

**0:00:02.4 Nicole Antoinette:** Welcome to the Pop-Up Pod, a new podcast that's similar to a pop-up shop or a pop-up restaurant in that it's sporadic. Sometimes it's here and sometimes it's not. Each 12-episode season dives deep into a single question, and our question for season one is this: Should I get married? I'm your host, Nicole Antoinette, 36 years old, divorced, close friends with my former spouse, child free by choice, self-employed, almost three years into a committed romantic relationship with a guy I love, and I'm genuinely unsure of how I feel about marriage. This uncertainty got me thinking, how do other people really feel about their own relationships, what's working, what's not working? Let's find out. 12 episodes, 12 different people, honest conversations about the joys and struggles of long-term romantic relationships. In today's episode, you will get to meet Ev'Yan Whitney. Ev'Yan whose pronouns are they/she is a sexuality doula, sex educator, and sensualist, helping women and non-binary folks reclaim their unique sexual expressions and reconnect to their central bodies. In this conversation, they share details about the time they recently spent living apart from their husband, Jonathan, and what it looks like to be apart together. We talk about establishing your own identities and individuality in a long-term relationship, and explore growing together, versus growing apart. I think you'll love it. Here we go.

[music]

**0:01:42.9 NA:** Alright, here we go. Ev'Yan, welcome to the show.

**0:01:45.8 Ev'Yan Whitney:** Thank you so much for having me, Nicole. I'm excited to chat with you once more.

**0:01:51.0 NA:** Yeah. Me too. I always love interviewing you, I feel like there's a couple of people that are on my... My list of, any time I get a chance to interview them, like how can I bring them into this project? I love talking to them. And you are definitely one of those people, so, thanks...

**0:02:04.5 EW:** I'm honored, I'm really excited to chat.

**0:02:07.7 NA:** I would love to start by asking you to share your relationship bio, so less of like a, What do you do, and more of a who and how do you love right now.

**0:02:17.3 EW:** Oh, like, who do you do?

[chuckle]

**0:02:19.3 NA:** Yeah, exactly. [chuckle] Oh yeah, that's fabulous. Yeah, so not what do you do? But who do you do?

**0:02:25.7 EW:** Who do you do?

**0:02:27.2 EW:** So I am in partnership with Jonathan Mead. We've been together for 15 years now, we actually just celebrated an anniversary in November, and we've been together since I was 19, he was in his early 20s. And yeah, we've gone through quite the experience of changing and shifting

and growing with each other. We are kind of in an open relationship, not so much these days, we're both queer and... Yeah, I don't know how much... I guess us being in an interracial relationship is another aspect, it's something that I don't think about all that much, but... Yeah, that's kind of like the Cliff Notes version of our relationship.

**0:03:17.0 NA:** What do you mean when you say you're kind of in an open relationship?

**0:03:20.5 EW:** Well, you know, [chuckle] I mean it in the way that we are always open, but for the last maybe five years, we haven't really dated anyone, and I think that... I think it's a mix between not having the desire to and also not finding the right people. We're both really, really busy with our work and have been for a while, and so... Yeah, it's one of those things where if it happens, we meet the right person, we're open to it, but if not, I guess these days, we're basically in a monogamous relationship because we're not dating anyone and there's nothing on the radar at this time to potentially get involved with somebody.

**0:04:09.1 NA:** So it sounds like something that you're open to but not seeking out?

**0:04:13.3 EW:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**0:04:16.3 NA:** Okay, that's interesting. The fact that you have been together for so many years, since you were 19. I have so many questions, so we're just going to get into all of that. I'm really fascinated by couples who are able to grow together, 'cause that really hasn't been my experience in romantic relationships, it's been, I'd say, two to five years, in depth relationships that then reach what feels like a natural conclusion, mostly because one of us has changed so significantly that we're not growing in the same directions anymore, so I'm super interested in that aspect.

**0:04:50.9 EW:** Yeah, that is... I think that that's the most common, that's what I watched my parents do, I believe that that's what Jonathan watched his parents do. Yeah, that narrative that you grow apart rather than growing with, is a lot more prevalent, I think.

**0:05:08.0 NA:** Why did you decide to get married at that age?

**0:05:13.9 EW:** [chuckle] Oh gosh, that's an excellent question. I mean, let me first start off by saying that I tell Jonathan all the time that he's really lucky to have met me when I was young and dumb, because I think that if I would have met him... Oh man, when I was in my 30s, like early 30s or even my late 20s, I probably would have been like, I'm not really into marriage, that's not my thing. Honestly, I think we're both literally very just young and just... When I say dumb, I don't necessarily mean that we were ignorant, but more so that we were just naïve. We were in our relationship for a short amount of time before Jonathan proposed to me, and I think we were both just on that track of like, Oh, this is what you do, you love people... You love someone, you get married to them. And there was a lot of excitement in the air around that. I remember when he proposed, I was starting to get really into planning a wedding and doing the whole shebang, and then suddenly along the way, I'm just like, I really don't wanna do this.

**0:06:20.8 EW:** It just feels like a lot of work, and it feels like a lot of money. And we ended up kind of just... Not kind of, we eloped. [chuckle] We went to Vegas on Christmas, Christmas evening, and we just was like, Fuck it. Let's get married. And it was really just like that. It was like, Fuck it. Let's get married. I didn't really... I mean, I can't speak for him, but for me, I didn't really see it as this big, serious, "And two lives shall become one." It was more so like, "This is cute. Let's get married."

**0:06:53.3 EW:** And I think doing it in Vegas and having it be this very impromptu... I think we were driving, we got in the car at like 9:00 PM, got to Vegas at 11:00 PM. It was like this very, very fast, furious and so much fun. It just felt really light, and I think because of that, our understanding of marriage was a lot more light and malleable and flexible than if it were like, my family is involved and they're paying for the wedding and having all of these family members that are coming in. It felt like something that we decided to do because we really wanted to do it, and there wasn't a lot of seriousness about it. We were seriously in love, we really loved each other, but it wasn't like... I don't know, it just didn't feel dogmatic, I think, as sometimes marriages or getting married can feel.

**0:07:47.0 NA:** It's so interesting because I feel like there's a whole narrative around how seriously you're supposed to take a commitment like that, whether it's the pre-marriage counseling or really thinking it through or understanding the weight of the commitment. We could put lots of different language to it. And I don't know that I've ever heard it described the way you described it, of the lightness being a benefit. That you were in love, but also being able to not have such a serious tone to it. I don't know, that's interesting.

**0:08:15.7 EW:** Yeah, we have had footage of our wedding. Like I said, it was just he and I and some random lady that was a witness that we didn't even know, 'cause again, it was like 11:00 PM in Vegas, on Christmas evening. But I remember watching that footage and I actually remember that day, and I was just laughing, just giggling the whole time. And not in this way of like, Oh my God, this is so crazy, I'm not in it. I was so in it and just felt so bubbly and... I don't know, there is a joyous-ness to that day and to the decision that we were making. It felt like something that we were doing on purpose, but without that seriousness attached to it. It felt like we were sort of setting the tone and carving a path for us to determine what marriage can look like for us.

**0:09:09.1 NA:** Yeah, how did your families react?

**0:09:12.5 EW:** Well, my mom and dad, when they were married, they eloped, so they weren't super surprised, but what I will say is, I actually called them when we were traveling about an hour... About an hour into the travel, and I just let them know, Hey, I just wanna give you a heads up, we're going to Vegas, we're getting married. And my mom was super cool with that, she's like, Oh my God, have so much fun. And my dad was a little disappointed because he wanted to be there. And I was just like, Cool, bye. [chuckle] We're doing it. We're already on the road and maybe we'll have a reception with family, which that is still to be determined 15 years later. But yeah, we just... We weren't really thinking about anyone else, we were just thinking about what we wanted to do, and thankfully my parents and his parents even were just like, Cool, have fun, enjoy, but they weren't

too disappointed, I think my dad eventually got over it.

**0:10:15.7 NA:** Yeah. This might be a strange question, because obviously, I know that you are happy in this commitment now, and it sounds like there was a lot of bubbly energy at the beginning. Was there ever a time that you regretted getting married?

**0:10:29.9 EW:** Oh, yes. Kind of. Yes, I would say yes. And that was probably in 2019, actually, and the results of me moving to Los Angeles and making the decision that we would live apart, so Jonathan would stay in Oregon and I would move by myself. I felt that mostly, I felt that regret mostly because of I had this desire to leave Portland so badly, and I had had it for a while, I think I just wasn't allowing myself to feel into that because I knew Jonathan was more keen on Portland than I was, and you know, we had built a life there, we were there for almost nine years, and I just... I had no connection to it anymore, there was no grounded-ness for me, there was no community there for me that I really felt pulled to continue to invest in. And I remember I was traveling to Los Angeles for work, and the first time that... It was the first time I'd been back. I'm from the LA area originally, and it was the first time that I'd been back since I moved to Portland, so about eight years I'd been away. And I just, there was something in my body that just clicked, it was like, "This is your home. This is where you're supposed to be." Amidst all of the problematic nature of Los Angeles, how noisy it is, and dirty it is, and expensive it is...

**0:11:55.3 EW:** It just, it didn't really make sense logically, but in my own body, this really... I was like, I have to be here. And on that trip when I was working and stuff like that, I was... And also just when I travel solo, I feel this come up a lot where I just love who I am when I'm alone. And it was the first time in a really, really long time, maybe ever, that I started to ask myself, Who would I be if I wasn't in this relationship, how differently would my decisions have been? 'Cause the first thing that I thought of as I was walking through this neighborhood that I live in now, I was like, God, I wanna live here, I want... What would it be like to have my own apartment? And any time I was thinking about that, Jonathan wasn't in the equation. It was more like, Oh, I would love to have my own apartment and go grocery shopping for myself and plan meals for myself. I was really in that mindset, and it freaked me out. It was very exciting, but it also freaked me out, 'cause I'm like, Why is it that he's not in this equation? And I remember thinking very clearly that if I wasn't married, if I wasn't with Jonathan, I would move to Los Angeles tomorrow.

**0:13:07.2 EW:** And that was really exciting, but it was also terrifying and devastating because I didn't really know what that meant, I was like, Oh, does that mean that I am not happy in my relationship? No, that's not true. I love my partner and we're in a really great relationship, we're not having any issues right now, and I want to be with him, but there's this aspect of feeling like I wasn't free to move and make decisions that were solely based on my needs, wants and desires. And I think that because of the relationship that we've built with each other, being in an open relationship, giving each other permission to live out our individual needs, identities, us both being queer, I think that it's sort of built in that we have that space to express ourselves, to be ourselves, to be individuals. But I think I realized on that trip that it was only up to a certain point, thinking about moving and making this decision that really was completely selfish. Jonathan had no desire to move back to Los Angeles, and I was like, Well, shit, I do though. I wanna move here. It's gonna be good

for my mental health.

**0:14:23.0 EW:** I have a lot of friends and family out here, and yeah, that was a really challenging time for the both of us because it was the first time that we were faced with... It wasn't even really... No, I guess it was sort of a dissatisfaction, like realizing that there are parts of ourselves that isn't being able to be lived through to fruition because we feel a sense of obligation or fidelity to ourselves as a unit. And yeah, us choosing eventually to live apart was a massive...

**0:15:03.7 EW:** It took the foundations of a lot of what we thought we knew about love and relationships and commitment was such a beautiful story, specifically what you said about allowing yourselves to have freedom and individuality, but only to a point that resonates so much. You can do your own thing, but as long as it doesn't threaten the couple or the union, I think that can be extrapolated out into other areas of life too, whether it's friendships or work, you can have your individuality, but only as long as you still conform enough there's something in the class, it makes you only consider possibilities that have been modeled for you or that are maybe 5% different than whatever the normative path is. But 25% is too much, and oh gosh, if you want 60%, then you're doing it wrong, there's something in that of... That feeling of bumping up against what I want is more than just a little freedom. Yeah.

**0:16:01.6 EW:** And I think what was really difficult about this is, I think you just mentioned possibility models, there was no possibility models for us, the only possibility model we had was if one partner has the desire that other partner cannot meet or match or isn't invested in for whatever reason, you'll split up. That's what my parents did. That's what his parents did. It's like you hit this period where you're at this impasse, and rather than figuring out a way to make it work with you, it seems like the obvious answer is to be like, Well, we're not aligned, so that means that we shouldn't be together. And that was really difficult for us, and I think one of the reasons why it was so challenging, that time was so challenging because it wasn't that we were just grappling with the strangeness of like, Okay, Ev'Yan wants to live in Los Angeles. Jonathan wants to stay in Oregon. We have no idea what that's gonna look like. It was also like, What does this mean though? Because every narrative, every story that we've heard is that if you love someone, you're with them, you stay with them, you don't separate, and even as I was talking about this to people, there was this narrative of like, Oh, so you guys are separating, like you guys are getting a separation. And I'm like, Physically, yes...

**0:17:25.5 EW:** Or, in a distance way, yes. We're not gonna be together, but our relationship is fine. It really was a mind fuck for us, and it was also a mind fuck for everybody else because of the narratives that we have about relationships. It just... Folks were just like, I don't understand... Having a conversation with my mom about this was really fucking wild, because she was just like, But what aren't you telling me? I feel like you're not telling me something. I think she thought that we were keeping it light and being like, Oh no, no, no, we're good, I just... I wanna live in LA, Jonathan. And she's like, No, you guys are getting a divorce. You can just tell me. And I'm like... So it took a lot, it took a lot for us to create our own path through this, and to also try to silence the voices of other people, 'cause I think that their concern, their worries and their projections onto it was also making it a lot more challenging for us.

**0:18:24.2 EW:** Well, yeah, there's the figuring out within yourself what you wanna do, and then there's figuring it out within the relationship, and then there's introducing other people's opinions and stuff to it. My point of relation to that was through the uncoupling and divorce process, and knowing that my former spouse and I wanted to build a very deep friendship where we're still actively in each other's lives and co-hosting some holidays together and spending a lot of time together and quite good friends with each other's now current partners. And it was really interesting the sort of, Oh, you're being so naive attitude that I got from a lot of people. It was either that, or, Oh, it's nice that it's amicable. And for me, I wound up having to let go of trying to make other people understand. I found myself being really defensive of, Oh, no, no, no, it's more than amicable, let me explain it to you. Or having to justify why what I wanted was okay. And the people who are really close to me get it, but there was definitely a freedom once I stopped trying to explain why my choice was valid to other people, which it sound... I hear that in your story too.

**0:19:28.0 NA:** Yeah, yeah. After a certain extent, I had to stop trying to convince my mom that everything was fine, I'm just like, You're just gonna have to trust us, and I'm not gonna have you force yourself to get on board with this. I understand that it's really weird, but hopefully at the end of this, you'll be able to understand, but for me, I just... I think we both needed to feel it out on our own and come to our own stories about it.

**0:19:57.9 EW:** Mm-hmm.

**0:20:00.1 NA:** Okay, so we're getting in the time traveling machine, we're going back to the day, maybe the day before you are about to move to LA and you guys are gonna try this lifestyle, what are you nervous about at this time?

**0:20:12.6 EW:** Oh man, I remember that day so clearly like the day that we were packing the truck and I just... I was so excited. I was so excited. It was two feelings, it was excitement for me, an individual excitement, and then a collective anxiety.

**0:20:35.9 EW:** When it came to my relationship, I was really, really concerned that Jonathan was just saying yes, and this wasn't something that he wanted to do, and I mean to be fair, I wasn't wanting him to be 100% on board, but I did at least, I didn't want for him to just suffice me and be like, Sure sure, whatever, if this is what you wanna do, I really wanted him to understand the intention that I was putting behind this and the reasons why I was saying that I wanted to do this and also the benefit for him as well, that it would give him an opportunity to search his heart and his soul and figure out what he wants, because the truth was that neither of us had been away from each other for longer than two weeks since we got together when we were 19 and 21, so I just remember feeling really nervous that he wasn't being honest with me about whether or not he wanted to do this, and then the other piece...

**0:21:39.1 EW:** And it wasn't, this wasn't that big of a fear, but I was nervous that this was like the end of our relationship, This was the slow... The slow death of our union, which when we got into this experiment, we both kinda said, If that's what happens, that's what happens. We can't prevent

that. We can't stop that from happening. If this is like the life span of our relationship, it is what it is, but it still was really sad for me to think about, and I felt a lot of responsibility because this was all on me... This wasn't Jonathan's idea. I was the one that was like, Hey, I have this weird feeling in my body that I need to move to LA and I need to do it by myself, and I'm asking for you to trust me, and so I felt a lot of responsibility that if our relationship ended, it was because of me, it was because I basically was trying to make things more interesting in our lives, so... Yeah, that's what I was really nervous about.

**0:22:43.3 NA:** When you first brought this up to him as something that you wanted, needed, were thinking about what was he initially on board, what were some of those early conversations like to get you both on the same enough page that you could move forward.

**0:22:58.1 EW:** Yeah, so the first conversation I had with him was not direct at all, it was very much like, Hey, I'm having so much fun in Los Angeles. What would you say if, hypothetically speaking, you know, we lived here together, and he was like, Yeah, no, I'm not really interested in that, and I was like, Oh fuck, okay, so that... That's not going well. And then I kind of put that out of my head, I just thought like, This idea isn't gonna work. Obviously, it's not gonna work. And then I visited Los Angeles again, and then I kept getting all of these signs and signals and messages from my ancestors like, No, girl, you need to be here, like, this is your home, and that's when... That trip, actually, the second trip, the first trip was like... I was in law Alan, I was having a gale time, I was having so much fun in the sun, but the second trip was very somber, and I remember feeling like I have to have a conversation with Jonathan about this like this... It cannot be hypothetical. It has to be very direct. And I have a tendency to be very cynical and pessimistic when it comes to conversations like this...

**0:24:11.5 EW:** So the way that I brought it up wasn't like, Hey... Like grounded in reality and feeling into the strength of our union, it was more like... So I think that this is the end. Because I have these desires, I wouldn't live in Los Angeles, I don't know what's going on. I think that there's obviously something and I think I was feeding into those stories that like if you want to separate or be a part or change the dynamic of your relationship in any capacity, it means that deep down inside you're unhappy and you're not allowing yourself to see those things... And so I was really in that... The first few conversations we had about... That were really, really hard. I was crying. He was crying. He was very confused. He's like, I don't understand what you're saying to me. Like, I get that you want to move to Los Angeles, but why do you wanna go by yourself? And that was also really difficult for me to explain too because we've done everything together, we moved in together, we moved to Portland together, we've done so many things together, and I think it was really alarming, it was alarming for me to be honest with myself and say, like, No, I actually, I want, I need to do this for myself.

**0:25:21.1 EW:** We were in this the space of just being in it, just so confused and concerned and sad, I felt like in those few days we were sort of mourning the loss of our relationship is like... And it was interesting because nothing changed, like neither of us said, Well, we're breaking up then, but I think we were finally realizing that, Wow, we have... This has the potential to end us, and then it also brought a lot of things up to the surface about the ways that we weren't happy, and they weren't

big significant ways, but for me, it was this aspect of like, I don't feel as free as I think that I should be... And for him, it was other things, but that was it for me, just this feeling that if I want to move to Los Angeles, I want to be able to do that, and if I feel like I can't do that because I'm in this relationship, then something has to change. Yeah, that was a really, really hard and heavy time also because we just didn't have anybody to look to to tell us like, No, no, no, this isn't the end, you're just shifting and you'll find your footing eventually, and I just...

**0:26:41.4 EW:** Your relationship is going through some growing pains for us, it was like, Oh, we're having these feelings and these sensations, it means... It's the end. We're getting a divorce.

**0:26:49.9 NA:** Why did you wanna do it by yourself?

**0:26:54.0 EW:** I was feeling a real desire to be alone at that time, I really... I had done a lot of solo travelling the first time that I had ever done it ever... I didn't even think it was possible. I always said to myself like, I am not self-reliant enough to travel by myself, and I started traveling a bunch for work, this was pre-covid and I was having a blast, I was staying in hotels and getting lost in cities, I'd never set eyes on it was fun, and I loved that version of myself, I loved who I was when I was hanging out with my friends really late at night, and that giving a fuck about like, Oh, I need to be home so I can have dinner with my partner, which that isn't even really a thing, it's not like we have that much of an expectation on each other that we have to be home to eat dinner with each other, but for whatever reason that shit still in there, it's still a program in my brain, and so I was really loving who I was when I was so low, and loving who I was when I was alone, and I was really interested in following that thread because I really got the sense that...

**0:28:03.4 EW:** There was a lot of healing and a lot of self-realization. If I just allowed myself to push it deeper, and I remember actually one of the first conversations that we had, I think this was in the conversation where I was like, Hypothetically, what if we lived in Los Angeles together? I told Jonathan, I'm really enjoying traveling right now, and a lot of this travel has to do with work, but I'm interested in what it would look like for me to not travel for work, just travel because I want to... And to spend more than 10 days by myself. And so that was sort of a thread that I was on, and then again, that second trip happened and I was like, Oh no, no, this isn't about traveling, this is about getting the fuck out of Portland and creating a new life for yourself in this the space that is your home. And there's another aspect of this too... I had never lived alone. I met Jonathan when I was 19, as I said. And from the ages of zero to 19, I lived with my mom, I lived with my mom and my sister. So I never had that expe... I didn't go to college, I didn't have that experience of living in a dorm or buying groceries for myself for longer than a weekend, I was really curious to see who that person was, because so much of who I was was defined by the relationship that I was in, and that wasn't necessarily a bad thing, there's a lot of beautiful qualities that I have because of the fact that I'm in this loving relationship, but I really wanted to see like, Who am I...

**0:29:43.4 EW:** If I'm not a wife, who am I? If I am just Ev'Yan and I am someone that is focused on myself and... Yeah, when I tell you, this was like... This wasn't just like, Oh, this is a really great idea. It literally felt like a visceral pool in my body, it was something that I could not deny, it wasn't something like, Oh, I love this, I love this concept. It really felt like a spiritual... A Spiritual calling.



It really did.

**0:30:21.2 NA:** When you were talking about the experience that the two of you had of mourning or grief, I'm interested in that because I think any period of transition, whether you're choosing the transition or not choosing the transition, or for you, once you realize that this was a true... Like you said, visceral craving, spiritual craving, you didn't necessarily have to act on it, but you'd be entering a period of transition regardless, because the transition is either into taking the action that you feel called to take or transition into denying that. And what does that lead to? Either way, that's a point of inflection is a point of transition. I'm interested if you can name a couple of specific things that you did to support yourself through the grief of transition.

**0:31:12.1 EW:** Oh, yeah. The grief was really big, and you're absolutely right, I thought about this a lot and I was like, whether we're together or apart at the end of this, our relationship is going to change. There's a lot of grief around leaving behind this very jovial, naive, childlike qualities of our relationship and stepping into being grown as adults, and also this paradigm of self-preservation, which is something that I don't see in the relationships that I was brought up in. It was like, if you have a desire, you stuff it down, and especially if it's a desire that is as big as you leaving your family or whatever, you either stuff it down or you do it on the side and you're very dishonest about it, and... No, I didn't wanna do either of that, and so part of me was mourning the loss of the relationship before sort of waking up and realizing like, Oh wow, you're not as free as you thought you were, because if you were that free walking through the streets of Los Angeles and thinking about having your own apartment... That wouldn't have been anything.

**0:32:28.2 EW:** It would be like oh yeah, Jonathan would totally be down. So it was mourning that piece, and it was also... I remember thinking a lot about my parents, they divorced when I was 18, they were together for over 20 years, and that divorce was really hard and traumatic on every one of us, and I remember thinking a lot about my parents during that time, like I wonder if they had just... If they just knew that this was a possibility, how much harm could have been saved, how differently would we all have turned out if there were spaces or just different ways of thinking about relationship and love and commitment? Yeah, I was thinking, I was thinking a lot about that in terms of the ways that I took care of myself. I feel very much that this was literally divine, I'm not typically a woo woo person, and even as I tell the story, I feel like a sense to be like caveat like, Yes, I have crystals, but it's not a thing that... It's not something that I'm religious about, but I really felt in my bones, Nicole, that this was the decision that I had to make, it was the decisions that my ancestor ancestors wanted me to make, it was the decision that I needed to make for my spiritual health my emotional health, my mental health, and so even when I was facing all this trepidation and even when I was like, I'm fucking blowing up my life and...

**0:34:07.7 EW:** Okay, I guess I just remember getting so many confirmations and messages from the universe in the form of Angel Numbers, Tarot Readings, conversations with friends, dreams, one thing that actually really solidified my decision was I was walking around LA on that, I think it was my second trip and just like, Oh my God, I was having so many feelings and like I feel... I'm feeling like I need to move here. I don't know what... And then out of nowhere, I smell my grandmother's perfume, and this was wild because there's no one around, so there wasn't like a little old lady

walking by me, my grandmother was not... This was not a part of town that she lived in, she lived a little further away, but I just felt her perfume out of nowhere, and it was like... That is weird. It was weird, so it was like I had all of these fears and concerns, but I felt very grounded and held by the powers that be, that was like Ev'Yan, you have to do this for yourself. And I'm so glad that I did. I'm so glad that I did.

**0:35:20.4 NA:** I feel like you just put into words the way that I feel or felt about quitting drinking that in the bones, not modeled by anyone else around me, I don't really know what this is about, but I absolutely have to make this decision that it felt actually quite simple and dramatic in my mind, and that I didn't have any external thing to point to to say, I have to do this because reasons that there was no one telling me that that's what I should do, there was no one that I knew that had done a similar thing in their mid-20s and anyway, that just that point of residents of, I just know that this is something that I have to do for my complete wholeness and well-being and those moments... You're right, it does have a real woo woo quality trying to talk about it because you can't necessarily put into language what that feels like, but you know what it feels like when you feel it, I guess.

**0:36:16.3 EW:** Yeah, yeah, it really does, it really does. And it was just so clear, I've never felt anything as clear as those moments when I just knew I had to do this by myself and... Yeah, it was such a trip. It was such a trip.

**0:36:35.6 NA:** How so? You two are living together again now, right?

**0:36:38.0 EW:** We are, yeah, so finally enough when we... We planned this out so beautifully, we were getting the finances in order because living apart, having two different apartments and utilities and stuff is so expensive. So we got all of that set. And then the pandemic hit, and we did not have that in our plan. We originally thought so I moved to LA in February of 2020, and then, as you know, the pandemic hit a few weeks after that, which... So, so grateful that I got out of Portland before that, because I think I would have been trapped if I hadn't... If I hadn't left in February, I probably would have been stuck in Portland for another year, so just speaks to the divine timing of that, but... Yeah, we had plans to see each other twice a month, that was our thing, we wanted to maintain that connection, and I was gonna go up to Oregon and then he would come out to LA. But because of the pandemic, we didn't see each other for the first five months, and that was like... There's that saying, When God makes plans or when you make plans, God laughs or something, I was like, Yeah, God was cackling because we had it all set out and then he was like, Bitch, you thought, like you really thought...

**0:38:00.7 EW:** That was a really interesting experience too, because not only was it like the alone time that I was craving, it was like a long time, it was like isolation in your house, you cannot leave because there is a virus out in the air, so it just added another layer of depth for me to really go into this hermitage that we just... We were not expecting at all.

**0:38:28.5 NA:** No, my gosh. God's like, Oh, cute. You wanna be alone, okay, cool, hold my beer.

[laughter]

**0:38:30.2 EW:** Yeah. Literally, literally, literally. Oh God.

**0:38:38.6 NA:** That's wild. So I'm interested, especially now that you're living together again, there's the living together as the book ends of this experience, this might be too broad of a question, but I'm gonna ask it anyway, I'm interested how this experience of being apart together, living apart together, has informed the way that you think about sacrifice within relationships, 'cause you mentioned before that the narrative of, Well, the desire comes up that this person can't meet, then either I'm doing it secretly on the side or I'm just stuffing it down, but this was a desire that you had that you were not willing to stuff down, and in fact, we're willing to change your entire life and perhaps lose this relationship over... How through that on the other side of that, do you think about what is and is not worth compromising on?

**0:39:31.0 EW:** Oh man, I think if you would have asked me this question before we went through this experience, I would have been like, Yeah, nothing. You should compromise on most things... Nothing is off the table. After having been through this experience, I'm like, Why would you compromise? I'm thinking about that very infamous Eartha Kitt, quote slash scene... And people have probably seen memes of it all over the internet, but she's talking about, why would I compromise. I want to be who I am when I am that person, and there shouldn't be a compromise. And so I think about that a lot, actually. What else is on the table. What else is like free... You give a freebie for in terms of like, Okay, if... Basically, what else is possible? Is there anything else that could be on the table that is just like, Okay, but it stops there.

**0:40:31.9 EW:** And I kind of feel like there's nothing... I feel like if you are in a space in your relationship where you're just not happy, you're just not satisfied, or there's a part of you that wants to do something, or live something, or feel something that you just can't feel in a relationship... I think it's worth having a discussion with your partner... Absolutely. I don't think that this would have been as successful if I didn't clue Jonathan in on what I was feeling. It would have been a totally different experience if I was like, So by the way, I'm moving to Los Angeles. I got an apartment. But we talked about this throughout the whole experience. And so I think that that really allowed us both to grow into this experience with each other. And to honestly lean on each other as well. Because at the end of the day, we were all we had. We didn't have anyone else that was helping us.

**0:41:25.3 EW:** And so I'm grateful that I made that leap and I decided not to compromise my own happiness and sanity. I have no regrets being where I am today. And it's also made my relationship with Jonathan today that much more rich... When we were thinking about living back together... 'Cause at first it started as a six-month experiment and then COVID happened, and we were like, Well, we don't know what's gonna happen in six months or 12 months. So we extended it to a year and things started getting a little sticky with the election coming up, and so we were like, You know what, I don't know what's gonna happen I would rather us be together and live together at that time. And so as we were talking about him moving back in with me in Los Angeles... 'Cause I wasn't going back to Oregon. I was like, No, that is like... Absolutely not... Will not happen. We are both just reflecting on how much we've learned over the last 11 months that we had been doing this. To

the extent that we just felt like we were two different people. And that because of that, our relationship was now a brand new relationship.

**0:42:38.7 EW:** And I feel really confident in saying that... He's been living with me... Or we've been living together for almost a year now, and it feels... The relationship feels completely different than when it did when we lived together. And I think it's because we focused so much on ourselves and got really clear about who we are, what we wanted for ourselves, for our happiness, for our mental health and sanity, but also what we wanted within our relationship. And it was by a lot of kismet that we aligned in those ways, and so we were able to come back together and continue to build our lives.

**0:43:16.2 EW:** But it was a really beautiful experience. And any time someone asks me about it, I say I highly recommend it for couples. If they can do it, I highly recommend it. And actually, when I was talking about this on my podcast... I was sort of chronicling the whole journey from my side of the story why we did this, and then an interview between Jonathan and I, when we were living apart. I've gotten a lot of messages from people that were like, I have wanted to do this for years, and I didn't even know that it was possible and seeing what you and Jonathan have done together has made me feel like we can do this. And not only that we can do this, but that it's okay if at the end of this we're not together. Like it's all right, because it's important for me to go after what I want. And it's important for me to hold those parts of myself as sacred and to not compromise on them anymore.

**0:44:11.9 EW:** And so... Yeah, obviously, there's a lot of privilege in being able to do this kind of work, and I certainly don't... I certainly don't say that you should live in separate parts of the state or country or whatever. You can find ways to do that in a really small way. But I think it's always a good idea, especially if you've been with someone for a really long time to just take some intentional time away from each other.

**0:44:40.9 NA:** It's not a surprise to me that you got all of those messages from people... I will share... This is kind of on a micro-level. My partner and I don't share bedrooms. We each have our own bedroom, which was again, something that I never thought was a possibility. Which sounds maybe silly. Of course it's... I didn't think it was like, actually, not a possibility. I know there are separate bedrooms, but the narrative was always, If you don't sleep in the same bed there's something wrong with your relationship.

**0:45:06.6 EW:** Yes.

**0:45:06.9 NA:** And when Paul and I were going through our divorce... Or rather, when we decided we were gonna get divorced, we still lived together for five and a half months after that... And companionably... And we were trying to figure out what does it look like to be boundaried and to have this kind of transition of our relationship under the same roof. And the... The first change that we did was that I moved into the guest room or what had been the guest room... Became my room. And that was the first time in so long that I had had my own bed and I'm notoriously not a good sleeper. And I was just like, This is incredible. And he also thought that it was incredible. And we

were both like, Hold on. And it's funny that now with each of our new partners, we don't share bedrooms. And every time I talk about that, whether it's in an Instagram story or something, I get so many messages from people that either they're like, Yes, team separate bedrooms. Or from people who were, I've been wanting to do this, but I'm afraid to bring it up to my partner. Or, I would love this but my partner would never go for it.

**0:46:09.5 NA:** Like these conversations that we're sometimes having in secret. And that's not what everybody wants. I know plenty of people who love sharing rooms, love sharing beds. But there is something there once you start to be at least a little bit open about choosing a different path, even if it's in really small ways... It's been wild how many people reach out to be like, Oh my God, me too.

**0:46:29.5 EW:** Yeah, so many people don't even know that this is an option. Which is understandable, because we don't live in a culture that gives us many options in terms of coupled relationships. It's like you're either ride or die, or you're not in a relationship. And so the idea that I was shifting those narratives to the extent of being like... Like having to literally tell people...

**0:46:53.1 EW:** Actually, I was just with someone the other day, at like a gathering, and I was... She was asking me about like, Oh, how long have you been in LA? And, How long have you been in your relationship? And I just said, Yeah, we actually left... We were living apart for a year or so. And she was like, Oh, I bet that separation was really hard. And I was like, No, actually it was great. We did it on purpose. It wasn't anything anything negative. But she still couldn't understand that... She still felt like, Oh, so you guys decided to get back together. You reconciled... And I was like, No, no, no. And at that point, I was just like, I can't... I'm gonna be wasting so much energy trying to tell this person that like, No, it's actually not what you think it is.

**0:47:37.3 EW:** We just... Those stories of relationships are so built into the framework of how we see marriage, couples, sex even, that it's understandable why something as simple as not sharing a bed could feel like, Oh my God, really. I have permission to do that. That's possible for me, and it doesn't mean that there's something wrong with me or the relationship. Like, I get to choose. That's... That to me is liberation.

**0:48:11.5 NA:** Yeah. So you mentioned that since you have moved in together again, that the relationship has felt really fundamentally different. Can you give a couple of examples? Maybe even small boring examples or anything to ground that.

**0:48:26.2 EW:** Yeah. The first thing that comes to mind is that I feel like we're a lot less codependent. The time that we spend together had us both really grappling with how co-dependent and emotionally enmeshed we were. Which I wanna say that if you've been with someone for a long time it's kind of gonna happen. You can't not be a little co-dependent with your partner who you've been with for 10 plus years. But we did notice some patterns of co-dependency that just were not healthy. And then also patterns of feeling like an obligation. Like, I have to be around all the time. I have to entertain you all the time. We have to hang out all the time. And one thing that's been really cool is that we have moments in our apartment where we're off doing other things... And for longer than just 15 minutes... He'll be in here, I don't know, watching something about Feldenkrais, and I

will be in the other room... What do I do... These days, I'm just watching a lot of Alfred Hitchcock.

**0:49:27.4 EW:** But we're just like chilling. And I think before we would have had this tape in the back of our minds being like, You should be hanging out with your partner. Why aren't you hanging out with your partner? You guys should have hobbies together and you should be continuing to entertain each other. But now we're just like, No, it's cool for us to take a break. Like... It's cool for me to go for a walk by myself. It's cool for Jonathan to be like, I don't really feel like hanging out 'cause I'm tired right now and I don't want to talk to anyone. So I'm gonna go take a nap. Like, I feel like we were doing that to some degree before, but I feel like we're doing it a lot more intentionally now. It's something that we ask for because we know that it's really important and it's something that we deserve. And also... I think we got spoiled with just how luxurious it can feel to like... Not have to worry about somebody else. I'm hungry. I'm gonna go make myself a sandwich, and I'm not gonna ask you if you want a sandwich. I'm just gonna make myself a sandwich.

**0:50:26.1 NA:** Right. I'm gonna have dinner at either 4:00 PM or 9:00 PM, and it's... Yeah, I...

**0:50:29.0 EW:** Right.

**0:50:31.3 NA:** So... A couple of quarters ago, I took myself on a solo quarterly planning retreat, mostly for work. And it's something that I've wanted to do. I've been self-employed for over 10 years. And every quarter I'm like, Oh, it would be so nice to just go away for a couple of days, whether it's kind of a nearby motel or an Airbnb a few hours away. I just have had this vision of doing it. But I don't really need to do it. Is it really worth the money? I always talk myself out of it. And this time I didn't. And it was the most incredible... It was probably a three-day experience of... A three-day version of what you experienced. But that reminder of how good it feels not to have to take anybody else's preferences into account, even in subtle subconscious ways. And it was just... I can eat what I want, when I want, watch what I want, do what I want... And it's not that I couldn't do those things in my... Quote, real life. My more regular life. No one's stopping me. There's no expectations, but it was interesting to see the expectations that I have of myself when I'm alone versus when I'm not alone.

**0:51:34.6 EW:** Yeah, I really feel that. One of the things that came through for me in a very, very big way through this experience was that I am a chronic caretaker. It is... And it's... I'm realizing that it's not a character trait, it's actually a trauma response. I am constantly panning the room to see how's everyone feeling, what do they need, what do I need to do. And it takes me out of myself and it doesn't allow me to really root into who I am. I'm seeing you nodding. So it sounds like I'm in the right place.

**0:52:06.4 EW:** So I think the reason why it can feel so luxurious to be like, I'm gonna have dinner at 4:00 PM, or, I'm gonna have popcorn for dinner. Like, You figure it out. That feels really good because it's keeping my needs in mind first. Because for 30-something years, everybody else's needs came before mine, even when they didn't ask for them. I was sort of on the hunt of like, That person looks like they're cold, let me go bring them a blanket. Or it's been like... It's 2:00 o'clock has Jonathan drinking any water. Do I need to fill up...

**0:52:39.0 NA:** Oh my God.

**0:52:40.3 EW:** You know what I'm saying?

**0:52:42.5 NA:** This is too real. I can't. I can't. I cannot with this whole... Oh my God, can we just pause and go to therapy right now. It's... I can't... I... Your's... Yeah... Yeah.

**0:52:51.8 EW:** Yeah.

**0:52:52.6 NA:** Yeah.

**0:52:53.2 EW:** And like... I really wanna drive that point home, because it's not just about like, Oh I have a desire and I should be able to take it. It's like there are a lot of layers on my desires that are keeping me from really accessing them, because I'm so busy caretaking other people. And so that's why that experience was so luxurious for me. It allowed my needs and my wants to be at the forefront. And while that can sound really amazing, it was also really terrifying 'cause I'm like, Oh shit. I'm all I've got. Nobody... I have to take care of myself. I need to figure out who I am. Like, What does that even mean?

**0:53:32.4 EW:** So that's another aspect that I feel has really shifted in our relationship is that we both have gotten so clear and have so much literacy around what we personally need, that we are able to access it a lot easier now because we understand how important and powerful it is for us to take care of ourselves first. And I know that that is really counter-intuitive. I know it is for me. I was taught that you're supposed to care for others first before you care for yourself. But in our experience... In my experience, it's been really rich to have that language and understanding that... I'm all I've got and I need to take care of myself first and foremost.

**0:54:15.8 EW:** My needs, my desires, my pleasure is important and deserves to be prioritized. And I feel really blessed and lucky that I'm in a relationship where I can express that need or that desire and it's not dismissed or it's not shamed or... Yeah, there's something to being able to have that awareness of like, Yes, I have a desire, but it's a lot easier to be in a relationship where you are... I don't wanna say aloud, but there's space for you to have your desires be present and there's no shame attached to that.

**0:54:52.3 NA:** Yep. I'm gonna listen to that part over and over again. May I ask you some money-related questions?

**0:54:58.4 EW:** Please, yeah.

**0:55:00.6 NA:** 'Cause you mentioned before the... Having to work out the logistical finances of managing two households. Stepping back from just this specific experience, will you share a little bit about how you and Jonathan handle money within your marriage? Is it shared? Is it not shared? I'm very nosy about money and relationships.

**0:55:18.8 EW:** Yeah. I'm so glad. No one ever asked me this question and I actually love talking about money. I think we need to talk about it more. Yeah, Jonathan and I we share our... We share our funds. We have a joint bank account. It's been like that since day one. That was another thing that was sort of young and dumb of us. We just didn't even think about it. We're like, That's what everybody does. So let's do it.

**0:55:40.0 EW:** And... It's been... It's been fine. We've never had any issues with that. But we do have our own separate businesses. And my business at that time was... As it usually happens, being an entrepreneur, you have good months, you have good years, you have bad... You know... So at that time, my business was doing a little bit better than his in terms of stability of income. And so I'd had a lot more savings invested in my bank account that allowed us both to be like, Okay, even if nothing happens... Like we don't get any jobs or whatever, we'll be fine, because we have a savings account that we can just pull from if need be. So that's what really made it possible. I think if we didn't have that savings account... I know we would have found a way to do it. It probably wouldn't have been as long. We probably only would have done it for a couple of months. But we were able to do that for almost a year. And then... Yeah, we were paying two separate apartments... Two separate grocery bills, insurance. It's very expensive.

**0:56:44.2 EW:** And even when I was doing research... The way that I stumbled across this term living apart together was through the internet... When I was like, Is this a thing? Am I the only person that's ever thought about doing this. And it turns out there's a whole terminology for it. And the way that I heard about it was mostly because of these really wealthy celebrities who do it. I can't think of the names of the celebrities. They leave my mind at this time. But I remember reading about one who had a penthouse in New York that she stayed in while he lived in Paris. And it was sort of an agreement that they had that neither of them live together. They would come visit each other... But it wasn't... They each had their own space. And I was like, Okay, that's cool, but what about for the common folk? 'Cause I'm not wealthy. I'm not a millionaire. So is it possible for folks like me and Jonathan to do this. And it just so happens that we were able to make it work by finding an apartment that for us both, that was in our price range and...

**0:57:48.6 EW:** Yeah, the money aspect of it, I like to talk about because it's not easy to do this type of thing. It takes a lot of privilege to be able to live apart in this way.

**0:58:01.1 NA:** Yeah. So when you say... I'm getting more nitty gritty... When you say that you have a shared account, does that mean all the money goes into a joint bank account and you don't also have separate accounts? Just everything goes in and out of one account?

**0:58:13.3 EW:** Essentially, yes. So we have a business account and then we have a personal account. And so our business account... Actually, both accounts are joint. And we just keep track of... That incoming is Ev'Yan's, that incoming is Jonathan's, and we sort of... Yeah, it's a little... It works. It works for us.

**0:58:37.3 NA:** Yeah, totally. One more question about that. With a joint account, is there any sort of



agreement of purchases over X amount we're gonna talk about together beforehand. How does that work?

**0:58:48.8 EW:** Yeah, so we... Thanks to Jonathan. He's like, the budgeter of the family. I couldn't be bothered. I'm like, I don't... I don't... Budgeting is boring. Like, let's just have fun. But he is very grounded and he's like, We have to be saving money. So we have a budget, like a... These days it's more of like a weekly meeting where we just go through our expenses and stuff like that.

**0:59:09.0 EW:** And we do talk about bigger expenses. Typically though, the expenses that we have are things that we wanna do together. So it's not like I want a \$500 bag and Jonathan is like, Well, what about me? Typically, the higher expenses... We just went to a concert recently, and that was something that we both really wanted to do. So thankfully we have... Our expectations are really matched in terms of what counts as being fun entertainment and things like that. So we haven't really had much issues in the money realm, because I think we're both really aligned with that.

**0:59:47.0 EW:** I think the only issue we have is that I have massive scarcity issues around money. And... I think we all do to a certain degree. And I feel like Jonathan does as well. But mine are really bananas where if our account gets to a specific number, I'm like, We can't grocery shopping this week. And Jonathan's like, You need to calm down. It's not that big of a deal, so that's something that I'm having to work on, but yeah, thankfully, money hasn't really been that big of an issue in our relationship because we're really aligned in terms of our spending habits and our needs and things like that.

**1:00:24.2 NA:** Yeah, yeah, thank you for sharing. I wanna go back to really towards the beginning of our conversation when we were talking about this idea of growing together versus growing apart, and obviously the living apart together was one example of how that growth trajectory looked, but I would love to hear if there's any others that come to mind over such a long relationship may be an example of how you've grown together with ease, and then also an example of how you yourself have grown that maybe took more effort to integrate into the relationship.

**1:00:56.2 EW:** Yeah, that's an excellent question. I mean, we've grown in so many ways, I've grown in so many ways. Like I said, we just had a milestone anniversary not too long ago, and so it's been really at the front of my mind to think about like, Wow, who was I when we first met and how differently I am as a person, how differently our relationship is because of how much growth has happened. We have literally grown up together, like I said, we got together when we were really, really young, and so that gave us a lot of opportunity for us to get to know ourselves individually while also getting to know each other, which has been really beautiful. In some ways, I guess you could say that we have a high school sweetheart kind of relationship, even though we didn't meet in high school and neither one of us went to high school, but it really feels like that we've been through a lot of... I like to say we've lived many lifetimes in the last 15 years that we've been together, and some of the ways that things have changed, at least for me, coming out as queer was a really big deal because again, it was that question of like, Okay, I am queer, but I'm in a relationship with a dude what does that mean?

**1:02:04.6 EW:** Like that means that, well, I missed the boat. In another lifetime, I should be able to... I'll be able to date other people, and in that sense, we're like, No, let's open our relationship, because that is a really important part of me, it's a really important part of us that we don't want to stuff down, it's something that really wants to be actualized... Another thing that came through, actually when I was... When we were living apart was, it wasn't really the realization, but sort of like the embracing of the fact that I was non-binary and how that to me was scarier than even coming out about wanting to live apart, because gender roles are baked so deeply into a relationship, even if you try to dodge them, it's just... They're in there... And so me coming out as non-binary, and I remember having these conversations with Jonathan when we were living apart, and it was so difficult because I was still trying to figure out who I was, and I still deal with this sometimes too, it's still really new for me. I have a hard time really explaining what it means to be non-binary because it is such a visceral somatic experience for me, it's not something that I feel or think about in my brain, it has everything to do with my body.

**1:03:27.4 EW:** And so when I was talking to Jonathan about it, it was difficult for me because I felt like... I don't think he wanted answers, but I think I had this narrative in my brain that like I need to get him answers so that he understands 100% who I am, what this means for our relationship, and the NT was a lot more chill about it, but I think I was really wanting to have a lot of clarity about what this means for us, and that was a really interesting... An interesting growth period for us too, because I think it really had us thinking about like, Okay, what are the gender roles in our relationship, and how are those roles oppressive, and that's something that we're still sort of dissecting... I came out as non-binary in December of 2020, and so this is still really new for me, it's even... It's new for me to talk about, but in the sense of my relationship, I felt really held in the sense that even if I didn't really know and I couldn't put words to what I was feeling and experiencing and wanting to reclaim within myself, Jonathan was really down.

**1:04:47.3 EW:** I think that that's the theme of our relationship that we're both just really down... We're like, Okay, you wanna do that? Let's talk about it. Let's see what happens. But yeah, that was a big one. And then I would say that the other one... There was a lot of growth that happened obviously over this period, realizing that I was asexual and how that shifted or didn't shift the sexual dynamic that was happening between us, and in a lot of ways that a sexual piece was like, Duh?

**1:05:16.6 EW:** It's been with me for a long time, I've just been running from it, but to actually tell my partner, I think that I'm asexual, and that is something that feels really resonant with me, and I don't know if it's gonna require us to change anything about our relationship but I feel like this is just really important information for you to know, just another point of exploration and growth and creating some spaciousness around like who we are, and just the mutability of who we are is such a big one that I think I'm grappling with. We're never gonna stay the same, we're always changing.

**1:05:56.6 NA:** I would love if you are open to it, especially since you just mentioned a sexuality, can you give a little kind of 15-year arc of what the sexual side of your relationship has been? And I ask this because a common question, especially within our Patreon community, and people knowing that I'm making this podcast, I said, What are questions that you have? What would you love for me to talk to folks about? And one of the ones that came up was how to navigate, especially in the long-

term situation, the experience of libido mismatch, and so I don't know if that is something that you have dealt with, but I'm interested in what the different phases of your sexual relationship has been like... Would love to get into that.

**1:06:45.4 EW:** Yeah, you know, my relationship has been through a lot of twists and turns, especially in the sexual realm. We started out really hot and heavy... Our relationship in general, started out really hot and heavy, and we moved in together, I think that's when all of the past trauma and realization of that trauma came flooding to me. I'm not entirely sure why that was, I'm not entirely sure why it was that we had the first six, seven months of our relationship, it was just like having the best sex ever, no problems, and then we move in together and suddenly it's like something switched on inside of me, and a lot of the trauma that I had experienced that I didn't even really understand or didn't know to be trauma, it just barreled through me. And we had this period, for the first three to five years of our relationship where sex was pretty sporadic, and it was also... There was a lot of charge to sex, it just didn't feel like something that was easy for us to do, it didn't feel like it was something that was easy for me to do because of all of the shame, trauma, obligations, gender roles that were getting in the way of it, and going through therapy and even really just starting the work that I did was a huge catalyst in getting me to understand what was happening to me, as well as giving me some perspective and clarity about how to heal these parts of me.

**1:08:24.8 EW:** But the reason why the asexual thing was something that I ran from is because... You know, we live in such a sex-obsessed culture, and particularly in relationships, something that I have heard a lot, and I still hear a lot, is that your relationship... The success of your relationship depends on how much sex you have and the quality of the sex you have and how you desire each other, and that if there's any kind of a dip or any kind of a variation of that, then there's something wrong.

**1:08:58.0 EW:** Something needs to be fixed, you need to go to therapy, or you need to introduce sex toys, or you need to try kink or whatever, and I don't necessarily think that that's wrong, I mean as a sex educator, I think it's really important to prioritize your sexual needs and to make sure that you're on the same page, but I think there's a lot of pressure that we put on ourselves in relationships to be hot and heavy all the time, to have the same sort of stamina, desire, availability when it comes to our sex lives, when it comes to our libido, and just knowing the type of person that I am, that just doesn't work for me, having that obligation just doesn't work for me. I know some people, and a lot of relationships, they just sort of fake it, they're like... What is it called? Maintenance sex. It's like they have sex because like, Oh, my partner wants to have sex, so I'll just have sex anyway, but I've tried that, I couldn't do it. I think one of the reasons why I had had so much trauma so backed up in my nervous system was because I was saying yes to sex that I didn't wanna say yes to, and so I made a decision pretty early on that I'm not gonna do this anymore.

**1:10:12.9 EW:** If I don't wanna have sex with you, I'm not gonna have sex with you. And that is an act of self-preservation. And it's also a way for me to give my system some love and some care, because my tendency has been to have sex when I don't want to have it, and that's also baked into the culture that we live in, particularly for folks who have been raised as women, it was very much

raised in me that you are doing a duty and a service to your husband if you have sex with him, that sort of to be a sexual subservient wife, and I don't subscribe to that shit at all, but it's still in my head so I think having that boundary set has been really beautiful for me, but also very challenging because I still have... And we still live in the culture that we live in that tells us like, Oh, you should be having sex like five times a day, or whatever the number is. [chuckle] I can't even keep up these days. I think one thing that's really helped us is to take pressure off of sex being this one thing, you know, penis in vagina, some sort of penetration that ends in an orgasm.

**1:11:30.4 EW:** For us, it's been really helpful to expand our definition of what sex is, and expand our definition of what sexual intimacy and physical intimacy is, and to not see it as like it's this one act that you do however many times, but what if sex was making out, we've been doing a lot of making out recently that's been amazing, and it satisfies that need for that physical intimacy, but it doesn't put any pressure on us to be something or somewhere where we're not, because we're tired, like, it's okay, it's okay for us to put those boundaries, especially if it's in service of taking care of ourselves. So that's been a really great way for us to stay connected, expand our definition of what sex is, and also have conversations about it. I think we're not having conversations, like I say, we as a collectively, we're not having conversations about sex enough, particularly those of us who are in long-term relationships, I think we just are like, We've been together for five plus years, we've been there, done that. We've see each other naked, we don't need to have conversations about our sex life. I think everyone should be having conversations about their sex life regularly, and because we are not the same beings that we were when we entered the relationship, and so we're also not the same sexual beings that we were.

**1:12:55.5 EW:** Our needs might have changed, our libidos might have changed, our desires might have changed, so it's really important to keep that line of communication going.

**1:13:04.1 NA:** Okay, so let's pretend that you are giving out a homework assignment, you just said, you think that everyone in especially longer term relationships should be having more conversations about sex, I'm into it. What are the couple of conversations that you think that people should be having or maybe a couple of types of conversations or prompts that you would like to invite people to consider?

**1:13:24.1 EW:** I love this question. It's one of my favorite things to talk about, I love talking about it with my clients as well, before we get into the conversation piece, I just wanna say that so much of our conversations about sex are so boring and serious and they require like, We have to sit at a dinner table and talk about her sex life, like let's try to make this conversation as fun and as playful and as light as possible. I know that that's hard because I'm talking about sex, even if you're with someone for a long time can be pretty awkward, it's vulnerable to do something like that, but what is a way that you can take this conversation out of this narrative that it's serious and problematic and it's going to result in an argument, like how can you take that conversation into a different context? So one of the first things that I say is like, first and foremost, don't have this conversation in the bedroom, don't have it while you're having sex, don't even have it within the context of sex, whether it was like before or after sex or during sex, have this conversation when you're out to brunch, when you're walking your dog, like when you are laying on the couch in between a commercial break,

really just bring a sense of comfort and playfulness around it, that makes it...

**1:14:39.2 EW:** Also, that puts it in a neutral place, I think sometimes when we have these conversations before, during or after sex, it can read as a critique or... Yeah, but there's a lot at stake if you don't nail it or whatever, so do it when your five hours out of having a sexual interaction or a couple of days out and see what happens. So that's the one thing. I would also say, and this is sort of baked into how to start that conversation, as a way to make it fun, one of my favorite things to do is to have people do a Yes, No, Maybe List. You can find go-gobs of them on the internet, you just Google yes, no, maybe list. And they have all different kinds. They have ones that are kink-focused, queer-focused, they also have some that are not just about sexual acts, but about consent and bodily autonomy, like this is how I want my body to be touched, this is how I like to be kissed, this is how I want you to come on to me, so it's not just about what positions do you want to try, or what sort of kinky things are you wanting to be curious about, it's also like, what is gonna make my body feel safe to open to you? So download one of these lists, tell your partner like, Hey, date night I have this crazy idea, I was listening to this podcast. This person was talking about it a Yes, No, Maybe List, I found one on the internet, let's do it together and let's see what happens.

**1:16:06.6 NA:** Do you print it out?

**1:16:08.1 EW:** You can do one of two things, you can print out yours, fill yours out and just like go over your own answers, I think that might actually be good for those of us like me who are chronic caretakers and constantly scanning the room for other people's emotions and stuff, like that. Take some time to do that list for yourself first and just like take your time with it, drink some tea, put on some music, get your journal out so you can journal what's coming up for you, just really take your time. And that way, there's not a lot of pressure to be like, I have to mark a yes, because I know my partner is marking a yes over there, so that's an option. You can do that separately, or you can do it together. Either way, compare notes. Do them together. Compare notes. Where do your yeses batch up? What are some yeses that you're like, Oh, I didn't think that I would say yes to that, but they actually said no to, Where are your maybes? And also, what are the noes?

**1:17:06.4 EW:** And this isn't meant to be like, Okay, here's the rule book, this is how we have to play by the rules. It's more just like, Oh, this is interesting. Let's be curious about that. Like it's so interesting that you marked that a maybe, I didn't know that about you. And what I like about a, yes, no, maybe list, is that it helps to generate a conversation, it's not... And it's also fun, it's got a quiz mechanism in it, and how can you not love a good quiz, but it really just helps to create that conversation in a way that feels playful, light, and you can do it in a way that... Like I said, it could be a date night, you could have some wine if you partake and wine, and just really set the stage of like, whatever happens, this is the safe space for us, we're allowed to just explore play, we're not gonna come to any judgments about each other. We're not going to say like, Oh, he said yes to this, so that means that we have to do it, it's just like, Let's play. Let's be curious. That is one of my favorite ways to instigate a conversation about sex, and then what's cool is that you could do this every quarter, so you can keep and save the results of your last test, do another test in a quarter and then compare notes, like, In what ways have you changed? How has your desires changed? You know...

**1:18:26.9 NA:** Yeah, I feel like the through line of this conversation and all of the stories that you're sharing is, Hey, guess what people change, in a great, very permission-giving way that is really... It's really easy to think about, you know, Oh, I did experimentation in my past, or, All these things are in the past, but my current self and my future self has to be fixed, and that reminder that we are always changing maybe at different pieces, in different phases of our lives, maybe some things do stay consistent, there might be something that you love, that you love for your whole life, or there might be something that's a no, that's a no for your whole life. It's not that everything has to change, but I just... I feel like it's almost an over-cliche to say things change, people change, like, we all would nod our heads to that, but to actually stop and be like, Okay, but what does that mean for me? It's not enough to just say like, Okay, sure, people change. How am I changing? How am I different than I was last quarter? Five years ago, 10 years ago, how is the relationship different, and leaving space for that to happen and for it not to be so threatening, like having a relationship where growth and change is sort of baked into it. I'm hearing that in everything that you're saying, and I feel like it's such a useful reminder.

**1:19:38.0 EW:** Yeah. It's really important. I think I've fallen into the trap that change is the only constant outside, but in the relationship, we have to stay the same, we have to be rigid, and I get that. I think for me, I have felt that my relationship is a safe space, it's a sanctuary, like all kinds of pandemonium can be going on outside, but I have this one anchor, this one space of constancy within my partner that I can rely on, and that's okay. But I also think that we have to remember that we are alive human beings, we are constantly living, we are constantly changing and transforming and healing and becoming new people. Anytime someone asks me these days to describe myself and the work that I do, I'm like, this is who I am today. Tomorrow, I could be a completely different person. Something that I've be thinking about when it comes to gender, what gender am I today?

**1:20:34.8 EW:** There's so much openness in my life and so much space and mutability and fluidity that it just naturally carries over into my relationship, and I really... I appreciate that because not only does it allow me to be the truth of who I am, it also allows me to give space to my partner Jonathan, to change as well, to have his desire shift and there's no right or wrong answer, it's just like, Yeah, you can change your mind because you're a human being and you're not gonna be the same person that you were when I met you when you were 21. That would be ridiculous for me to think that. And it's actually really beautiful for me to think about how different my partner is and how I've watched him grow, and in that way, it's almost as though I get to meet a different person every single day because I have these eyes on him and on our relationship that all of this is so fleeting, and who I met 15 years ago is not the same person that I am in relationship with now, and so I want to cherish every moment of that and honor every iteration of who he is.

**1:21:48.3 NA:** What has helped you... 'Cause everything you just described sounds incredibly beautiful, and then my sort of like this cynical petty part of me inside is like, what do you do when you feel someone else's change as a threat. Is that something that you've experienced? I think I wanna be the person who gives all of my beloveds freedom to be their most authentic self... I think that those are my values, and sometimes either my conditioning or my fear-based response, whether it's a being left behind when they're changing or... I don't know, I think as difficult as it can be to

accept to change within ourselves, I actually, for me personally, find it sometimes more difficult to accept the change in other people, particularly people that I'm in the most intimate relationships with.

**1:22:34.5 NA:** Yeah, as I'm saying all of this, this is not easy for me, like I'm an Earth sign, I like things the same, consistent. I'm typically, I don't really like surprises, I like routine, I like structure, I like repetition. So this is not easy for me, it's actually a practice of patience and a practice of trust, because there probably will be a time where Jonathan changes and there has been times where I've changed, or Jonathan's changed in a way that feels like it's a threat to that stability. And that practice for me is to just get out of the way and say like, this change is gonna happen regardless if I wanted to or not. You know what I mean? We can try to deny it as much as we can, we can try to stuff it down, but it's gonna come up eventually. Let's just embrace it, let's talk about it. And also, I want to be a safe space for my partner in this world, that doesn't really give us a lot of flexibility and fluidity to be ourselves, I want our relationship to be that space where if nothing else, he can come here into the space and not be judged, that he can come as he is, and I can accept that because he gives that back to me, so I don't want... [chuckle]

**1:23:47.5 EW:** I don't want to make it like I'm talking about this with such ease, but it's actually really difficult to do, because you're right. When we change, it does threaten that sense of stability, and even it can rub up against our own desires for what we want and are the ways that we want our lives to go. Like I'm 100% certain Jonathan was not thinking that this was the trajectory of our lives, I think he was like, we're gonna live in Portland for the rest of our lives, we're gonna buy a house there, we're not going to do any major moves. Yeah, life, life happens and I really just want... I don't know, I just keep thinking about the aliveness of my relationship and I really see it as a living document and how... And I think what helps me, even in those spaces of hardship where I'm like, Oh, he wants to change, or I'm feeling like I need to come out as this now, I just remember that. What a blessing. What a miracle.

**1:24:49.3 EW:** I think what a privilege it is to be alive, and I constantly think about this when it comes to my own ancestors who, a lot of them did not have agency or autonomy over their own bodies, they did not have the privilege to be able to feel into the desires of their body, or the pleasures that they had, and so I almost feel like it's my duty to be everything that I can in the realm of possibility and freedom and liberation and aliveness, to live out the parts of themselves that they didn't get a chance to. So for me it's like, it's an imperative, it's not even something that I can choose, it almost feels like if I don't do it my ancestors are gonna drag me anyway, so... [chuckle] Well. Yeah, that's just how I feel about it.

**1:25:40.6 NA:** Oh, that's so beautifully said. When you said the change is gonna happen anyway, whether I want it to or not, yes.

**1:25:48.9 EW:** Yeah. I've seen it happen where relationships are on this track of change, and there's one partner that's just like, nope I don't... Hands on my ears, I don't, I don't, nope, it's going to happen, it's gonna happen. So you may as well get out of the way and enjoy the ride as much as possible and just trust that if you all are meant to be together, you will find ways to grow and shift

through these changing tides with each other. That's what I truly believe.

**1:26:26.0 NA:** I would love to pose for you a question, a specific listener question from one of the folks in Patreon, because I think it definitely speaks into what you're saying about change. So their questions around the idea of keeping things... The word they used was fresh after being married a long time and says, "Both in terms of friendship and relationship but also sex," like when sex has faded way into the past, do I care? Do they care? Should we care? Are we lying to ourselves if we say that we don't?

**1:27:00.9 EW:** I think what comes up for me is the conversation that we've been having about this is, of this narrative that we're given that you have to be having hot and heavy sex no matter where you're at, you should be 60 years old and having kinky sex. I think what I love about my aseness, my being an asexual person, is that sex is no longer the center of my universe, it's part of my work, and it's a part of my relationship. But it's not the center of it. I think I've gotten to that trap where it's like, it's all about the sex, and it's all about the connection, and it's all about the attraction, which to be fair, that's a good part of it for people, but for me, I've been really enjoying what it feels like to de-prioritize sex for my relationship, and to think about how sex isn't the only thing that makes a good relationship good, sex isn't the only thing that makes a relationship feel safe and intimate and comfortable and cozy. There are other aspects that we can pull from within our relationship, we don't have to put so much pressure and precedent on sex, and that's something that I talk about a lot in my work, like I'm not as interested in the doing it as I am about how are you all when you are with each other, what do your bodies do when you're with each other, and not from in a sexual place, but when your partner is standing next to you as they are drying dishes and you are washing them, what does your body wanna do?

**1:28:36.4 EW:** Does your body feel soft next to this person, does your body want to move closer to them? Do you all dance with each other in some way, either metaphorically, literally? I'm really curious about that aspect of it, I think we think that sex is the only way that we can have physical intimacy and shared desire with someone, which is understandable, I think that is the story, the narrative that we've been fed, but that's not everything. And I'm really interested in what my body does next to my partners, like can my body soften when I'm next to him, when we're laying on the couch, am I able to just like... Just completely relax. That to me is so much more valuable than a 10 minute, 30-minute sex session that we have. Like I want to feel that consistent intimacy, love, connection, communion, collaboration, every aspect of my relationship, not just the 10% that we're sharing a bed together. So that's what's coming up for me, is just really wanting to invite for folks to think about like, what if sex wasn't at the center of our relationship. And that can be scary for folks, 'cause like I said, is a huge paradigm shift, we've been taught that the sex is what makes our relationship.

**1:30:07.8 EW:** Otherwise, it's just a friendship. That's what defines platonic versus romantic. It's the sex piece, which I feel like that's also being shaken up, I've seen... I'm seeing a lot more conversations around platonic friends having sexual relationships, and it's not about romance, it's just about getting a physical need met, but anyway, I digress. Yeah, I would think about that. I would think about that and I would also just have some conversations about your partner about,



kind of going back to the conversations about sex, but more than that, I don't know, what comes up for me is kind of doing a check-in, like how is sex feeling for you, are you happy? Is there anything that you wanna change? What's the frequency that you would like for us to have sex, and again, to ask these questions from a place of curiosity, not from a place of interrogation or critiquing, it's just more like you are a person that is sexual, I'm a person that is sexual, how has that changed over the last couple of years? You might be surprised that your partner is like, I'm not. Sex used to be at the front of my mind, but I would rather do other things and that's okay.

**1:31:21.6 EW:** And literally, that's okay. Again, I'll say it til the cows come home, the sex is not everything, it's one aspect of a relationship, and I think that once you have that down as a practice, it doesn't matter what sort of peaks or valleys you go through when it comes to libido or lack of desire, because you're not placing the importance of your relationship on this one entire aspect, it's a lot more sustainable, I think, to focus on the other parts that make your relationship romantic and intimate and beautiful and fun and playful than it is for you to like be well, the sex is everything. At least for me, it's easy for me to talk like this because I've gone through this whole growth experience around de-prioritizing sex, realizing that I'm on the A spectrum and how that means that sex is not at the front of my mind and that's okay.

**1:32:19.0 EW:** But yeah, I also, I wanna give some reading for folks, if they're interested in anything that I'm saying about de-prioritizing sex and the idea that sex isn't at the center, or doesn't have to be at the center of a relationship. To read this book called *Ace* by Angela Chen, actually had her on my podcast, and we talked about the different ways that asexuality helps folks who aren't Ace experienced sexual liberation, because we can learn so much from *Ace*, folks who have families, kids, even have sex. They're just, they're approaching sex and sexuality and love and relationships in different ways that are just really counter to the culture that we're in, so I highly recommend that book for anyone who's interested.

**1:33:07.3 NA:** Yeah, I love that. I also think that's a great place to start to wrap up, is there anything that you feel like you are burning or called to say that hasn't come up yet?

**1:33:21.7 EW:** I don't think so. Yeah, I feel like we got really deep into a lot of areas, so I'm feeling pretty good.

**1:33:28.9 NA:** Okay, then a couple of last questions. If you could leave people with an affirmation of sorts based on our conversation. What would that be? Basically, what is your wish for everyone listening.

**1:33:41.6 EW:** My wish is for folks to really feel into their individuality who they are outside of the relationships that they're in, and if they don't know who they are outside of their relationship, my hope is that this conversation and the conversations that follow will invite them and give them permission to be curious about that, to begin to ask themselves questions about that, not with the sense of like, I have to figure out the answer, but who would I be if I wasn't in this relationship, and how differently would my decisions be. Would I shop at the same grocery store? Would I eat the same meals, but I live in the same town when I have the same friends, just get curious and trust that

this questioning isn't meant to take you far out and away from your beloved, if anything, it's an invitation for you to... To find yourselves together in a deeper way.

**1:34:47.5 NA:** Yeah, an invitation into partnership without self-abandonment.

**1:34:50.2 EW:** Yes. That part right there.

**1:34:54.9 NA:** What is the very best place for people to find you and say hi, do you have a favorite way to connect with new folks, any offerings that you would like to share?

**1:35:03.1 EW:** Yeah, so many things. Well you can find me on my podcast, Sensual Self, you can find that anywhere you are streaming a podcast, you can also find me on Instagram at Evyan.Whitney. You can go to my website evyanwhitney.com to sign up for my newsletter. That's a little bit more reliable than Instagram these days, and if you're interested in things about sensuality and coming into your body and pleasure, may be answering some of these questions that I asked about like, who are you, what does your body want, need and desire you can check out my book, it's also cold sensual self, and you can find that anywhere. But I highly recommend buying from an independent book store if you can.

**1:35:46.0 NA:** Yes, I will put links to all of those things in the show notes, thank you so much, you are delightful as always, this was such a joy, and I feel like I have lots of homework that I'm excited to do for myself.

**1:35:56.5 EW:** Thank you, it was such a pleasure chatting with you again.

[music]

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