want to be desirable to him." But it's really his sexuality that we need to attend to so he's not looking at porn and so on. Then immediately your sense of self is like, "I'm supposed to service this guy sexually." It takes a lot of self validation, a lot of confidence to really let somebody know you sexually, to know yourself sexually, and to really let yourself be known. Many of us don't have that upon getting married. So there's anxiety about that level of exposure. It's one thing to desire and make out, but it's another thing to say, "Hey, come into my body and experience me." That takes—that's higher anxiety. So that coupled with "I'm supposed to give this to them and he seems to be having a great time." The other thing is that for many women it's painful at first and pleasure is not as easy as to get to because women's anatomy is not as conducive to sexual intercourse as it is for men. So when we make sex all about intercourse, not about sensuality and intimacy, and closeness and pleasuring, then you on your wedding night you have intercourse it may be painful. You may not have any clue about what is even supposed to be good about this. He thinks you're having a great time, and he's like, "let's do that

again!” For many women it’s like, “Crap! Now I’m supposed to do this for eternity? I got tricked!”

Jody Moore: Exactly. Yeah.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: So for many women the way they start trying to belong to themselves is let this shut this thing down. I don’t know that I want anything to do with this. See, the reality is if we won’t make room for ourselves, if we buy into this idea that sex is for men, it’s for us to give it to men, sex will die. Right at the beginning. First of all, that’s not our theology. We’re equally yoked. We are equal partners, and sexuality is for both of us. The clitoris it’s only function is pleasure for the woman and the woman’s capacity for pleasure is higher than a man’s capacity for pleasure. Women, if any of the two has higher sexual capacity between men and women, it’s women. But in a male-centric form of sexuality, women look sexually incompetent and men look like they’re very comfortable sexually because it’s low contact, low intimacy and it doesn’t pull out a woman’s natural sexual capacity. Men are, perhaps—men and women are sexual, but women are more discerning, they’re more discriminating about when they’re going to show up sexually. There’s a lot of good reason for that. But, if it’s all about that the man’s pleasure, both what they’re doing as a couple and the psychological environment, she’s not going to show up. So then, it starts becoming about how to service him, how to keep him happy, how to get him off her back—I better have sex so he doesn’t get tempted by porn and that becomes the sexual relationship. It’s miserable for both parties. Miserable.

Jody Moore: So men need to redirect to try to get in touch with her own pleasure...

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Yes. I think that the basic paradigm is this is not sex for you, husband, this is OUR sexual relationship, and if I’m not happy, this is not working yet. Meaning, what is it that I need? What would give me pleasure? What would be helpful for me? What is not working for me about our relationship or about the way you engage me sexually or not? Or even in the day-to-day? Because women, again, are high discriminators in terms of, does this man really love me? Does this man really choose me? Does this man really desire me

or does he just want to get off on my body? Because women are very in tune with that and if this is just about being serviced women don't want—so they may have sex, but they aren't going to show up emotionally and they may even have sex and know how to withhold from him at the same time or torture him at the same time that they're doing something that they feel that they are being used. So the basic idea is how do we both—can this relationship be about both of us? Now, for many women this is very challenging. When I recently taught women out in Utah and did a live version of my courses, it was really striking to me how many women struggle with the idea of receiving, how uncomfortable it is to really receive sexually and otherwise. This is a big problem. This is a big problem. I think one of the reasons we don't like to receive is we like the control of being the giver and I think you have to have a sense of self that actually feels like an equal and many of us do not. If we're in control, and we can think that we are needed and necessary, and we're earning our legitimacy in the relationship through our serviceability. That's completely antithetical to our relationship that's truly reciprocal and the woman is both giving and genuinely receiving, genuinely acting like an equal. Not that she has to earn her legitimacy, she has legitimate by nature of our divine reality, our divine existence. It's a blasphemy that we, as women, are so attuned to this idea that we have to be serving and serviceable to kind of earn our right on this planet, or to have legitimate access to our sexuality. That's wrong. We pay a price when we don't grow into the deeper truths around that we are inherently equal partners, that our sexuality is matters inherently because it belongs to us, because it's a part of being a woman. I'm really trying to help women grow into being whole women in their own right, integrated with their sexuality. Not because they're trying to be less defective for their husband, but because they want to belong to themselves for once.

Jody Moore: Love it. And I can see it showing up in their sexuality, but in many areas of life.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Absolutely. It does. When I see women make this transformation, you just feel their strength just in their presence. Not just in the way they are in the marriage, the way they are in the conversation.

Jody Moore: So good. I love it all. I could keep you here all day, but why don't you just let people know if they want to work with you more, if they want to learn more from you, where can they go and is there anything coming up in the near future that might be of particular interest.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Sure. Probably, if you want to learn more, the best way is to purchase any of the online courses that I do. I have two couples' courses. One, a relationship course for LDS couples, and then a sexuality course for LDS couples. These are both recently just recorded, upgraded. They're the best that I've ever offered. They're watching me teach a live course but it's professionally recorded and so on.

Jody Moore: Sorry, I can say that I've purchased one of those and it really is fantastic, and I can listen to it from my phone and it includes some worksheets. It was really great.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Great. Wonderful. So I also have an Art of Desire course for LDS women that's really around all of these issues that I'm talking about today. It's around the issue of selfhood and desire. I talk about sexuality, but I spend a lot of time on this issue of desire and the issue and self and self-relationship and then how it relates to our sexuality. Then I have a fourth course that's on how to talk to your kids about sex. I will probably be doing a live course in the spring on pornography issues and intimate betrayal and how to recover and grow in the face of that reality. That will probably be live. If people want to be on my e-mail list, they can get on my web site and put their e-mail in, and then they would be notified of that live course.

Jody Moore: Okay. In Utah?

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: That will probably be online that way people can call in from their computers and they can watch me on the screen and ask questions in the chat box and that kind of thing. A couple of things that are coming—I am probably going to do the women's sexuality course live in Salt Lake in the spring, as well. If people want to go to the web site, I mean on my e-mail list, they will get all that information. The third thing is that I'm doing, I've been asked to post

a trip to Italy for Mormon couples to see the open house of the Rome temple. It's probably a year and a half away. Lots of time to save up for that. But you and your spouse can come and tour Italy for 11 days and get input from me every day about how to have a better sexual relationship.

Jody Moore: Okay. I think we all should be going to that. That's fantastic. Are you kidding me?

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: I have to tell you, Italy is the most unbelievably romantic place. If you can't feel it there, there's no hope. I'm just teasing. I'm just teasing, but Italy is amazing.

Jody Moore: Really, if we go to our husbands and say, let's go to Italy and Dr. Fife is going to be there to help me cultivate my desire.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Absolutely.

Jody Moore: It's a no-brainer.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: It is a no-brainer. All that information can be found on my web site if you get on my web site which I can give you the link too.

Jody Moore: Yeah, I will link to all of this in the show notes for everybody.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Right. And then the last thing, of course there is, I do Skype counseling. I'm booked out several months currently, but if anybody knows that they do want to work with me, if you get in touch with me I can put you on the wait list.

Jody Moore: Okay. Perfect. Thank you so much for your time and for this insight. It's awesome. I'm really excited for everybody to hear it. If there's anything we can do to take care of you in the future, be sure to let us know. Otherwise, I'm going to send everybody over to take your courses.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Great. Thanks.

Jody Moore: Thank you, Jennifer.

Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife: Okay. Take care.