



Episode 60 – Love is Blind and Birth Control **Written and hosted by Lisa Dawn Hamilton**

Welcome to Do We Know Things? A podcast where we examine things we think we know about sex.

Content warning: This podcast will include discussions of birth control and very minor spoilers for Love is Blind Season 6. I name one couple that gets engaged in the pods.

Hi everyone! I am Dr. Lisa Dawn Hamilton, professor of psychology and sex educator. Today on Do We Know Things, why don't Amy and Jonny on Love is Blind understand birth control?

On the last episode of Do We Know Things?, I mentioned it was one for the sex researcher nerds. This one is... a little different. I promised you that this episode would be about periods and the menstrual cycle, but something urgent came up that I had to make an episode about. And that urgent issues is the Amy and Johnny storyline in Love is Blind season 6 where they decide not to have sex because Amy is not on birth control.

Yes, we're talking Love is Blind here.. but through a sex ed lens.

Like many people on the internet, my first response *to this storyline* was to yell at the TV, "HOW DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND THIS BASIC PROCESS OF PREVENTING PREGNANCY??" But then Amy posted an explanation to her Instagram account that helped me realize I am a jerk, and also was a reminder of the dystopian nightmare that is reproductive health in the U.S. (and, frankly, many places). On this episode, I explain WHY Amy and Johnny are doing the right thing in avoiding penis-vagina intercourse, the current state of affairs in the U.S., and what I wish everyone knew about preventing pregnancy.

That's coming up on Do We Know Things!

But first!

In an upcoming series of episodes, I am going to tackle menopause, perimenopause, and all of the myths and misunderstandings surrounding it. I would love to include recordings of people talking about their perimenopause experiences because they are so varied. You can DM me on Instagram @doweknowthings, email me at doweknowthings@gmail.com to send a recording or send a question. For typed questions or comments, you can also click the link in the show notes to send them anonymously!

What Happened On Love is Blind

For those of you not watching Love is Blind, here's what you need to know. It debuted in 2020 (just in time for the pandemic) and is currently in its sixth season. Also, it's a big, big hit. It's

consistently one of Netflix's top ten shows and has been nominated for Emmys, but has yet to win any yet. Should you be watching Love is Blind? Well, it depends. Let me outline what happens in a season:

The concept of the show is that presumed heterosexual men and women date people in pods without seeing each other. So they talk to each other through a wall, and they can't see each other, but they can hear each other. They have 10 days to fall in love with someone and get engaged. This seems to mean a man proposing. I haven't seen all of the seasons, but Google tells me no woman has proposed first. Once the couples get engaged, they can meet each other. Then they have 4 weeks to spend together before their wedding. The whole concept is absurd because you can't know enough about someone in the first 4 weeks of knowing them to decide to make a lifelong commitment. If you are entering into a long term relationship energy based on love, new relationship energy is real and that honeymoon phase eventually wears off and reality sets in. You really need to wait for the reality part to make any major decisions. But, the ideas and stories we have about romance do not teach us this. Anyway!

In my opinion, and the opinion of the entire Internet, Amy and Johnny are the best couple on this season, at least based on how the show has been cut. But, as of now, they are also the only couple remaining who don't have penis-vagina sex. I specify penis-vagina sex because they are very clear that the sex they *are* having is hot AF, but the other couples treat them as weirdos because they are afraid of pregnancy.

Multiple times in the show Johnny and Amy have talked about why they aren't having sex. They really, really, really don't want to get pregnant. And I understand not wanting to get pregnant, but also there are ways to prevent pregnancy that don't require using hormonal contraception or having an IUD. I have to admit, I definitely thought they were being ridiculous. Condoms exist! Tracking your menstrual cycle exists! Put those two together and you got a pretty good combo!

I was annoyed that Johnny was so shocked that Amy wasn't on some form of birth control. He repeatedly says "everyone else I have been with has been on birth control." That made me a mad because it seems like he was shaming her. It reminded me of the many women who have been told "All my other girlfriends cum from penetration alone" when the girlfriend in question points out that they need clitoral stimulation to cum.

Johnny tried to redeem himself by saying he would get a vasectomy, which disturbed me because he clearly wants children! While vasectomies can potentially be reversed, it is not a guarantee. Vasectomies should be considered permanent even if some people can get them reversed. He also didn't fully understand what a vasectomy was, and on a subsequent episode after he had looked into it, he was like "Hell no" once he realized what would happen.

Social media exploded with videos of people criticizing Johnny and Amy and I agreed with them, but my attitude shifted when I heard about Amy's Instagram post explaining her side of things.

The Response

My friend Tasia Alexopoulos, who you might remember from Episodes 7 and 26 when she came on to talk about abortion was the one who told me about Amy's Instagram post. Tasia and I watched the show together and were both very judgmental and yelled things at the TV together. After reading the post, we realized that we were wrong to judge them and Tasia suggested that I do an episode on this topic. Here's Tasia reading excerpts of [Amy's Instagram post](#).

“Hi friends. I'm getting so many questions regarding the birth control talk and I figured I'd give a little more context here. Our perception of the world is significantly influenced by our upbringing. Johnny's fear in having an unplanned pregnancy is rooted in his upbringing, which is moreso his story to tell but its something we talked a lotttt about in the pods bc we both came from low socio-economic backgrounds. His fear was completely valid, and I had the same fear too. [...] we live in a country where sex ed is not the best, let's be honest. [...] As for me, another conversation in the pods I told Johnny was that that I have a rare genetic *hereditary* disorder...I told him if we ever have kids, my children would most likely have that condition [...] Although there have been developments on what can be done for my condition, it's something where research is still being done. Me not being on birth control is for a myriad of reasons and my condition is a huge one because there is still not a substantial amount of education around the effects of hormonal birth control with it. [...] Two other questions I've been getting are: did we think about condoms? Yes, 1000% but we still saw it as a risk at the time. Did you know vasectomies are not always reversible? Yes, which is why in my interview clip I say that it is a risk after I mention the idea of a vasectomy. [...] Additionally, I mentioned vasectomy because I feel like society always pushes women to be responsible for these decisions and never on the man. Johnny was very much open and keen on further exploring that route at the time as well! [...] There is still so much more to come on this topic, but I am so grateful that we opened up such an important conversation, as being aligned in family planning is crucial for something as serious as marriage. I also want to note that as a Latina, these topics are not widely spoken in our culture and growing up, I shied away from talking about things like this. I hope women across all communities, especially Latinx communities can feel seen, heard, and understood.”

Tasia also reminded me to think about the abortion law chaos currently happening in the U.S. The people on this season of Love is Blind all live in Charlotte, North Carolina. And while abortion is technically still legal in North Carolina, in July 2023, the abortion limit was changed from 20 weeks to 12 weeks. Also, everyone has to have a counselling appointment at least 3 days before the abortion. Medication abortions are allowed up to 9 weeks, which is standard. There are exceptions to the 12-week rule for rape, incest, or if the pregnant person's life is at risk. Think about it, though, most people don't know they are pregnant until weeks 4-8, which doesn't leave much time to find a clinic, make an appointment, and complete the procedure. It is certainly not an ideal environment to risk a pregnancy. And that is just one state. There are many states where abortion has been either completely banned or functionally banned with things like a 6-week limit.

So, I take back my judgement of Amy and Johnny. They were being smart! They weighed their risks and decided even a small risk of pregnancy was not worth it for them in the early stages of their relationship. Bodily autonomy is extremely important, and they made choices that aligned

with their concerns. Also, the obsession with penis-vagina sex is very heteronormative, and totally unnecessary. So, I think people should back off on their commentary.

What I Wished They Knew

It wouldn't be a DWKT episode if I didn't also challenge some of the misconceptions about birth control on this episode. Amy was right that most people in the U.S. do not have good sex ed, so here is a crash course on non-hormonal options for birth control. (Most stats in this section from (Hatcher et al., 2018).

I will go over this more in the next episode on menstrual cycles, but the risk of pregnancy is only for a few days a month. The egg that's released for fertilization is only a 24-48 hour window around the time of ovulation, which happens roughly in the middle of the cycle. And this is only applicable to people NOT on hormonal contraceptives. Many people on the pill do not realize they do not ovulate on hormones. But that's the point of the pill!

It's also worth noting is that the reason I said several days was the risk, is because sperm can live for several days in the uterus, so if you want to be really careful, only have penetrative sex after ovulation. If you aren't tracking your cycle, you can tell when you are ovulating by the slipperiness of your cervical fluid. If you go to wipe yourself after peeing and the toilet paper slides way too easily, that's a sign you are ovulating. Basically, when the cervical fluid looks and feels like raw egg whites, you are at high risk of pregnancy. A couple of days after that, you have about 2 weeks where there is no risk of pregnancy!

Condoms are also quite effective when used properly, but there can be errors. Making sure you get the right size and making sure to pinch the reservoir at the tip will help prevent breakage and slippage. The perfect use failure rate of condoms is 2%, but the typical use failure rate of a condom is 13%, so that risk can be higher than people are comfortable with. However, if there is a breakage or slipping off of the condom during sexual activity, Plan B can be taken after the fact. This is something that can be taken over the counter in most places. Plan B is not as effective for [people who weigh over 165 pounds](#), but it is still better than nothing after a condom break or unprotected sex!

The pull-out or withdrawal method is not ideal, but it is relatively effective compared to nothing. It has a 20% typical failure rate. So that's pretty high, but when combined with using a condom and being aware of your cycle, that will become lower.

Another option is the copper IUD is hormone free and is the most effective form of birth control. It is very painful to have inserted, but once it is in, its good for 5-10 years. For some people, the IUD can cause extra cramping during periods, so it definitely isn't for everyone, but it's a highly effective option if it works for you.

And it's totally reasonable for people not to want hormones in their body. Many people can't use hormonal methods for medical reasons or because they don't like the side effects. If you find you are sensitive to hormones in the pill or patch, it could be the estrogen. Some people do well using a progestin-only pill. Or a progestin IUD, which will eventually stop your periods, so you don't

need to worry about the heavier periods and cramping that might come with a copper IUD. All that being said, these are things that put the burden on the person who can get pregnant. I understand Amy's point that this is unfair!

There are future treatments for people who produce the sperm, some of which have been around for decades, but haven't been officially approved to use outside of clinical trials. One of these options is Vasalgel. It has been tested in India under its former name RISUG since at least 20 years ago, but it is not very profitable, so it was hard to raise the funds to do clinical trials in the U.S. or other major western markets. It is a highly effective, easily reversible and the [website says should be available to the general public by 2026](#).

Conclusion

After 25 years of "reality tv" on our screens, we know that this kind of TV isn't real. But it does tell us something about the real issues we face in our society right now.

It was a bit painful for me to watch the ignorance displayed about birth control and pregnancy risks on Love is Blind Season 6, but I don't think Amy and Johnny are the ones at fault. The sex education they should have received was clearly missing or inadequate. The U.S. has some of the worst sex ed and the worst outcomes for STIs and unwanted pregnancies in the Western world. Amy and Johnny clearly had life experiences that gave them a healthy fear of an unplanned pregnancy. I am glad they were extra careful and made the choices that made sense for them. For fertile people, penis-vagina sex comes with the risk of pregnancy, no matter how small. Birth control methods can fail. If you want to ensure 100% that you do not get pregnant, not having this kind of sex is the only way. I know that I sound a bit like an abstinence-only educator right now, but I also want to reiterate that there are so many exciting and pleasurable types of sexual activities that don't come with the risk of pregnancy. There is really no reason to have penis-vagina sex when there are so many other options.

That's all for this episode. If you have any feedback or peer review of this episode, I am always excited to hear from you. Or, if you saw something on reality TV that made you yell at your television set and you want a sex educator perspective, reach out. You can send me a voice memo recorded on your phone or just a written email to doweknowthings@gmail.com. You can also find me @doweknowthings on Instagram.

Acknowledgements

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I am Lisa Dawn Hamilton. You can find a script for this episode with references and extra info on the website at doweknowthings.com.

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Of course, I would love it if you could subscribe and rate and review the podcast on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen. Thanks for listening. I will talk to you next time on Do We Know Things?

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