

## Belarus

Okay, so welcome everybody and thank you so much for joining me today. I am so excited about today's podcast episode. So today I am joined with Yana Bilinkaya and Zoya Prishivalka.

I hope I said that right. Who are joining me all the way from Belarus. And I originally met Yana because she is an app developer and reached out to me to collaborate with her on creating a story about sexual exploration for a popular women's health app.

And so it was a long story and we got to know each other I think pretty well through the process. It was something so much fun with. And Zoya helped her come up with the story for the app.

So she is a psychologist and sexologist practicing in Belarus. And today we are going to talk all about sex and love and relationships in their part of the world. So thank you so much for joining me.

Thank you. Hi everyone. Thanks for having us here.

Hi. So Yana, do you guys want to just begin by telling people a little bit more about the app that you're creating and the work that you do over there in Belarus so people can familiarize themselves? Yeah, sure. Let's start with Yana maybe.

Wow. So in a couple of words, for the last four years, I've been working on different digital products, mainly in the health area. So there was something about longevity, mental health, happiness, chronic pain management.

And now I'm working on this project. It's playable therapy. So it's like real life stories.

And you can play them and choose different options shaping the story. And as you play, you get comments from different experts like psychologists, sexologists, and other medical experts. So it's pretty awesome.

It's like you play real life. So I would say that like my mission and what keeps me up at night is to create digital products that can help people become happier. Awesome.

Sounds wonderful. And you are. I was so impressed with the product that you're creating.

And I was so excited once it finally hit the market here in the U.S. on the Flo platform. The story that we were working on specifically was about a couple who were kind of struggling sexually. They were beginning to feel bored.

And they were trying to find new ways of spicing up their love life and sex life. And so you originally reached out to Zoya, I believe, to talk about that. So Zoya, do you want to

talk a little bit more about your role in the app development and your work there in Belarus? So I'm a sexologist and a psychologist and therapist in a relationship of people.

And I also have a blog on Instagram and have like 60,000 followers on it. And the main theme of my blog is sex education, because in our republic, we have no...like the main education in sex for young people and also the adult people too. And in my blog, I do like some questions for my followers about their bodies and their relationships and their sex.

And someone seems about this. And I also do therapy with the couples. And I also work...like training, some trainings for women about their lives. Like coaching women. Yeah, coach. Thank you.

Sorry for my English. It's really good. Yes, and some coach for women, how to be in the relation with their bodies and sex and health.

And some of the worst questions about their whole life they have in their lives. That's all, maybe. Also, Zoya is making workshops for women, I guess, not for men.

But she is also leading this type of things. You are busy. It sounds like you're both very busy. Yes, because I have also a family, a husband, two children and all their life. It sounds like you're my counterpart in Belarus. I'm the same.

I've got a husband, two kids, workshops, blogs, therapy practice, coaching. But I think that's what keeps life interesting is to be busy doing so many different things. That's awesome.

So I'm curious, as you guys were creating this story, how typical was the story of what a couple might experience in Belarus versus someone maybe here in the US? Maybe Yana say something. Actually, I think that generally the problems are the same. So like relationship problems in couples, long term relationships and how to keep this fire burning.

Actually, they are pretty much the same. Of course, maybe some couples are more open to different adventures, so to say, because of the society, because the society is more open. And our society may be a little bit more closed.

And that's why people are not so open to new experiences. But in general, the problem is the same. And what Zoya told us correlates very much with what you, Emily, told us about all these problems and how we can deal with it.

So it's pretty much the same when we go to the roots of the problem and the ways to solve them. So it sounds like a real global paradox, right? How to sustain high levels of sexual satisfaction and intimacy and long term monogamous relationships, right? No matter what part of the world you're in. And so I hear you saying that generally in Belarus, I hear you accurately that it's a bit more conservative in its value system, would

you say? Yes, because we have some vote about how people think is a kind of a family in our country.

And 85% of people think that we have a patriarchal family. Yeah, and maybe like in works, we have the same salaries for women and men. But we have three years for women for childbirth.

And it's like women are more, Yana, say in English зависимы. Depends. Dependent.

Depends from men. And also in our country, the huge impact of religion we have, I think. Because more than 86% maybe like Orthodox.

And 50% maybe persons like Catholic. And the religion has a huge impact for people. Do they have something in sex with that? So we have the kind of problem that young people, they are dependent from their parents.

Money and in the home and something like this. Because parents pay money for their education and they stay with their for a long time, for a long term of their life. And it's like generation conflict.

I don't know like in English. Yeah, no, that's right. So I'm hearing you say that there is pretty good equality between men and women in terms of equal pay.

So that's good. But that women maybe emotionally or in relationships are still kind of dependent on men and generally dependent on their parents. It sounds like you guys are following similar trends in other parts of Europe where, or really around the world, where kids are staying home, living with their parents for longer periods of time.

And would you say that this is delaying marriage? Like are marriage rates on the decline? Yeah, yeah. They need some, the young people, they go to marriage because they want to go away from their parents and do something for their free life. They think.

But they have not some education how is a family is building and some rules for families and some rules for sex, maybe something like this. And it may affect many problems then in family life and sex life. Between the partners.

Yeah, between in the pair. Yeah. Okay.

And so what I find interesting is that it sounds like there's still a lot of conservative values that, you know, Orthodox or Catholicism, Christianity tends to be the majority of religion there. On the other hand, though, Belarus is known to have a high degree of sex tourism. Is that right? So can you guys talk about that a little bit? Because that sounds like quite a dichotomy.

Yeah, do you know something about this? Well, maybe it's something about some people from Turkey visiting Belarus, something about this. That's what I read as I was

researching that people come from Turkey or Western Europe for sex tourism. Well, actually, I'm not sure about Western Europe, but there are really quite a lot of people from Turkey in our country.

And because our girls are beautiful. Yeah. Well, actually, I think.

I think. Well, we have one more million women. Sounds like one more, I think, than men.

And I would say that maybe men are quite lazy and quite used to the fact that there are lots of women around them. And these women really take care of themselves and they are very beautiful and so on and so forth. So they don't feel like making beautiful actions towards women.

And women, they are really hungry for men who will really appreciate them, I would say in this way. And maybe that's why sex tourism seems to be popular, because when Turkish men come to Belarus and they see lots of really beautiful women who take care of themselves, as I mentioned earlier, they know how to flirt with them. They know how to make beautiful actions.

And I think that maybe lots of women, they really need this. So maybe you would add something to this story, Zoya? So. Like my view of the situation, but maybe you worked with some people who have been in relationships with Turkish men.

I don't know. So I think now we have another kind of problem because of political situation now in Belarus. There are many women, they choose the marriage or some relationships with citizens of European countries and also Turkish people.

And someone who chooses our women and goes from Belarus, from away from Belarus now. So it's like a trend. Now it's like a trend because I have many online clients, women with the same problem.

They are like, I don't know, like in English. Running off from country? Running, running. They are running from Belarus now.

They have many problems with sex with that man because they don't have love with them. They don't have something like, not different, but equally interesting and something. They run away from Belarus.

Women right now because of the political situation? Yeah. Oh, really? I haven't known then. Wow.

Yeah. I have many clients like in Hungary, in the Czech Republic, in Great Britain, even in the USA. And they like, we have some dating apps for the dates from men from other countries.

And they go to Belarus and have some, something like one, two or three maybe dates.

And then they go, run away from Belarus in any way. But how do you explain that the men, when they are on these apps and they come to Belarus, they are coming because of, I don't know, easy sex, for instance.

Why do they bring girls to their countries? Because they have some ideas how our women are. They think is, so they think that Belarusian women are in bida. Well, in pain.

In pain or in trouble. They think that Belarusian women are in trouble. And they think that our women are not beautiful, but it's also that our women are hard working.

They're like good housekeeping. Yeah. But our women will be appreciated for this.

Something like stereotypes from many years ago. But now we have the main problem, the political situation. And they think like they are heroes.

Heroes for us. Yeah. Tell people if you don't mind a little bit about what the political situation is and why some women may be trying to get out of the country.

Oh, damn. Hmm. Well, we had presidential elections last year in August.

So, actually, the president who is now running the country, he's running it for 25 years. And, well, actually, the majority of the population was for another president. But these elections were not fair, so to say.

And now then there were lots of protests going on all year round. And lots of detentions, a lot of companies closed. And a lot of companies, I mean, mostly in IT area, they moved to other countries like Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, and open offices there.

So there are lots of people going, running away from the country. Because you don't know what to expect here in our country right now. Because there are lots of detentions and lots of protests and all this stuff going on.

So it's a bit unstable at the moment. Yes. Yeah.

So it sounds like you mentioned a couple of times that Belarusian women are known for keeping up their appearances and they're very beautiful. Tell me a little bit about the beauty industry over there and how important that is to the women and to the men. And how do you think that ties into sexuality and feeling sexual there? Yana, say something or I say something about it.

You can start because... So I have many clients, women, and they say they think that the beauty has some impact about how they will be good in sex. I don't know. How they do their satisfaction, orgasms, and something like this.

Because, I don't know, like in English, we have sexuality and sex appeal. But in English, sexuality and sex, I don't know, appearance or something like this. And we have many

women around, like in the world.

And we have Instagram, the huge impact of the beautiful faces, stereotypes, beauty, and... Yeah, yeah. They think that how Instagram is saying to us, be like this, be like that, women here, and you will be happy in sex. And the huge problem that women do all things about beauty, but their sex is not good for them.

But don't you think that women here just are used to taking care of themselves, like regular manicure, pedicure, haircuts, and makeup, and so on. Because, yes, like you can't go to the street, I don't know, you can't go outside without makeup, like there is a saying here. I would say that younger generations do not behave this way.

So it was like a trend for the guys who were born like in 1980s, something like this, am I right? Yes, I think yes. But we have now the trend also in Belarus, like body positive or body natural thing. Yeah, like body acceptance.

Yeah, but it's a very, very terrible thing, I think, for our people, because they think we need to do something like all their people earlier do like this. But now many, many young women are not in standards of beauty in our country. Yes.

And this is, yeah, this seems to be a trend, you know, here in the US, it's like the time I was growing up, it was all about having, you know, flat, tight abs and, you know, low rise jeans to show off your stomach, this and that. And now there's such a positive movement towards bodies being beautiful in every shape and size. And that, you know, not only stereotypically beautiful women can be sexual, that sexuality is something that you discover inside of yourself, no matter how you look.

And it sounds like you're seeing similar trends there among the younger generations. Yes. Yeah, yeah.

So tell me, Zoya, I'm curious, you mentioned that you have a lot of clients now internationally who have left Belarus. What are you talking to them about? How would you describe their experiences in other places? So maybe Yana can translate for me. But I faster speak in Belarusian and Russian than in English.

Yana. I'm not sure if they want to do it with their partner, with whom they left and live there, or they just don't want to have sex at all. It scares them a lot.

Because they often think that since they were saved in a relationship and they left somewhere, they should have sex. And that's a problem. Yes.

And if before that they were more equal here in Belarus, with the same young people, and didn't really care, they did everything. There was no stress yet. Why? Because stress appeared because of this whole situation, plus the coronavirus also adds.

And they never had the experience of coping with it. It scares them a lot because they are afraid to be left alone, that they will be thrown out and sent back to Belarus. That's how the horses come.

Okay, so getting started. Yes. Well, speaking of international clients, number one concern is that they lost their libido and they don't want to have sex.

And they can't understand whether they do not want to have sex with the person they are living with right now. Or just in general, they have lost their libido and they just don't want sex forever and ever. And they are scared, they feel scared.

And they didn't have such an issue here in our country because maybe they were in more like love relationships and now they are more in dependent relationships, in co-dependent relationships. And they are stressed out and they just don't know how to deal with it. And maybe they are also scared to be left there alone, out of home, like homeless and so on.

So that's number one concern. Okay. I'm curious what kind of advice you share with them as a sexologist.

What's your perspective? I mean, libido, as we know, as sexologists, is extremely complex. And so what's your take on the shift? I have my ideas, but I want to hear yours. Okay.

First of all, we will talk about how to build communication between the client and the partner to mark such a situation and that perhaps it will have to be worked on in pairs. Well, not only the client who applied will work. Then we work with stress factors, which, in principle, can be eliminated according to the scheme.

We write it down from the very... Don't talk so much, don't talk so much. Ah, okay. Okay.

Okay. Okay. With stress factors.

And then I tell them how to work with their sexuality, with the body, with attitudes, with beliefs, with experience. Sometimes some say that they don't even think about what their sexuality is. They start studying, focus their attention and energy there, and everything is gradually improving.

Plus, I give them some exercises for processing, which they do on their own or with a partner, and then we discuss. Yana, I'm sorry, I owe you. So, Zoya told me like an election. So, well, first of all, they discuss whether these women do have any physical issues, first of all. So, if there is no physical issue, then they go up with the stress issues. Like, Zoya explains that stress accounts for like 80% decrease in sex. So, they discuss all things about stress. And then what's more important comes communication with their partner. So, they together discuss how to communicate this problem to the partner, what

is the communication strategy.

And she also like prepares women that maybe they will need to work together as a couple with her, because this issue can be solved only when both two partners are involved in the process. And then come all things about sexuality, different cognitions, and so on. But it all starts with understanding physical issues, stress factors, and communication.

Relationship, yep. Sounds like a very similar approach that we use here. Again, I think that no matter where you are in the world, the problems are the same.

But it sounds like one piece of the puzzle that you notice is that the difference in the kind of relationship structure. That in Belarus, they have this more love-based relationship, libido wasn't a problem. And then if they marry someone outside of Belarus, it's more of a dependent, I think you described it, relationship.

And that's when they notice the drop in libido. So, that ultimately love and romance and the emotional connection matters to people. Yeah, sure.

Yeah, definitely. So, I'm curious, it sounds like, as I was researching, I learned that homosexuality was legalized in Belarus in the mid-90s. And even though it is currently legal, that it's still kind of closeted, frowned upon, judged.

Tell me a little bit about what the LGBTQ community is like over there. Actually, I was surprised right now that LGBT was legalized in our country. Because I was... It wasn't legalized, really.

Yeah, because... Okay, I may have had that wrong. Everyone here is so intolerant to the people that may seem different. So, I would say that in general, our society is very intolerant to all the people who are somehow different.

I would say so. So, yes, these people are judged a lot. And, well, actually, I do not have any friends or any connections in this community.

So, it's kind of difficult for me to speak about it. But I know that there is a huge problem there and that people are judged a lot. So, maybe Zoya will tell us more.

And if we compare the situation in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus, it is that the Russian-speaking community that exists, then in Belarus we have the most tolerant society. Because when I talk to sex bloggers and sex consultants from other countries of the Russian-speaking community, when they come here, they are just amazed at how openly people can still... Well, as if... Yes. That is, we can walk down the street and be somehow... stand out from the crowd.

And in Russia it would be already, well, as if... That is, we really sometimes come here, to



Belarus, people from this party, to relax. To go to some kind of party. Yes, yes.

Especially, we have a more tolerant attitude, in principle, to female homosexuality. Because, basically, there is such a background. Well, these are girls, what's wrong with them, you know? Here.

Men's is a little bit more strict, but I really have a lot of personal friends who have their relationship in Europe and then live here as a couple. And no one will do anything to them, that is, they are there... Are they openly allowed to kiss on the street, or something else? No kissing, of course. But in general, in principle, people do not like it when other people kiss on the street.

You know, if you ask like that. Let's talk, it's been a long time. We are discussing here, then maybe we will say something.

Okay, I'm ready to answer this question. Well, actually, I was surprised, because Zoya shared some information with me that was really a surprise for me. Well, actually, she has lots of clients who are homosexual, and she has lots of friends who are homosexual.

And she knows some couples who have legalized their relationship somewhere outside our country. But they return to our country and live here right now. And if we take Russian-speaking countries like Ukraine and Russia and Belarus, Belarus is the most tolerant country, according to Zoya.

So, actually, that was a surprise for me. But she told me that homosexual people from these communities, when they come to Belarus, they come here to relax and to attend some homosexual parties and so on, because they feel much more free than in Russia or Ukraine. Interesting.

So, that was really a surprise for me, actually. Can you add that I didn't just come up with it, I talk to my colleagues, bloggers and sexologists who live in Belarus? Zoya tells me that this is not just her gut feeling, but she talks to different sex bloggers and sexologists in Ukraine and Russia, and of course, they discuss this question, and they understand that it's really how it is, it is what it is. Interesting, interesting.

So, it sounds like there is a tight-knit community in Belarus, despite the fact that it's not generally accepted, that there are some parties where people feel more free to be open, to be themselves. Close parties, very close. Underground.

Yeah, underground parties. But that is interesting that in comparison to Ukraine and Russia, that it's considered more open and accepting. Because, yeah, it sounded like from your perspective, Yana, it was still a big no-no.

Yes, yes. And so, is it currently criminalized then? If someone were to be out, you know, say, two women holding hands or being affectionate with one another in public, would

they face any kind of criminal... No, we don't have any laws about the criminality, a legal order. We don't have any laws about it, yeah.

But, as Zoya also mentioned, if we talk about homosexual women, the society is more tolerant to them than to homosexual men. And holding hands is okay, but not something more than holding hands. Yes, yes, that makes sense.

So, there's that aspect. We talked about sex tourism earlier and how even though it's not technically legal, the government kind of turns a blind eye. Although, when I was researching it, it sounded like prostitution is still criminalized.

I'm sorry, not prostitution. Pornography is still criminalized in Belarus. Is that right? Prostitution and pornography too.

So, two laws. Both prostitution and pornography. Both.

Okay, because I think what I was reading was that prostitution was more of an administrative offense, whereas pornography was more of a criminal offense. Yeah, that's right. Okay, okay.

But we have many problems with prostitution because it's illegal. And I worked about nine months in the organization. It's like Yana, Belarusian Organization of Club of UNESCO.

Belarusian Organization of Club of UNESCO. So, something like this. And I work with prostitutes.

Like, they go to my work and say something about their sexuality. And they... Brali... Yana. Brali, brali, brim? Not brim.

Tell me the whole sentence. They took all kinds of condoms, blah, blah, blah. Prostitutes came to me and asked about sex, about condoms.

By the way, in Russian, it's the workers of commercial sex. Workers of commercial sex. So, right.

Yes. Brali, how do you say it in English? Take. Took. Took.

They took condoms. How do you say it in English? I'm done. I've been working since 8 a.m. I'm done.

So, Yana, can you tell me that I worked in an office where there was a work with workers of commercial sex. How to call them correctly? The main idea was to prevent the spread of IPP and HIV, diseases that are transmitted by sex. And for them, it's some kind of semi-legal opportunity to come to such a volunteer organization and, in general, to get some kind of support on health, on working with their sexuality, on some social issues.

Because in all other cases, they either face the law and the administrative authorities, or they get this condemnation, infringement of their rights, when they go to a non-institution or some kind of official social institution. And it's very... But in this organization I worked in, the Belarusian organization Kula Finesco, almost half of Belarusian prostitutes were registered in it. That is, it is a very large volume.

And although the main idea is to prevent the spread of HIV, in fact, a very large social work is carried out thanks to the third sector. What is the third sector? The third sector is a non-government organization. Listen, you became very dark.

Maybe you should come closer to the window, because you are very dark. I told Zoya that she is in the dark and maybe she would go somewhere to a place with more light. Okay, so Zoya told me that she used to work in the organization supported by UNESCO and the main goal with prostitutions... I'm not sure how to say this.

Prostitute? Workers of the commercial sex. Sex workers, we would say. Sex workers.

Sorry. So she used to work with sex workers in this organization supported by UNESCO. And the main goal of this initiative was to prevent sexually transmitted infections and HIV.

But although the main goal was this one, it was a lot of help for these sex workers in terms of understanding sexuality, in terms of sex safety, in terms of medical support, psychological support. Because they can't just go to medical organizations, governmental, and just say that, you know, I'm a sex worker and I need help. Because they will be judged and maybe they will even be criminalized for this if they go there.

So yeah, it's about prostitution. And about pornography, I know that I'm not sure whether we have such law, but I have a friend who once told me that you shouldn't send any nudes or any photos via WhatsApp or Telegram or anywhere because it will be considered to be pornography distribution and you will be imprisoned. And I was like, oh, really? No.

So yes, do we have such a law here, right? Yes. And the secret chats in Telegram are rules. So yeah, we have such a law.

Yeah, so if you send your nude, even your raw nude to someone, it will be pornography distribution. And then another law, like a traktovka, I don't know how to say it in English, but I'm scared that I have no permission to do some sex education lecture for people in any places because it needs to be a special place, maybe like in team shops or sex shops, or maybe like some organization that works with sexual health or medicine organization or some special мероприятие, some special event, because I will have some troubles with our law. Interesting.

So you're limited in the ways in which you provide sex education. How would you say

people perceive you as a sexologist, as someone who specializes in this? Do you feel like people judge you for it or that you're accepted for the work that you do? Oh my God, what a loaded topic. Yana, let me say it in Russian.

The topic of sex in our society is still taboo and very negative. So when people hear the word sex, they have a stereotypical image of a person who will talk about sex, what this person will look like and what he will teach in a bad way. And of course, there are a lot of people who care about their health and want to do something better for themselves, including their sexual health.

But there are a lot of people who are aggressive, especially religious people, who don't understand the importance of sexual health for a person. And of course, they can send me angry feedback on the platform, on Instagram, or even complain about the content that I publish. But in principle, I would say, well, yes, and you have to be a brave person in our country, to do sex education and, in principle, help people with sexual health.

I would say so. And for me it's still a huge job, which... It's good that I also have a therapist, so to speak, because sometimes it's very difficult to help people who are afraid of this help. Okay.

Well, so Zoya told me that... Well, and actually I agree that the sex topic is still a very, very, very taboo topic here in Belarus. And I would add, I'm not sure if Zoya will agree to this, but I would add that Belarus has been a part of the USSR and there was a saying there, like, there is no sex in the USSR. And this topic was very taboo at that time, and it is still very taboo right now, because we have this USSR heritage, so to say.

And so that's why there are lots of stereotypes around the topic, lots of negative things. And that's why there are lots of aggressive people who leave bad reviews for Zoya's work, and they... Like, haters on Instagram and so on and so forth. And actually, lots of religious people who also think that if there is a person who talks about sex, he will definitely talk about something bad.

And that it will not be like sexual health, because sexual health is very important. They don't understand it. And they think that it is something bad, and they will be taught something bad.

So, like, you need to be brave, so to say, to make this topic less taboo-like. And actually, Zoya had a joke that thank God she has a therapist, because a therapist helps her a lot to overcome all this negative pressure coming from different sides. Of course, there are lots of people who understand the good and who understand that sexual health is really important, and they want to open this sexual health.

But on the other hand, there are lots of people who don't understand it, and it's really very difficult to cope with this pressure. Yeah. Well, Zoya, it sounds like despite the fact

that you're facing scrutiny, you are very brave to... Thank you! I think so! Yes, and you're doing amazing work.

I mean, working with sex workers, working with women who've left Belarus, working with couples to just enhance romance and sex within the country. I mean, you're doing such great work. So, I just want to thank you for being so open and transparent during this interview.

And I've learned so much from both of you. I thought this was wonderful, wonderful information. So, thank you both.

So, where can people find you if they want to learn more about you or get information? Tell people where they can find your website or your social media, Zoya. So, I have a blog on Instagram. And... Priishe Zoyka.

Priishe Zoyka. What's the link? Yeah, like... Zoya Prishivalka, Priishe Zoyka. I don't know.

And the blog in Russian. Maybe... Who has some questions about the sexuality of the people in Belarus, they need to... Like, email for me. Email for me.

Priishe Zoyka. Gmail.com. All right. And thank you again, Yana, for helping facilitate this interview. And it's so lovely to see you again as well. I think that... I think it's so unique, the work that you're doing. And I'm so excited about the app.

For anyone who's interested, you can find the story that Yana and I worked in on the Flo app, which is a women's health app. And it's all about how to explore new things sexually with your partner. And she's got lots of exciting things that she's working on.

So, definitely follow her. Do you want to tell people how they can stay up to date with what's happening with you? Yeah, sure. So, you can find me on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and all those social websites. So, maybe, Emily, you will leave links to our social accounts from Zoya and mine.

So, yeah, feel free to chat with me and to drop me a line. Okay. All right.

Well, thank you, ladies both. And hopefully our paths will cross at some point in the future and we can meet in person. Yeah.

Thank you for having us. All right. Thank you.

Thank you. Bye-bye. Bye.

Bye.