

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Bonnie Koo, MD

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson

Welcome to *The Wealthy Mom MD Podcast*, a podcast for women physicians who want to learn how to live a wealthy life. In this podcast you will learn how to make money work for you, how you can have more of it, and learn the tools to empower you to live a life on purpose. Get ready to up-level your money and your life. I'm your host, Dr. Bonnie Koo.

Hey everyone, welcome to episode 104. Or is it one zero four? Anyway, I and super excited for today's episode. I'm pretty sure I say that for most episodes, but I have a special guest today. And remember back, I think it was episode 99 where I speak a little bit about money and race, and how money is different for not just women, but Women of Color.

And so I had said during that episode that I really wanted to find someone to talk more about this. And so I have Brig Johnson, and she'll introduce herself when we cut to the interview part. But the reason why I asked her to be on the show is that she is an empowerment coach specifically for high-achieving Black women. And what that means is she is intimately familiar, not only as a Black woman herself, with the struggles that are more pronounced/particular to Black women.

And so I love that she's doing this work, in fact I've met Brig in person and when I did this was last August when I was in Cabo for the mastermind I was in. And she told me that she had worked with someone I knew who is a physician and so I just thought that was pretty cool.

And so we are going to talk about her experiences, what she sees in her clients when it comes to creating lots of money, sort of the barriers and limiting beliefs. So that's what we're going to discuss. And as usual, my episodes are short and to the point, and so let's get started.

Bonnie: Welcome to the show, Brig.

Brig: Thank you. Thank you, it's so good to be here.

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson

Bonnie: Yeah, I'm so excited for you to be here and to have this conversation. So first, let's start with introductions. So why don't you say a bit about yourself, who you are, what you do, who you coach. Brig is a coach too, in case you guys didn't get that.

Brig: Love being a coach, yes. I'm Brig Johnson, not short for anything, all those who are like, "What's Brig stand for?" Nothing, it's Brig, B-R-I-G. And I'm a coach, life and mindset coach, and I coach high-achieving Black women, that's my niche. Like all the drama that comes along with it, all the internalized conditioning that we have to unpack, all of it. And I help us create epic shit.

Bonnie: I love it. Yeah, and that's actually what we're going to talk about, right? Sort of the conditioning that might be specific, particular to Women of Color, especially Black women. It's something I think everyone's becoming more aware of and so I want to educate myself and educate my listeners because I just think it's important to talk about.

I did an episode not too long ago, so we'll link that in the show notes, just sort of introducing the topic of how money is different for women, but money is different for Women of Color, especially Black women and Latino women. And Latino women specifically get paid the lowest in terms of the gender pay gap.

So, tell us a bit about how you grew up and looking back what conditioning or limiting beliefs that you had.

Brig: Yeah, but I want to go back because you said something, you was like I'm just understanding the difference in the conditioning, I think I am too. I think we all are, this whole world is. Even though I'm Black, like I lived in it, it's like me even diving into like, damn, the internalization of it is even blowing my mind. So it's not just you that's uncovering, we're uncovering too as a people. And some of us are more informed than others, but also we're not a monolithic people either, like anyplace else.

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson

So as I speak, guys, I just want to say I'm not speaking for all Black people, I'm just speaking from my perspective.

Bonnie: Totally.

Brig: So as far as limiting beliefs, I think for me one of the most common ones that I coach my people on, what I've seen is just that idea of being too much or being visible, or being seen, or being too smart, or don't be a know it all, or don't be a fast tell. If you Black, you know all of these things that have been told to you.

And it's like the same conditioning as women, but it was I think more of a cultural standard to like dampen, to stay under the radar. Because there was no other safety for us, so we just had to hide. Like just do your job, head down, and hope no one sees you.

Bonnie: Like blend in.

Brig: I think that just got, yeah, I think that just got be in stealth mode, right? Just be real good, but don't draw attention to yourself because there was no protection for us. So when you're talking about making money, creating money, getting more positions in your job or whatever, you go against all of that cultural training. Like all of that comes up.

Bonnie: Yeah. I'm curious, when you were growing up did you feel like you had enough role models that look like you?

Brig: I think because I grew up in a predominately Black community, like my teachers were Black, the people, yeah. It was just, I think the disparity was when you watched TV, or when you saw commercials, or when you saw an advertisement, it was all successful was something that looked something other than me. Like beauty was something other than me, wealthy was something other than me, smart was something other than me.

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson

In my lifetime quarterbacks were never considered Black men, like it was a big deal to have a quarterback because Black people don't think, or they can't maneuver, or they can't outthink, or they're not smart. So it was just that subtle, it wasn't the overt stuff, it was always the subtleties of life that if you're not paying attention, you just kind of accept and I call it the soup that we swim in.

Like it's the soup that we swim in and then we just slowly started like no, that's so crazy. What do you mean we can't be quarterbacks? What the hell?

Bonnie: Yeah, that's such a good point because, like you said, it's the soup we swim in, like it's in the air so you can't avoid it.

Brig: Right.

Bonnie: So I was born in Korea but I moved here when I was two so I basically grew up here. And I like what you said, it's like we're not even aware what's going on. Like yeah, of course growing up everyone was white on TV and commercials.

And so Brig and I did this advanced certification in feminist coaching and one of the things that blew my mind was that who you find attractive is socialized to some degree. And then I was like, no wonder I always liked blond hair, blue eyed men. Like that wasn't an accident, right? And so that blew my mind when I realized like, oh, maybe that's where that came from because on TV they're not all blonde, but they're usually light haired.

And it's so different today, right, there's more diversity on TV. You know, it's still not where it should be, but it's definitely better now. But I didn't grow up with that so to me it's still, yeah, movie stars are usually white, for example.

Brig: Yeah, it was the standard, right? And if you look at it, like the dating apps will tell you the least desirable of all the cultures and everything is the

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson

Black woman, like she's going to be on there. If you look at the dating sites and everything, they have the data that shows that. Not because we're not attractive, not because we're not badasses, but because of that socialization of what beauty is and that plays out, it's the soup that we swim in.

Bonnie: Yeah, and even as you're talking about the dating apps, also just biracial couples and it's not even like what's accepted, but I think at least my experience is people are surprised when they see, let's say a Black woman with a white man or the opposite. It seems to be more surprising than Asian and white.

I've definitely noticed that just from my experience and also just what other people say, like they're surprised when they see that. As if it's not a thing, as if white people can't find Black people attractive, I think that's probably where it comes from.

Brig: Right, yeah. For sure.

Bonnie: Anything else about money that you think you had limiting beliefs about growing up? Like they probably weren't conscious, but did you think maybe that your ability to make money wasn't the same as someone else? Like that sort of thing.

Brig: I think it wasn't even my ability to make money, I think it was the safety in making money for me and my clients. It's like there is a threshold and then we're at too much and now you're making too much. And so now it comes with the shame, it comes with like you're being greedy, you're being independent, or like your marriageability goes down, like all of those things.

It's hidden, it's in the soup, you don't really see it but it's there. So it's like the safety of, there's a safety threshold of like there's money and then there's money. And when you're doing money, I think that scares. Like I notice a lot of my friends, when they're dating they don't even say what

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson

they do because they don't want, and I'm sure most women do that. But it's like it just feels like it's more of a target on your back the more money you make, so it's not safe in a lot of senses.

Bonnie: Yeah, can we talk more about what you mean by safe?

Brig: Yeah, it's just that feeling of, again, going against that grain that I said in there earlier. It's like don't stand out too much, like fly under the radar. So it's like you're going against cultural norms. Like that sense of belonging, that's what makes us safe more than anything, is that innate sense of belonging.

So the further you get up as far as income, then that tendency is to feel like you belong less because you're not with the general population or whatever. So it just feels less safe.

Bonnie: Yeah, I think a lot of Women of Color already have thoughts they don't belong.

Brig: Right.

Bonnie: And so maybe making more money is like well it's increasing that probability or increasing the likelihood of that.

Brig: Yes.

Bonnie: And the desire to belong is primal, right? It was important for our survival to be in groups so that people could look out for you. And so, yeah, it's really scary to think that you might not belong.

I definitely have thoughts about not belonging, not so much about me as a Korean, but just in general. I just think people don't like me and then because of that or because I'm afraid if people get to know me, then I just kind of hide out.

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson

Brig: Yeah, yeah. But we have to remember like, I'm glad you said that, like our belonging is our sense of safety. That's it, it's primal. And when you really think about it, if it's between I want to be my highest self, and a primal instinct, unless you are intentional about it, the primal one usually wins.

So it's like when women are like they want to do these big badass things, but yet that primal instinct of but I'm not going to belong. And they wonder why what other people think matters so much to them. It's because they're going against that primal instinct. And so that one will win unless we address it.

And that's why I love coaching for that, right? We know our sense of belonging really is how we think about ourselves, and we get to create that. But a lot of people don't know that that's created, we think other people create our belonging. But it doesn't, like we create it ourselves internally.

Bonnie: When I started to learn that, I feel like I'm still not 100% there, Brig. If I'm perfectly honest, yeah, I think my brain thinks, no, no, no, it's whether people like me or not or whether they want to be friends with me or not that creates that. But yeah, I'm starting to see that it's me.

Brig: Yeah, it's totally us. And I think that's what I do to go take on these mammoth projects that we are totally capable of doing. But it comes from us creating that sense of belonging and that sense of safety inside out, not outside in. Because if we're waiting for the world to make us safe, it'll never happen.

Bonnie: Yeah, I'm actually planning on doing an episode on money and safety, so this is a good introduction to that topic.

Brig: Yes.

Bonnie: I'm curious if, since we're talking about the topic of belonging, I've heard sort of anecdotes of this and I'm curious if you've seen this or maybe you see it a lot in your clients.

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson

Now, you said earlier that a lot of your clients are afraid of going against the grain in terms of money. Do you also see that when they do, because I'm sure your clients already are at a certain point that is, I don't want to say more than maybe where they came from. But basically do you find that, I'm trying to see how to describe it, like friction, like their family or their friends they grew up with kind of like don't want to be friends with them anymore because they're moving up?

Brig: No, I don't think they don't want to be friends with them anymore, I think there's this thing of like you can't relate to my struggle anymore. That's it, it's not that they don't want to be your friend, but like they'll be friends with you but it's like this, somehow because you make more money, you can't relate to me anymore.

And I'm like, which is the complete opposite because anybody who works in higher levels or makes higher money, as far as the belongingness is, if you're a Black woman, you're one of a very, very few now. So it's like I relate even more, like the higher up you go, the more you relate to the struggle of your blackness, or your otherness, whatever it is. Outside of the normal circles, it just shines even more.

So it's like we actually can relate even more, but so many people are like, "Well, you don't understand." As if money solves all problems.

Bonnie: I wish that were true.

Brig: I know, it doesn't solve all problems.

Bonnie: It solves some problems, for sure. But not all problems.

Brig: Yes, right.

Bonnie: It doesn't make you happy, contrary to popular belief.

Brig: None of it.

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson

Bonnie: Anything else about money growing up? Or, I guess, you know, here's the question because it doesn't have to be related to money. Have you ever felt like you were treated differently because of the color of your skin?

Brig: Oh, hell yeah. Yeah, all the time. You have to show up differently, you have to dress differently, you have to talk differently, like all of it. Like you don't have the same margin of errors, all of that.

I didn't say it but before I was a coach I was a nurse anesthetist or a nurse anesthesiologist. So very much in a professional sense, putting epidurals in, putting people to sleep, waking them up. And go to some hospital that people don't know me and the surgeon is like, "Who's anesthesia?" And I'm like literally drugs in hand behind the cape at the anesthesia machine. And I'm like, "Who the fuck you think I am? What do you think I am?" Right? So, yeah, totally treated differently. And, yeah, that's the soup we swim in.

Bonnie: Yeah. Tell me your thoughts, like before you became a coach and started understanding your thoughts create your feelings, how did you handle it then versus now?

Brig: Fortunately, I actually handled it the same way. And so I did it naturally, which was like I didn't know that's what I was doing. But like, yeah, you have your thoughts about me and I'm going to let you have them. And I know I'm good, I know I'm great at what I do, and I'm just going to sit in that and I'm not going to try to prove or anything.

I did see it sometimes, like when I would go to a new place, that's when I saw it the most because my thought was I haven't proved my worth yet, and so I have to prove it and then I can relax. So I saw it more with people who didn't know me. But once people knew me, then I kind of relaxed.

Now I know it was that thought, like, oh, I got to prove it, right? So I see that a lot with my clients too, it's like they're going to proving energy, especially within circles of people that don't know. Like if I'm going to do a podcast

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson

interview or if I'm going to go to this thing and speak, I have all the credentials and I'm chairman of it, but yet I got to prove. And I'm like, "Or you can just show up as yourself."

So I think I just took it a little bit further with coaching, but yeah.

Bonnie: What sort of thoughts and advice, and you're going to be so good at this since you this is what you do, what thoughts and advice do you have for my listeners who are Black, or of color, or of another group that's not the norm? Obviously, I coach money so my clients struggle with money to varying degrees.

And so I'm sure you've coached on this, and what would you say to someone who's struggling with money and basically they believe they can't make or have the money that they want? And maybe they also believe it has to do with what they look like. So what would you say to that person?

Brig: I'll answer it, but I'm going to answer it in a completely different way because, I think, first before not having or before creating more, I think a strong understanding of like where they are, in shame of where they are. Because for so many money is a shame thing, like I should have more or I don't have enough and there's a shame about it.

And I'm so glad that you're linking to your other podcasts that you talked about, like the red lining and the pay gap. There is a reason why, so we can let go of the shame of not only did I not come from money, but my family didn't come. Like we were given this and so allowing that to not make you shameful for where you are as far as the money is. And because I don't think we can improve until we take away the judgment of where we are right now, that's all I'm trying to say.

Bonnie: Totally.

Brig: It's like so if we can get to a place where we are not judging how much money we have, where we are, how little or bad or whatever we want

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson

to say, we managed it. We did the best that we could with the knowledge that you had. If you can just adopt that principle and remove any kind of shame.

Because if you're doing it out of shame, then I think there's this urgency to make up for it because I got to make up for what I didn't do. And all that does is make you make bad decisions, rush decisions that you don't really think of right?

Bonnie: That's actually what most of my clients deal with, and the thought is I'm behind.

Brig: Right, yeah. So it's like first step is to get rid of the shame of anything in where we are. And it's like, yeah, of course, our families didn't have money to help us because of redlining and I did make this decision. Okay, fine.

So I think your next question was understanding your ability as a, I think Women of Color, marginalized people, especially women are never taught their authority or their ability to create. We're seen as the doers, but not the creators. And just start to literally see yourself as a creator of value, of knowledge, like a person that can create their life through their thoughts, of course.

But like I am a creator, and with that I think that's how you'll start with I can make more money. Because as long as we see money as a byproduct of somebody gave me something and it was a fluke, they took pity on me, they gave me this job, or I was a diversity hire. I coach on that a lot, I was a diversity hire, I don't deserve to be here. And I'm like bullshit, right? Because someone else that you're sitting to is a nephew hire or a I work at the country club hire. So what says one is better than the other, right?

So those type of thoughts, it's like just seeing like they are there because they created it. And if they created this, they can create so much more.

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson

Bonnie: I really love that, I never thought about it like that, doer versus creator.

Brig: I hope that helped.

Bonnie: And I totally see how that plays. And even just with combining that with money, because I think the doing also perpetuates this belief that money comes from time and effort versus something we can create, that doesn't have to do with that.

Brig: Right.

Bonnie: So I love that so much.

Brig: Yeah, it's like seeing their value to create value. Like I get to create value.

Bonnie: Yeah. So, is there anything else that you want to say that we haven't gotten to?

Brig: Yeah, I think also like, the last thing I want to say is especially as Women of Color, it's okay to want more money.

Bonnie: Yes.

Brig: It's okay to want a fuck ton of money, right? There's nothing bad with wanting more. Even if you have some there's nothing, like I know there's this thing in some of our communities where to want more is being greedy. Or oh my god, when is it going to be enough? It's okay to want more. That's called dopamine and that's a normal thing, right?

Bonnie: No, I love that, yeah.

Brig: Totally normal, give yourself permission to want more and vote for more, and it doesn't mean you're a bad human.

104: Women of Color: Judgment, Shame, and Wanting More with Brig Johnson

Bonnie: Yeah, no, that's so important because my audience, they're doctors, right? So they already make well over six figures and so there's a lot of thoughts like, well, I should be grateful for what I have. I already make enough, I shouldn't want more. And this whole idea that if I make more, someone has less. But yeah, the whole like I don't want to be greedy.

Brig: Yeah, the zero sum, like there's a pile, that's yours. Go get it. Go get it.

Bonnie: Yeah, that's how I think of it too. Yeah, there's a pile with your name and it's waiting for you.

Brig: Right, yes, for sure.

Bonnie: Well, thank you so much for this conversation, I know it's going to be so valuable to my listeners. So where can people find you and learn more about you?

Brig: Yeah, I'm Brig Johnson, as I said. So website brigjohnson.com, easy. Instagram. I'm Johnson Brig, and Facebook I'm Brig Johnson. So there it is. I have my own six month coaching program that I just work with the high-achieving Black women, like helping us unprogram, reprogram all of it.

Bonnie: Yeah, that's amazing. We'll link everything in the show notes so people can easily find you. So, all right, well, thanks again so much. And everyone else, I'll see you next week.

Hey, if you're ready to create wealth, I want to invite you to join my program, Money For Women Physicians. You'll join a community of like-minded women physicians who are committed to creating wealth. Just head over to wealthymommd.com/money to learn more.