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**0:00:02.5 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, at least for myself. 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.

**0:00:55.2 NA:** In today's episode, you'll get to meet Grizel Williams. Grizel, whose pronouns are she, her is a Dominican Cuban-American who fills so many roles, she's a musician, outdoor lover, backpacker, cyclist, therapist, mental health advocate, writer, speaker, marketing strategist, but she identifies most as a human being doing her very best to amplify mental health as well as de-stigmatize mental illness and hopes that more and more people will get the resources they need to live their lives without fear or shame. Griz is also a newlywed, and in this conversation we talk about the intersection of marriage and mental health, or at least her experience of it, the role of therapy in her relationship, supporting a partner who's having a tough time, being the one who supported yourself and the messy reality of both partnership and healing. Here we go.

[music]

**0:01:51.8 NA:** Alright, my dear. We are good to go. Griz, do people call you Griz or do most people call you Grizel?

**0:01:56.2 Grizel Williams:** Most people call me Griz.

**0:01:57.7 NA:** Okay, cool. Even as we just started this, I'm like, is that what you prefer for a public podcast? Well, here we go.

**0:02:02.5 GW:** Yeah.

**0:02:04.1 NA:** Welcome, welcome, welcome.

**0:02:06.4 GW:** I'm so happy to do this. Yeah, I feel like everyone calls me... Eric only calls me Griz now to where I feel like he has forgotten my name and we talked with the healthcare expert this morning, 'cause I have healthcare baby, and he was calling me Griz to this person, I'm like, "Yeah, they don't call me Griz, but you know." Okay, I like that he's just casually, just throwing that in there.

**0:02:32.2 NA:** Right. Nickname-ing you to your new doctor. Great, I love it.

**0:02:34.1 GW:** Yeah, exactly. I know.

**0:02:37.2 NA:** So, I am going to ask you to introduce yourself in maybe a slightly less traditional way, with what I'm calling a relationship bio, so less what do you do, and more of who and how do you love? Since that's what we're gonna be talking about, give us your relationship bio.

**0:02:53.2 GW:** I love this. I love your questions. Okay, so my relationship bio, I am a married woman of a whole year and a half.

**0:03:06.9 NA:** Congratulations.

**0:03:07.4 GW:** Actually, like a whole year and three months, I got married to Eric Mitchell Hallworth. What an incredible human. He is my partner. My co-pilot, sometimes he's more pilot, sometimes I'm more pilot. Yeah, I feel like we're each other's kind of reminders of balance and how important it is for each other to make one another, make ourselves happy, and hopefully that interprets to making the other person happy. We love each other by communicating very clearly our expectations and also our needs to one another. I feel like that's something that I've always valued since I was a little person, but have become more confident in that request ever since I started really accepting who I was as an empath, as a therapist, as a human, as a friend, is just kind of embracing that who I am is a person that has a huge heart, and I know that about myself.

**0:04:24.3 GW:** And so that means that I have to be very aware of who I give my heart to, which is probably, I feel like relationship status in all relationships for me is I love very hard. And it's a cultural thing, I think that I've kind of just accepted is also a part of who I am. So I like being married, I really enjoy it. I'm learning so much about myself, and I'm learning a lot about my tendencies, and I'm really grateful to be married because I don't think... I actually know that I would not have grown this much as a person and as an individual had I not made this commitment to Eric. So, yeah, and I like growing. I'm a grower, not a shower.

**0:05:18.4 NA:** Oh my god, there's so much good stuff in that that we're gonna dig into. First nosy question that I am surprised I don't already know the answer to, did you change your last name when you got married?

**0:05:27.1 GW:** No but that's only because Trump was in office and I was scared to change my last name because just in case I had to flee the country and change my passport, but Eric and I are planning, if there's ever a time available to change our last name to Bien B-I-E-N, good in Spanish, both of us, we both just wanna change it to that 'cause we don't like either of our names quite frankly, I got adopted, so my last name I hate it, and it wasn't my choice to change my last name. So I don't really even talk about my last name very much, but... Yes, so we're gonna change it to Grizel and Eric Bien. Casa Bien is what we call our little house here and yeah. [chuckle]

**0:06:07.1 NA:** I love that. Making a new last name together, I know someone else who has done that as well, that's...

**0:06:13.0 GW:** Yeah, dude.

**0:06:14.4 NA:** It's a sweet idea.

**0:06:15.8 GW:** Yeah, we were gonna do... We were gonna do Grizel and Eric Taco because everyone loves tacos, but my mom got really upset about that, so we went with Bien.

**0:06:28.8 NA:** Oh my god. I secretly wish that... Well, I guess not so secretly wish that you were going Taco. That's fantastic. It's still funny to think about names and how... Obviously, you just said that and you weren't totally joking, you can just change it to whatever you want.

**0:06:42.1 GW:** It's tight dude. I think that everyone should have that opportunity. I wish... You know, it's really sad how much it does affect you, I don't... It's like something that you wish it didn't affect you as much, but it does. And that's from my own experience of like, I got adopted really young and didn't have a choice to change my last name and my stepdad, my mom just literally, randomly came home one day, it was like, "Your last name is Williams now." And I was just like, "What?" Now, it's something that... Because especially, I don't identify with my stepdad and Williams is such a... It's just a different name. It's just not very me, my name is Grizel Williams, it doesn't make any sense. It has affected me more than I thought it would, and so I feel lucky that... I think I would have probably changed my last name regardless if I had gotten married.

**0:07:36.6 NA:** Yeah, that's interesting. I did change my last name when I got married, and part of it for me, so I don't even like the phrase made name, there's something about the patriarchy of all this that makes me feel a way. So my dad is the youngest of three, and he's 85 now, so both of his older brothers have died and their birth last name was Rosenberg, and one of the brothers kept it, one of the brothers went into the movie industry, and for the opportunities he was looking for at the time, it was too Jewish sounding, and so he changed it to something else. And when my dad was coming up in the world of music PR, there was someone else that had his same name, and so instead of just going with it, that he was like, Oh, I'm just gonna change my last name and made a different name for himself, which is cool and is a choice. But because of that, I never felt a sense of family history really around the name, and so I didn't really feel rooted in it, and I was like, Oh, I'll probably just change it when I got married, sort of because the idea of that's what you do.

**0:08:45.9 NA:** Putting that in big air quotes, I never really examined that when I was younger, and so got married, changed my name, and it's funny now, being divorced, I decided to keep my married name, I'm quite good friends with my former spouse and the logistical paperwork of doing something else with all the logistics of getting divorced, I'm like I can't deal with one other thing, and so I decided to keep it and who knows if I'll keep it forever, but I use my first and middle name Nicole Antoinette for work anyway. I don't actually use my last name for anything public-facing work-wise, so it didn't feel like it was a big change, but it is funny, just thinking about the decisions that we make with our name, which is partially our identity, and I kinda like that it bonds me to my former spouse in that way, but I think if I were to get married again, that I wouldn't change it or I wouldn't make that decision now.

**0:09:35.3 GW:** Yeah, yeah, I think like you were saying, the patriarchy feeling, and it just doesn't feel in line, I guess, of who I know myself to be and also a representation of the relationship. I think that's why I struggle with the whole changing the name to like the male partner, your male counterpart or whatever. Or even change to get to one or the other, I get it. If it's something that you feel like it flows really well with you, but if it doesn't, and then you have to anyway... I know Eric's mom is disappointed that we didn't change our last names to that, and she still for herself will send us packages, and it'll say Eric and Grizel Hallworth, and I'm just like... And she said... [chuckle] I mean, I love her. She's great, she's just funny sometimes about that kind of stuff. She's like, "I'm just used to it." I'm like, "What are you used to?"

**0:10:32.0 GW:** We've never changed our last name to that, but it's what she's... What is ingrained in her, but that's one other thing I love about our changing society right now, is I feel like people are challenging those norms and challenging the whys to what we're accustomed to. And I feel so lucky to have learned a lot of those things throughout the last few years, but I can't deny that some of the things that I've chosen, like some of the decisions I've made around marriage has also been a part of culture, not culture. Because that's what you do. Even to the white dress. Why? Why white dress? 'Cause isn't it supposed to be like you wear a white dress because you haven't had sex and you're like the purest form, and I promise you this, I was not my purest form on my wedding night, in any sense of that. I was very depressed when I got married, I was very honestly pretty broken at that time, and I felt like if anything, I probably should have been wearing all black and some emo eyeliner or something. [laughter]

**0:11:55.9 NA:** So you've been married a little more than a year, newlywed. Tell me about your decision to get married. Is that something that you always wanted for yourself?

**0:12:11.6 GW:** When I was young, when I was in Miami, I lived in Miami for eight to 10 years. It's hard to... I was actually telling my therapist how much I don't remember a lot of my... Like the dates and numbers of things when I was younger, but I remember day dreaming about having a family, but the way I day dreamt that was not so much like in kids or even a perfect partner, it was just this feeling that I was going to have a lot of joy in my home and that I was going to have a lot of love in it, and I feel like that's something that I've always felt. But didn't know how it would turn out. Growing up Hispanic, I feel like talking about kids was a big part of my life, my mom has... My grandpa has 20 siblings, and there are so many of them, I grew up with a huge family, so you just kind of hear that you're gonna have kids, you're gonna have kids, you're gonna have kids.

**0:13:16.4 GW:** You're gonna get married, you're gonna have kids, get married, and then my grandma really wanted me to get married to a rich wealthy man, and a rich, wealthy white man was her goal for me, and so I just heard it a lot, so I think somewhere in my body, right, I was hearing it, so I think that it kind of manifested to a point, but more than anything, I knew I wanted a connection with someone, I knew that I wanted that love that was unconditional. But mostly because I didn't really have that growing up. And so I just desperately wanted that kind of committed passion for someone, 'cause I gave that to my family, but they didn't really give it back to me, so I think... Yes, I think I knew I wanted it, but I didn't know it was gonna be defined in a marriage setting, and honestly kind of I feel like getting married made it very real to me, like you

don't realize what you're doing until you're married, I feel like. You're just like, "Oh, shit, this is the real stuff. We're doing this now." So now I feel like it's just been a different interpretation of what marriage means to me now versus what it did before.

**0:14:34.5 NA:** Yeah, how much thought or conversation did the two of you put into marriage, was it an impulsive decision, was it something you went to joint therapy for? There's all different ways that you can approach it. Like my former spouse and I, we basically yolo got married, we eloped, it was kind of... It was a very quick time frame, and it's funny to be doing this podcast and how much my partner and I now talk about whether or not we wanna get married and what that would look like, I feel like I'm having all of the conversations that I didn't have before getting there that I don't regret the way that we did it, it was right for us at the time, but I'm interested in what the lead-up looked like for you, because it sounds from what you just shared that marriage almost was this two-pronged thing, there was the cultural family box checking, success is you get married, you have kids, that instilled in you, and then also this unconditional love to support the partnership, the home that you wanted, that that was something you wanted just for you, and that these two kind of met together in the form of getting married, but what was the lead up like for you and Eric?

**0:15:36.1 GW:** Yeah, so I've grown a lot in the last few years, and I feel like the way that I've grown the most is this acceptance without shame of who I am and how I am a person that needs companionship, it's not like necessarily even so much a want as much as it is a need, for me. I think my personality it's very family-oriented, it's just who I am, like this ride or die kind of human. So meeting Eric, even though I wasn't in my healthiest form, I presented very much committed and very much open to having conversations about marriage within the first few months, I just don't have any... I never had a problem talking about commitment because I've always known that I needed commitment from somebody, and also my trauma is based off of abandonment, so it's even more predominant that I have that intense connection with someone because my biggest fear is someone leaving me, but at the beginning of my relationship with Eric that was what was leading the marriage conversations was my trauma, which I would not recommend doing it that way, but at the same time, it opened a lot of conversations for Eric and I that he would never have had had I not been in that space.

**0:17:08.6 GW:** Because he has the opposite problem. Like he doesn't... He's difficulty committing to things, and especially people, the fact that I was so open and having these conversations from the get-go, like, Hey, this is like, what does this mean to you to? I need to understand how you're perceiving this, and I've always been like that. It wasn't so much that we were talking about marriage per se, even though that word was thrown around quite a bit in the beginning, it was more just like, "Hey, what kind of love do we want to offer each other, and what are we committing to each other and how has it changed? How has your relationship changed? How has our commitment changed?" It's been an evolving conversation of connection and commitment to one another that evolved into getting married when COVID hit because we, quite frankly, went through a lot of changes during COVID that kind of helped us recognize our love for each other and our commitment to one another.

**0:18:22.8 GW:** And how we have found that marriage, our marriage has gotten messy, not because

of one another, as much as it is life circumstances, so when COVID hit and we were kind of isolated to one another and had very minimal contact with other people, it kind of just made us realize how much we are affected by people and how much Eric and I both are empathetic to the needs of others, and that often is what gets our relationship off track and out of balance, and so the fact that we had the opportunity to get married in a place that we loved, in an intimate setting without the distractions of other people. We had a few people at our wedding, in fact, I still kind of regret some of the people that I invited 'cause I didn't know them well, but it was still that intimate decision, it still was only about Eric and I. Even though there were a few friends that were there, it was 100% about committing to one another in this really very deep, deep, deep way. And instead of bringing other people into it, it was validating the commitment and connection that we've been talking about for the last four years. Does that make sense?

**0:19:40.5 NA:** Yeah, it definitely does. I would love to get a little bit more specific 'cause you've talked about commitment a couple of times or used the word commitment. In getting married, what did you feel like you are committing to? What were your... Not specific vows, not actually the vows you recited to each other, but what is this commitment in more tangible specific terms for you?

**0:20:04.8 GW:** Yeah, I love that question, 'cause I think commitment looks different for every single person, right? Commitment for me, I guess I'll only speak for me 'cause Eric had a very different experience. I feel like I committed to holding his hand when I could and saying yes to difficulties as a partner at the time, I didn't even realize that I was committing to that. I think I was committing because I was so in love and he was so good to me, and he went to therapy, and in the moment, it was just like all of these boxes really were checked out. He was like, Who else would I be with, there's literally no one else that I would want to do this partnership with, because he just fully accepts me and fully... He's committed to who I am on the good days and on the bad days, and so his acceptance of me also helped me fully accept him, and I guess the commitment that I am continuing to make is like, I got your back for when you need the support. I'm committed to bettering myself so that I don't project my shit onto you, and I feel like, yeah, there's so many things. I don't know how to even put it into one sentence.

**0:21:27.5 NA:** Yeah, I love that, about committed to your own growth and healing so that you're not just projecting your own like trauma and bullshit onto each other, cycling back and forth. So do you feel like... Obviously, you chose to get married. Do you feel like everything that you just said, all of those commitments, those are in theory commitments you could have made to each other without it. Why marriage?

**0:21:52.3 GW:** Yeah, I have thought about that a lot.

**0:21:55.7 NA:** Same, hence doing an entire podcast about it. Yeah.

**0:22:00.6 GW:** Yeah. Man, I feel like almost a little embarrassed to even share, but dissociation is such a big part of my story that I feel like it wouldn't be fair to not mention that. I struggle with being able to... Well, in the past, my depression has gotten so, so bad where it's really hard for me, like people think I'm super empathetic and super present or actually I'm really good at just taking

care of people and communicating, and I have gifts that almost... They make it difficult for others to see how unattached I am to the actual reality. So sensations sometimes can be really difficult for me to feel. So, truly 'till just a few years ago, I didn't realize how important smells were to me, I just never thought about that. I just didn't care. And then you live in Van life and then you do... I did the trails and all of these things that almost made it like, Oh, I can put up with a lot of shit and not be affected by it, which is great, resilience is an awesome thing to learn.

**0:23:15.9 GW:** And resilience with dissociation can inhibit, at least me, to feel the gravity of decisions that I make, and now I've seen that in the backcountry, and I've seen that in friendships and relationships. And so no, I don't think that that everyone needs to necessarily get married in order to feel those commitments, but I don't know if I would have understood the gravity of it had I not made that decision, and I'm grateful every single day that it was with Eric because there were other people that were up for that kind of task and I'm so grateful that I didn't make that decision with them because it wasn't the right person for me, and Eric truly is, but sometimes it freaks me out a little bit because I wanna trust that my intuition was right the entire time, that my childhood self was speaking to me when I met Eric, and that's why I made those decisions, and that's why I'm married Eric, even though I was really depressed, and even though I was all of the, fill in the blanks.

**0:24:27.8 GW:** But part of me feels like I just got really lucky 'cause he is such an incredible human, and I don't know how I got so lucky with someone like him who is just so willing to just humble himself and have hard conversations and be patient, and he's just an incredible man, honestly, and I feel like men like him do not come around very often and yeah, I don't know, I'm just... It's that balance of, Am I lucky or did I manifest this? Or... Yeah, it's a hard thing. 'Cause my friends tell me all the time like, "You deserve that, that's what you deserve. You're a great person." and I'm like, "I don't think I'm a terrible person. I just also understand that I was really sick when I was making these decisions," and did I need to make these decisions in order to feel the level of satisfaction that I do in my relationship? I don't know, I don't know. I think I did because dissociation is a big part of me, but I don't think everyone does.

**0:25:43.2 NA:** Yeah, it's interesting. One of my best friends talks about how the best relationships of all kinds, like friendships, romantic relationships, the best relationships are when both people feel like they got the better end of it, and so hearing you talk about feeling so lucky to be with him, I would assume he feels the same way, and that's a sweet... I think that's a sweet place to be when both people feel like, "Oh my God, how did I wind up in relationship with this person?"

**0:26:10.8 GW:** Yeah, yeah. He's really great. Last time we had a date night, and it was just really a great date night last night because we just bought a house about a year ago when we got married and we have a green house, and Eric and I... It's been mostly Eric 'cause he just loves all of the house projects, he's obsessed with plants, but I love lettuce and I love food, and so Eric tried to do tomatoes, but it got really super hot, and then he just told me yesterday, he's like, "Dude, the aquaponics system is up and running, ready to go, it's time to plant some greens." And so last night for our date night, we did our first reseed and did our first... What is that called? When you plant things. [laughter]

**0:26:58.3 NA:** I've literally never planted anything. So I don't know, you planted romantic lettuce is what I'm hearing.

**0:27:04.6 GW:** Yeah. That's exactly, yes. And it was beautiful and lovely, and we're supposed to have greens starting next month through this aquaponics system, and that he has talked about for years and years, and he's finally able to do, and just like his joy and his happiness, it was just like... I don't know, we just... I love seeing him happy, and the fact that I got to partake in that with him, I don't know, it was just a really special date night, and it felt like this really bonding experience of like, "We're making food together, we're doing things together." This is like a human need that we're doing together, I don't know, it just... It was just so happy and connecting and I just love learning things about him.

**0:27:50.2 NA:** I love that. Okay, I have a bunch of just nosy questions based on what you... A couple of the things that you just said, do you feel like for you marriage needs to be forever? Was that part of what you felt like you were committing to?

**0:28:04.1 GW:** I really want it to be, but I feel like life is too complicated for that. I want that really, really bad and I want it so bad. I think that's the kind of... That's the kind of thing I saw and felt as a little child, and that's kind of... I keep talking about that inner child a lot, but I do think that there's a lot of truth there that I feel like gets over-shattered by life circumstances, and I want that, but Eric and I both have too much trauma in our lives already before anything that we've had to really work through, that affect one another.

**0:28:52.8 GW:** And I wanna say that we've gone through a lot of the things together and worked through it, but that's just... That would be really prideful for me to say, 'cause I just don't know, and that's something I'm really trying to learn with him is like he has shit that he's just now working through for the first time, and I don't know how long that process is gonna be for him, like, maybe he's gonna keep discovering stuff that is going to affect our relationship more 'cause it already has, but it's navigating those things and seeing and continuing conversation about how does the things that come up in life affect each other individually, and how does it affect the way that he views me, how does it affect the way that I view him? And I feel like I'm committed to forever having those conversations, that is what I'm committed to, is never not talking about it, but to say that he's gonna be my forever person, I want that, but I just... Yeah, I don't know.

**0:30:00.0 NA:** Yeah. So obviously being divorced, I don't believe that marriage is forever, 'cause I didn't do that already. Right, so there's something in that. I've been thinking a lot about how, if you're looking at a partnership that you think it's just one relationship, but it's really... In my partnership, it's my relationship with myself, it's his relationship with himself, it's our relationships together, there's a lot of different components there. And if I'm honest, my relationship with myself is the most important. And this didn't used to be the case. But that's the most important to me.

**0:30:29.8 NA:** And if for some reason, our relationship, if we change or if for any reason being in partnership is no longer serving the highest and best good of each or either of us individually, that takes priority for me. And so it's just interesting to hear about how other people think about this idea



of forever, holding it maybe loosely as a North Star, and that's the goal and operating as if, but like you said, not being prideful to the point of thinking that you know what's gonna happen in the hopefully, many more decades of your life, it's an interesting thing to hold the both end of that.

**0:31:08.4 GW:** Can I ask a question?

**0:31:10.1 NA:** Always, yes.

**0:31:12.1 GW:** Do you feel like that change can happen very suddenly, the way that you explained that was like if something happens where I'm not serving myself or my higher self, that I will make decisions to make sure that I am my priority and I actually agree with that. I will always prioritize myself because if I don't I'm a shitty everything. I'm not a good worker, I'm not a good anything at all. I can't even fake it. It's just who I am, but do you feel like it's something that would happen very suddenly where you're like, "Okay, this is a big change," and it's like... Or do you feel like those are conversations that lead up to the big change? Does that make sense?

**0:31:53.6 NA:** Yeah, it makes sense. I think it could be either. I don't have any specific examples in mind. With my former spouse, it definitely was a process, I feel like something happening really suddenly, I can't think of what that would be, it would be something that was huge and impactful and that we weren't willing to work through, I don't know, I don't know that it would be something that was so sudden because part of commitment for me, similar to what you said, is being committed to going through the process together and being committed to communication and being committed to sitting with things being hard, being committed to accessing outside support, whether that's therapy or coaching or other things. So I feel like it would probably be some kind of a process, hopefully be some kind of a process, but I don't know.

**0:32:39.4 NA:** I think it's just for me, it's important to know what I am and I'm not committing to, I'm not committing to the relationship over my own well-being, and that's true in all of my relationships, and that doesn't mean... I think that that makes it sound maybe too black and white, because that there is that process of in the in-between I am committed to harm repair and whatever sort of conversations need to happen to hopefully make growing together possible. But yeah, I don't know. And so it's interesting because I had always been raised thinking about marriage as this forever thing, even though I had very few examples of what I would consider a healthy, good communicative marriages in my life when I was younger. It's like if the forever thing is off the table, what's the point of marriage? And so that's part of the questions that I'm asking myself.

**0:33:32.0 GW:** Do you feel like though... I think... Yeah, I guess, 'cause you've been married, so you know that level of commitment, do you feel like you could make that kind of commitment without the labels and the intensity and all of the consequences that come with saying yes in legal capitalistic world?

**0:33:57.5 NA:** Yeah. It's a great question, and I would have said no, maybe at the beginning of this podcast project, 'cause obviously this podcast project was born out of me wanting to think more deeply about this, and of course, has led to Gent and I having a lot of in-depth conversations about

this, but I would say, Yeah, and it's been helpful to pick apart what is it about marriage, getting married again that is of interest to me, and what is it that's not. And I think the legal aspect of it is the thing I actually have the most trouble with. Because my divorce was so logistically smooth, because we wanted the things at the same time, I have very intimate stories of people that I know who spent 10, 20, \$30,000 on lawyers trying to get their autonomy or what happens to them financially.

**0:34:47.3 NA:** And I think for me, I never again wanna have to go through the process of waiting for the government to tell me that I can have my autonomy, if that makes sense. And I'm not trying to be cynical about that. But I think there's something about that that makes me feel powerless, almost. And so I'm really looking at how do I have that feeling of commitment without that. Yeah, it's a good question, 'cause I had a conversation with a friend recently about her marriage, not on the podcast, and she said that they had gone through some tough times that had they not been married, they probably would have split up, and she's glad that they were married because it helped get them to the other side because it wasn't so easy to leave, so I think there is a little bit of a double-edged thing there. It just depends on... Yeah.

**0:35:31.2 GW:** Yeah but I don't think... Yeah, I don't think you need it though, I think it's like all trauma work is like that rewriting of different intrusive thoughts that you need something in order to get something, and I just think that... That was my... I think it's everyone's journey is different, but I think because of your experience, you know a transition and a commitment that I won't understand unless I go through that, right? And so you have a full story, a full story that influences how you re-write your narrative, whereas I don't have that. I have it with my own parents and stuff, but I think for me, I would have had to go through something in order for me to not have made the choice that I did, and I don't regret it.

**0:36:27.7 GW:** I genuinely don't because like what you just said about your friend. I think that the commitment, not so much for me, but maybe more for Eric would have been a lot difficult, a lot more difficult for him, had we not said I do in an official government controlling way, but at the same time, I think I'm trying to, I don't know, I guess, except that life. I think it's really important for me to accept that life is just a shit sometimes, and for me to think that because I said I do, it kinda gives me precedence over other people who haven't said that because they haven't made the commitment, that's not fair, that's not fair to so many people who've lived through so many extreme life experiences and can still make that commitment, just choose not to do it in that form.

**0:37:26.0 NA:** But also married privilege, not just from a legal financial tax way, but even socially, there absolutely is, your relationship is considered more important, more worthy, more valid, more special. And I'm saying this in kind of a generalized way, I certainly don't believe that, but... Okay, so this is an ego question, and I'm not sure if this resonates with you, but something that I have thought about a lot in past relationships is, particularly in relationships that I was in, where if I'm being honest, I didn't really like the person that much or it wasn't really like the best fit, but it felt really good to be chosen sort of, again, going into this patriarchal you're as good as the man who chooses you. We're talking about this from a heteronormative perspective obviously, but I'm interested when you got engaged was any of this stuff that came up for you? Like, I'm special

because, not like some dude picked me, this kinda sounds like really whatever, but I'm interested if that has been part of your story.

**0:38:27.8 GW:** Oh, yeah. Definitely. I think it wasn't so much like I think there's so many different things that play into it. I feel like as a society, we're traumatized by relationships, and so I still think it's coming from a place of... I put the capitalism almost with also my own narrative of just feeling like I wasn't good enough, and so I felt chosen because I thought something was wrong with me, I've always felt like just this deep, deep level of shame that I am not enough, so it was more being chosen, not so much by Eric, but just a fucking individual. Like, "Man, they really like me." So it was like even to a point where my friendships, I felt like I didn't deserve them, I just felt like in general, I didn't deserve good people around me because something was wrong with me, so it wasn't so much like from the patriarchy per se, although I'm sure that there are influences in that because I don't have anything to offer to the world because I'm a woman or whatever it is, or I'm not going to be as successful 'cause like I'm not married to a man and stuff like that, but honestly, I thought kind of differently for a big chunk of my life.

**0:39:51.8 GW:** I've always... Getting married was a very difficult decision for me 'cause I don't have any friends that are married, I think I told you this, I don't have... I'm one of the only people that I know that is married and it is really isolating, and I understand that the government and privileged marriage, and I actually have not thought about that idea, to be honest, because I'm so the opposite head space where I'm just like, Man, no one, I'm the only one that's married around here, and I feel like I'm... Not that in embarrassed to be married, but it sometimes feels just like, Wow, you chose to get married. You just, I feel out of place often, so. Yeah, I don't know if that answers your question.

**0:40:42.7 NA:** I don't believe there are any answers, I'm just interested in talking about this kind of stuff, but it's so interesting to hear you reflect on the fact that you feel like the odd one out maybe in your social circle because you did get married, and I know that there's plenty of people listening who maybe it's the opposite, that the norm is get married, have kids, and if they're choosing something different, so it's... So much of this has to do with social positioning and social conditioning and who we're surrounding ourselves with.

**0:41:06.3 GW:** Yeah, yeah. Especially, not especially, but I think it's really exciting to see... It's really exciting to see people feel this really strong pull to really make sure that they're doing okay, and a lot of self-awareness, but I think part of my self-awareness journey was realizing that I do better in like a duet of some sort, and I think accepting that about myself has been really hard because I really want to be this, and I am independent, like Eric and I are actually very, extremely independent people, and that's why I think it works so well is 'cause we're both introverts, we both have our own thing, like we do separate things, and it is very easy and flowy, but I think sometimes people assume that because I'm married, I'm not available, that I'm not... That I'm gonna choose to spend time with Eric over everything else.

**0:42:06.8 GW:** And it's just like, it couldn't be farther from the truth, and I have a partner that understands that about me, so he and I have... I do my own thing, I go out in the backcountry for

months if I want to, and there isn't anything holding me back from being my truest self, but the stereotypes often get in the way of people connecting with me and me connecting with them because of how they view me in a marriage and then me viewing them as someone that doesn't believe in marriage and doesn't believe in this, and it's like, "Well, I'm not saying that everyone needs to get married, or I'm not saying like... You do you." You know?

**0:42:46.5 NA:** Yeah. Okay, so you just mentioned the example of... So you and I met on the PCT, and you used the example of going out hiking in the backcountry for months at a time, which is obviously something that like he... Well, I say obviously, 'cause I know you, but something that he didn't join you for, and you've done that on multiple occasions throughout your relationship, and... So I've had that experience as well. I got into long distance hiking while I was in my marriage, and it was not something that we shared, we certainly didn't get divorced because of long distance hiking, but also we didn't not. It's an element of, we really wanna spend big chunks of our year doing really different things, and I think in some relationships that works, and for us, it was one of the things that didn't work, right. And so I'm interested for you and Eric sort of this idea of pursuing different dreams, what does that feel like? How do you give space for that, what was it like for you to be gone for months while he was at home? Did you feel guilty? Was he resentful? Obviously, I'm projecting a lot from my own experience, but anything that you... Anything specific on that that you wanna share I would love to hear.

**0:43:55.8 GW:** Yeah, yeah. I feel like that I sought out a lot of these adventures for my own self-healing, and so as healthy as that is, I think it was my own way of making sure I didn't project my shit onto Eric and similar with his dreams. I think for both of us pursuing our own passions individually is what I feel like being a partner, a life partner means to us, but yeah, I guess learning that... I didn't say it in the time 'cause I knew it was for myself, right. But it was really, really difficult because I was also doing a lot of healing work when I was in the backcountry, and part of accepting that I was doing the healing work was also the fact that there was a lot of shit that I hadn't dealt with and so that also means I was probably projecting a lot of my shit onto Eric. So navigating that at first was so terrible, so difficult, so frustrating, we were getting in fights a lot more because I was doing my own healing that he would never understand and then he was also pursuing his dream of completing a house in Nashville.

**0:45:24.4 GW:** So honestly, the first few years or it was just this respect for one another because we're proud that we were both pursuing what we definitely needed to be pursuing at the time, but the lack of understanding for each other's journeys was very frustrating at times, but necessary as well, 'cause we had been like that ever since we started, was like... That was our relationship was, "Hey, you're really cool. But I got things I gotta do." And he's like, "Cool, you're cool. I got things I gotta do." And so for the first few years, it was just like us kind of doing our dreams and navigating and having conversations about our dreams, and then realizing more and more that we could compromise more for one another's dreams and actually support each other and each other's dreams.

**0:46:14.9 GW:** And so now it's not coming from this place of projection or pain of what we've been through, but just a sincere excitement or genuine compassion of one another desires to do that gives them fulfillment. So Eric's aquaponics system, for example, he's been talking about doing that for

years, so many years, and maybe part of it is because he feels this need to provide, and there's probably some hidden reasons and stuff for sure. Like there is with anything. But mostly it's... Eric has been talking about this for years now, he loves food, he loves growing things, and I love watching... The fact that I have the ability and the means to support him makes me fucking stoked and happy and that feels like a very natural transition. And I have that we're learning how to share more spaces together, which has been a challenge because we're so independent, but... Yeah, it's evolved a lot. And I think it will continue evolving.

**0:47:24.3 NA:** Yeah, I've been thinking about this too, that kind of... The way I'm gonna describe it, it breaks down into cleaner buckets, and I think it actually does in real life, but that there's some stuff that's mine, that's just mine, that he's not really that interested in, or there isn't really a way for him to support me, right. And the same thing for him. And then there's things maybe that are mine that I need a lot of input or support or tending or something, and then there's things that are shared dreams or goals, and it's taken me my entire life and various iterations of relationships to understand that in the types of relationships that I wanna be in, there's a room for all of those to exist.

**0:48:04.8 NA:** And I think that I used to feel guilty wanting to do things or spend time and energy on projects or goals or people that didn't have to do with that partnership, and that's definitely been a learning lesson for me, and it doesn't mean that stuff doesn't still come up. So for example, obviously you and I met on the PCT. Gent and I also met on the PCT, and so long distance hiking was this real bonding thing for us and planning hikes and going on hikes together, and we've done various iterations of that throughout the year, or throughout the past three years, and he right now has just started to train for his first big bike race, he's racing the Leadville 100 mountain bike race, next...

**0:48:49.8 GW:** Cool.

**0:48:52.5 NA:** Whenever, so like in August. Yeah, super exciting. I am not a cyclist. I have no desire to ever, ever, ever ride a bike. Like this was something that my former spouse and I didn't have in common, he's a big cyclist, and I'm like, "Man, I thought I divorced cycling. How is this back in my life?" But it's interesting because this is something he cares about so much, and there's a lot that I can do to support him and support his training and go out there and crew for him and stuff, and it's interesting to feel within myself the excitement for him and really wanting to show up for him in these ways, and then also feeling like, "Oh, I wish we were planning for a hike together." Again, the both end of being super excited for someone you love and their dream, and then also feeling like, "Oh, this isn't something that we're really gonna share in that way."

**0:49:35.8 GW:** Yeah. It's just hard to navigate too, like I watch a lot of really terrible terrible reality TV shows that are all about love, and one of them is called The Love Island, and they... It's just... I think I like it because it helps me turn off my brain and I just find it comical, but when you hear these people talking about what they want in a person, and it's just like this massive list of things and... I get it 'cause it's like, it's okay to have those needs, but I think... I don't know if sometimes I think that what we ask for and what we think we want isn't actually what we need, and I think

tuning into what my needs were, especially with my relationship with Eric, and that's changed as well. And that's changed for him. Honestly, it's changed for him a lot recently to where I'm like, I feel like I have to put in a lot of work for him to feel appreciated and loved right now through the season that he's going through, but letting go of some of those expectations of what you think you need and then really just tuning in to what I actually need and then also being okay with the fact that sometimes your needs change.

**0:50:57.5 GW:** That's been really, really helpful for me 'cause yeah, same like Eric. Eric and I bought mountain bikes together, and so I thought it was gonna be this thing that we were gonna do together, and I was like, "He hates backpacking 'cause his knees are bad, so this is gonna be great, 'cause then we can do this together, and I wanna do stuff with him out in the backcountry, and so honestly..." And then he got depressed this summer, and I ended up getting this honestly resentment towards me because I kept asking him to bike with me, not knowing that he couldn't give that to me right now, but I was like, I need to do things with you, 'cause right now, we're not really connecting emotionally, we're not like, you're going through stuff, I'm trying so desperately to connect with you and I can't because you're not wanting to meet me halfway, but I need connection.

**0:51:46.1 GW:** And so having him be like, I can't connect with you through cycling right now, like that, whatever. And like, What can I do to connect with you? And I was like, I thought it was that, but I guess it doesn't have to be that, and having a new conversation about my needs with him and not being stuck on what I don't have in the moment because it's not fair to him, and it's not fair to myself, it's like someone who gets mad at cancelling plans, it's like, are you really gonna get mad about that. If someone's not doing great, why would you want that for them? And I think it's being more okay with the fact that Eric... And honestly, this is the first time Eric's ever been super depressed ever, I've never seen him like this, and so it was also a very humbling experience about being like, Griz, you have really high expectations, and the fact that he's just doing his best to communicate with you and also understanding really, really taking the time to understand how slow he processes and how fast I process, it's just been a transformative experience for us both, I really think. Yeah.

**0:53:00.2 NA:** Yeah. Okay, so you've mentioned your own experiences of depression, his experiences of depression, obviously, mental health has played a role for you individually, and then also in your partnership, which I know is something you're open to talking about, which I would love to talk about. Where do we start? I would love in as many kind of specifics as you can ground this in, obviously with the caveat that your experience is just your experience, I'm not asking you to speak for anybody else.

**0:53:23.8 GW:** Yeah, for sure.

**0:53:25.9 NA:** I'm interested in what your experience has been like with Eric supporting a partner who's going through our tough time mental health-wise, and then also kind of being the one who is supported, can you share some of the details of what that's looked like for you?

**0:53:38.2 GW:** Yeah. Yeah, I honestly love talking about this because I feel like it gives me hope in

a lot of relationships, I grew up with very toxic relationships all around me, narcissism was something I was raised with. I saw a lot of arguing, physical, abusive, it was just not good but my heart knew, somewhere I kept believing that surely there was such the thing as a happy relationship, and that's always been something I have fought for because my mental health is something I've always fought for. I had all of the odds against me when it came to my own mental health and have just really accepted that it's not ever going to be something I awaken to, I'm never going to have my mental health completely figured out, and I think having that understanding for myself gave me the understanding that Eric was definitely going to be going through shit eventually. It was just when.

**0:54:56.9 GW:** And I know his past and I know his trauma, and the greatest part about where mental health science is going to is that now we have research-based evidence, and so I don't have to say that Eric is being affected by his trauma, science says he is being affected by trauma and honestly letting go of that control of just being like, I'm not making this shit up, this is just science. Having that as my basis has helped me again, understand that it was going to happen for Eric, but I first experienced it because dating for me has always been really scary due to my abandonment issues and so Eric working through my depression and him being a supportive partner for me, honestly looked like him getting walked on by me.

**0:55:50.1 GW:** And it's something that I've had to apologize for because he did his best to support me when I was depressed, but he also didn't realize that I was projecting so much of my stuff on to him and if it hadn't been Eric processing that with me, and because he is such a beautiful soul, I don't think it would have worked out, but I think somewhere within Eric, he knew that he struggled too, he just wasn't good at showing it, so he was very patient with me and was always willing to have conversations, which is why I think we were able to work through the darkest times of my life. He was definitely there. So then when we got married, I was kind of getting married was really scary, I think you and I talked I'm pretty sure about it, 'cause I remember you were one of the first people I talked to about it, 'cause no one asked me about my marriage or if I... Was I married by the time? Yeah, I was married, right? Or no?

**0:56:56.1 NA:** I think you were about to get married, last time I saw you.

**0:56:57.9 GW:** Yeah, I was about to and you asked me about it and I was just like, Yeah, I'm pretty spooked. And it's 'cause I was super depressed. And how can you make these decisions when you're so depressed, but that also gave me another layer of insight is not like when you're depressed, it doesn't mean that you can't see shit, sometimes it does, but it just sometimes means that your lenses are a little bit blurry and it doesn't mean that you're not... You're necessarily going the wrong way. It just means it can be a little bit rough. And he helped me see that as well with his understanding and compassion, so when the roles reversed this past summer, when he was really, really depressed, it's been... We kind of just promised each other to continue... Our commitment is to continue talking, our commitment is never to fix each other's mistakes or depression, but it's just like, "Hey, how can I support you in the best way?"

**0:58:00.5 GW:** And a lot of times it has nothing to do with me, a lot of times, and not taking that personally, you can't. Like mental health you can't take personally, it has nothing to do with the

other person in a lot of ways. Well, not nothing, but for us, it has to do with our childhood wounds and then getting triggered and putting it on each other, but just really supporting and not being our main priority, and I can't imagine being married to me, that must feel like so much pressure from him to communicate perfectly, to express his feelings perfectly, and I've had to really just be grateful that he is just trying, and I've really had to accept that this summer, 'cause it has been... It's been hard, but every time I check in with myself and I'm balanced and I really feel like present, I'm just like... I know how proud I am of him, I know how thankful I am that he's doing all that he can. I respect his process, and that's all I can do, and that's all we really can do for anybody really.

**0:59:11.5 NA:** Yeah, what are your boundaries around what you will and... Not like will and will not support him through. I know that that sounds maybe more dramatic, but you are a therapist, this is your job but you're certainly not his therapist. And so how do you think about that, particularly when it comes to mental health stuff of like what you... I don't know what we should and should not expect from our partner when it comes to helping to manage our own mental wellness, because I think that a lot of times, and this isn't just with partnership, this is with friendships too, like our partners are not our therapists our friends are not our therapists and can they play supportive roles? Yeah, and I think most people would agree on the surface with what I just said, your partner is not your therapist, but I think the actual way, the lived experience of that, the actual way that it breaks down can be kind of cloudy and kind of nuanced, so can you give me an example of a boundary of yours in this area?

**1:00:06.2 GW:** Yeah. Oh yeah, Eric and I... Yes, I love this question, and it's definitely also changed, so I think it's important to understand the base of where we're both coming from, because we are both in therapy regularly, we're also both... Eric's on anti-depressants right now after hitting his low point this past summer, realizing he needed help. So I think it's important to recognize that our base point is we both know that we don't understand fully how our chemical imbalances and our emotional wellness always interact with one another, and we know that about ourselves and we don't put that on the other person. So that is so important, because I don't feel the need to fix Eric, I don't because I know I can't, and I don't even feel that way with my clients, I don't. And truly like what therapy is, for me, at least, is I just get to elevate what people already see in themselves or already know in themselves, and so that's what I get to do as a therapist, and that's what I don't get to do for Eric.

**1:01:32.0 GW:** When I can tell he is struggling and I can tell he's struggling. And because we have conversations about his triggers, so his triggers are... And the way I know he's not doing great, which I think is super important to integrate is how we figured this out was we honestly are obsessed with the Enneagram. I know it's like corny and cliché, but it's not astrology, it's not. It's based off of human fear and human pain, and that's where a lot of our projections come from, so understanding where his pain and how his pain translates to his communication styles towards me has helped me not take his projections personally, and instead noting them and then asking him to do something with it on his own and not putting it on myself. So for him, I can tell this happened a few days ago. He is an internal processor. He takes forever to process things, I'm a fucking fast processor, I process so fast, I go through things and move forward, and I'm just like, "Alright, let's fucking go," and it's just like, Oh, this is... I feel fine and he's still dwelling in it and I...



**1:02:43.3 NA:** I'm exactly the same.

**1:02:44.1 GW:** Is Gent...

**1:02:45.1 NA:** Yeah, Gent is also a very slow processor and I'm exactly the same as you. Yeah, so that's...

**1:02:47.1 GW:** Yeah, and it's so frustrating sometimes, 'cause I'm just like, Oh my God, you're still there, and I'm not. But he doesn't know he's still in that, and I know he's still in that, but he doesn't know that he's still being affected. So oftentimes, his projections come off very passive aggressive, he is like a little smart ass, but he's charming, so he thinks he's pulling it off and I just am like, "This is bullshit." And eventually, and this is something that we're working on, is how do I communicate to him when he's in that space? 'Cause me being like, Why are you being a fucking dick right now and being so passive aggressive is obviously not the way to bring it up. But those are the things that I have strict boundaries with, that I'm like, I'm not putting up with your projections because they're so mean, and because of who I am and just never works.

**1:03:47.2 GW:** That is a strong one. So he was kind of being a smart ass, and I sat with it for a while and then I started... I can tell if it starts building up that he hasn't had alone time, he needs alone time in order to really process and not just alone time, like watching TV, he needs intentional alone time or he will not process it at all. He will just ride the way for as long as he can, and then it blows up and then it's a fight. So one thing that we've been working on is like, Okay, I can start seeing his heightened triggers and his heightened projections, and instead of me addressing it super confrontational, and being very [1:04:29.9] [REDACTED]. I just take some time, try to feel the moment and try to be really intentional about how I address him, and sometimes it goes well and sometimes it doesn't go well, but I'm just like, "Hey, when was the last time you talked to your therapist?"

**1:04:44.6 GW:** And that's such a simple question, but it's like he knows what I mean by that, he knows that at this point, he knows what it means, and it just means, Hey, I probably have been bottling some shit up and I'm not even realizing it, and I should probably talk to someone. And he'll be like, "Yeah, it's been two weeks." I'm like, Yeah, well... And usually, again, at this point, it's kind of this unspoken that he knows that he needs to be. He has to set aside time to do this, so she kind of uses that question as like, Okay, yeah, I probably should go talk to somebody about it. But he's gotten mad at me a few times and we've talked about different ways of communicating that and how it's been a lot of trial and error, 'cause he's like, "When you say that it makes me feel defensive." And I'm just like, "Okay, well, what can I say that will not make you feel defensive?" Because I don't feel like when someone says that to me, it's this attack, I just know that I can't do it by myself, and so that's what I'm asking, so how can I can ask you without you getting defensive in that space.

**1:05:50.8 NA:** It's so interesting hearing you go. I feel like I've used the word interesting a billion times in this conversation, but hearing you go into these tiny details, 'cause this is so much of what it is, it's like messy, it's the back and forth. It's, how do we support each other without making the other person defensive, what happens when they do get defensive, there's no perfect answers to any

of this type of stuff and... Yeah, it's so good. I've been...

**1:06:13.8 GW:** It's so good. I love talking about it too, 'cause I think sometimes it's hard to... I love podcasting for this reason too, 'cause you get into those details that you miss often it's like, Yeah, me and Eric are really fucking happy because we've had a thousand, two million conversations in between all of those happy moments about how we can fucking improve the way that we communicate and navigate this together that makes sense. And honestly, it's... That to me is also self-growth, I work really hard on learning as... Learning as much as I can of how I affect other people around me and... 'cause I know that I struggle with it still. I have a lot of good communication skills, but I get defensive too, and I get hurt and I'm overly sensitive, so I have to constantly be checking in with myself so that I don't put that on so many other people around me.

**1:07:13.6 NA:** Yeah. That question of how do you support someone that you love and how can they support you, there's so much assumption and mind reading that we kind of lean into of, they should just know what to do. Or sometimes we don't even know what it is that we need. And so being able to break down, obviously, you just laid out some of his triggers and some of his behaviors, you have your own, of course, but things that you do and what his experience is of that, and when he has to say to you, when's the last time you talked to your therapist and all of this, all of this type of stuff together and... Yeah. With the time we have left let's talk about sex.

**1:07:52.6 GW:** Oh, sex.

**1:07:52.6 NA:** How has mental health impacted your sex life in your marriage relationship?

**1:08:02.8 GW:** Dude, have I ever talked to you about my sex life before?

**1:08:05.2 NA:** I don't think so, but you put... When I asked you what you wanted talk about today it was a potential thing on the list, and so I'm like, "Alright, let's talk about it."

**1:08:12.0 GW:** Yeah, I'm super interested to hear your thoughts on it 'cause it's an area...

**1:08:16.0 NA:** My thoughts on your sex life? Great, let's do it.

**1:08:18.1 GW:** Exactly. Yes, please therapies me. No, well, honestly, I think it's a conversation that I'm starting to have more frequent with people because I grew up super, super, super, super Christian, didn't have sex till I was 25. Eric, unfortunately, was a victim of some shitty sexual stuff very young in life and didn't really realize it till I was around 24, so I have a lot of weird sexual trauma and it's like... It's just an interesting... The way that it's projected onto my marriage, which is more this ignorance is bliss kind of mentality that has come up. I feel like it's like everything we've talked about today with just having conversations that feel uncomfortable, I think sex is the thing that Eric has seen me become more open with but it's kind of the way that he feels about talking about emotions is the way which is uncomfortable, but necessary is kind of how I have felt about conversations and sex is necessary, but uncomfortable.

**1:09:29.2 GW:** Because it was hidden from me for so long and I was shamed for so long, it's something that I felt like I needed to block myself so that I wouldn't do anything wrong in the Christian church, so a lot of my sexuality scares me, but the greatest part of having a partner that is Eric, I guess, is how much he has accepted that part of me as well. And never... But that does scare me about how accepting... It scares me how accepting we both are about one another's sexuality sometimes because we do view it as so fluid, we both have experience, we both... I would say we both identify personally as queer, but we don't feel this need to share that with anybody because it's just like... I don't know, it's just like, Why share it? I guess, 'cause we also believe in, in this stage of our life we're monogamous, we're not in an open relationship in any way, but to say that we will always be this certain way, it's just not fair to one another's growth, one another's mental health, my sexual trauma, his sexual trauma, and so mental health has 100% affected it because we don't... Because our sexual life is constantly transforming and morphing, and there are so many different seasons of it for both of us and... Yeah, it's complicated.

**1:11:11.2 NA:** Yeah. Can you say a little bit more, maybe give some examples about how your sexual relationship with him has changed over the years that you've been together?

**1:11:18.2 GW:** Yes, yeah, I think Eric is the only person that I've had consistent sex with ever, ever, ever, ever. And the guy that I had sex with, the first person, I was fucking older, and he lived long distance, so I didn't get to have sex very much, and it was abusive, so it was just like... It was not great. And then unfortunately, I was a victim of rape. And then after that was Eric, so very little experience, which is what I think in the beginning of my relationship with him, it was this lack of confidence that I felt in myself that maybe I'm not being fully in tune with my sexuality. I think that that was what I used to feel like. I was like, maybe I'm missing something. Maybe I'm like, I'm not fully experiencing things 'cause I've only had sex with these people and it's based off Christianity, maybe I'm not woke up enough.

**1:12:18.6 GW:** And I really ashamed myself for not having more sexual experiences, and now as I've learned more of my narrative, my trauma narrative and I had done the sexual work. Actually, was one of the first things I started with working on with therapy, so I thought I'd processed most of it, but the outcome didn't change, but then I'm like, "Shouldn't the outcome changed since I worked on this?" And so now accepting the fact that just because I have sexual trauma doesn't mean I need something that I don't have right now, but if it does mean something that I need, that I don't have right now, Eric is the first person I would want to talk to that about. And that is how we both feel, quite honestly, 'cause he's just now doing a lot of this trauma work around sexuality, and so we've had a lot of conversations about this and me being like, of course I'm scared to have these conversations 'cause it's uncomfortable, but if he's suppressing something, that I don't want that...

**1:13:28.1 GW:** I'm a therapist, I don't want that for literally anyone because that shit comes out regardless, and if I can be a safe place for someone, and that's a boundary area too, it's like, How far do you go into that? And that's something... We don't talk specifics about that, but we do talk post-therapy, we usually talk about what we're learning about ourselves, but we leave a lot of those conversations for our therapists, not... And then kind of come together and discuss how it affects one another, how we can meet halfway, and honestly, it's given me more confidence in the bedroom

and also within myself that... First of all, I love having sex with Eric because of who I am and who he is and what we create together, not because I was missing out on something, or all of these other reasons that are super valid, but are just not me, you know.

**1:14:27.5 NA:** Anything else about this topic that you wanna mention or chat about?

**1:14:33.1 GW:** Yeah, how does... I would love to know from your perspective, how does... 'Cause I know that my experience with sexuality is so different than most people's, but how is navigating sexuality with an intimate partner different, I guess, than... How do the conversations change for you?

**1:15:00.4 NA:** What do you mean? How do they change?

**1:15:01.9 GW:** How was it before when the beginning of your relationship with sex and then your relationship after three years of having sex, 'cause that's something I don't know, I've only had one experience about it with Eric.

**1:15:13.5 NA:** Yeah, it's an interesting question. I feel like we could have done a whole episode on this. Part of what I feel like I was really learning about myself or finally accepting about myself, letting it come out through the process of getting divorced was how important sex actually is to me, and I wasn't raised in a religious context that, like you were saying, so I don't have that specific form of conditioning, but I do think that there is just a general attitude, whether this originally stems from religion or not, there's a general attitude of what I'll call slut-shaming, that I think is really pervasive, and what does it mean to be a good girl?

**1:15:58.0 NA:** And I really internalized a lot of that, not to the extent that sex is bad, but that certain types of sex are bad or wanting a certain amount of sex, there was just a lot of stuff that I hadn't even articulated for myself, but that I really started to come up for me in this process. And the part of getting divorced was really thinking about what do I want from partnership, because I don't believe that... For me personally, I'm not interested in a partnership being more important in my life than other relationships, my close friendships are just as important, I really look at that in a non-hierarchical way, and I also don't believe that a partner should or can be everything to you, I think that's way too much pressure to put on one person.

**1:16:52.3 GW:** It's so much pressure.

**1:16:53.9 NA:** It's so much and it doesn't work for me, and I would argue that it doesn't work for most people, maybe there are exceptions to that, but for me, I was like, "Okay, if I'm not looking for someone to be my everything because that is too much pressure and is in my experience not realistic, for this type of relationship, what am I looking for, or at least, what am I looking for right now?" And so when I got into this relationship, what I was looking for, and what I was really clear about is that I'm looking for a romantic and sexual and adventure partner, that was... I had these really deep friendships, I wasn't necessarily looking for someone who was gonna be my best friend, I felt like I had those buckets covered.

**1:17:33.7 GW:** Yeah, me too.

**1:17:34.7 NA:** I wanted someone to go on long hikes with me who really wanted to travel, who was building their work life in a way where the work supports the adventures but not just having two weeks of vacation a year, that type of thing, and where our sexual and romantic connection was foundationally important, and so that was really the forming of our relationship was that. And so it's been interesting then in the years since, we have lived in a lot of circumstances that aren't conducive to a great sex life, van life is one of those, long distance hiking where you're just... You just feel kind of gross all the time, you don't have that kind of privacy, and then for the last on and off, for the last whatever many months, have been living with his dad and also not sexy.

**1:18:27.3 NA:** Living with your partner's dad doesn't give, at least in a pandemic, in the conditions that we had lived in, we don't have a lot of privacy, and so a lot of our conversations have been around, we say this thing is really important to us and our circumstances aren't supporting it. And there have been a couple of instances where we get a hotel or we travel or we go somewhere, and the connection is really strong and it's been a good reminder for me that there isn't always a problem in the relationship, sometimes the problem is the circumstances, and I really got down on myself of like, Has something changed for us? What's going on? And then to be like, No, it's literally just the circumstances has helped me not create fake problems in the relationship, if that makes sense.

**1:19:10.1 GW:** Yeah, that's also really powerful, and I often wonder why... Are we creating those problems because there's something else that's kind of missing in the relationship or we're just trying to find a way out? I don't want to hold anything against Eric at all, I don't want to. And that baseline of... So that I can re-assess, okay, what actually is happening. And it's so... I believe so much that timing is fucking everything, I believe that to such a core part of myself that there are just seasons for things, and the more that I can accept what the season is, the quicker I am able to adjust that, treat the people I love the same and not be completely influenced by things, and I think with sex in particular, I've really appreciated that with Eric as well, like him going through seasons and not shame.

**1:20:13.5 GW:** It's this beautiful acceptance of what season that we're in. And even though sex has always been a big part of me and Eric, it's the connection that's always been a really big part of Eric and I, we are also never have... We've really... I feel really lucky. I know how lucky I am 'cause I know that a lot of people have not had that sexual experience. It makes me fucking sad to think about how traumatic people have had sexual experiences with folks who shame them for not being horny at a time, or shame them for saying No, which is like, that is such a... I mean, that breaks my heart, it's like no one should ever feel like that, especially when I'm sure that if I wanted to have sex, I would try to if I could, you can't just put that on to somebody, and if the environment or if the setting or the time or the circumstances are just not aligning, it makes it difficult to connect, not just in a sexual way, an emotional way, a physical way. It affects all of the parts of it, not just sex, you know.

**1:21:20.1 NA:** Yeah. Absolutely. And so part of what was useful was acknowledging, Okay, the

problem is with the circumstances, and like you said, there are seasons for everything and that these won't be the circumstances forever, but also we're soon gonna be moving in together in a more permanent way, and that was a big part of the decision-making process is, okay, this circumstance works for now, and I'm incredibly grateful for being able to live with his dad when we did and all of that, but it was... It sort of nudged us into a conversation of, Okay, we say that this thing is really important to us. What are we gonna do to make sure that that's actually the case? What are you willing to sacrifice? Money, to live somewhere else, right, or whatever else goes into that, if this is really important to us and our circumstances aren't allowing us to fulfill that to the way that we want, how do we move toward a different circumstance?

**1:22:14.7 NA:** And so that was really useful in terms of clarifying, Hey, does this part of our relationship still feel as important to you as it did at the beginning, 'cause just 'cause it was a foundational part, doesn't mean that it still has to be. Things change. But for us to check in on, No, this is really important, and we are going to put our actual financial resources into a different situation, that was really clarifying, but it took 11 plus months to get there, and so I think it's interesting to talk about what it is that you're working on in a relationship, but it also can seem like that happened really quickly, like this was a long period of time in having these conversations.

**1:22:51.6 GW:** Yeah, do you... I guess, I'm curious to know, say he felt like it wasn't as important to him as it was still to you, do you think that the decisions would have been the same or you think that the decisions would have been more difficult to make, had...

**1:23:14.7 NA:** Meaning if he was still interested in partnership with me, but where sex was a really downgraded priority?

**1:23:18.8 GW:** Not so much downgraded but right... I feel like just not as important, it's not going to satisfy his needs necessarily but would want to meet your needs because that's important to you right now, and if that's an area of connection that you need right now for that season, do you think that would have been difficult to manage?

**1:23:44.9 NA:** Maybe, like you said before, we are also currently practicing monogamy, but that's something we check in about every four to six weeks. I'm not under the assumption that that would be the case forever. So it wouldn't be... And obviously, it would depend, I guess, on the circumstances of the situation, it's hard to be like, Well, if this then this. I don't really know how you're gonna react to something until it actually happens, I think it would depend on where he actually was at and where I was at, and what are the needs that are being fulfilled within this relationship, and then what are the needs that the other person isn't interested in fulfilling and is there space within the terms of the relationship to have those needs fulfilled elsewhere? And so I think that we're... This is like the railway, collectively, I think that we understand this in certain respects.

**1:24:30.9 NA:** So for example, he and I do very different things for work, and so it doesn't mean that we can't listen to each other talk about work and that we can't support each other, but if he needs to problem-solve this carpentry issue, he's gonna talk to his dad because I'm useless at that,

and similarly, if I wanna talk in-depth about the pricing structure for a new online offering, I'm gonna call one of my business besties, I'm not gonna talk to him about that, right. So in certain ways, I think that we... Again, the railway, are very comfortable getting some needs met outside of relationship or outside of that partnership, and for any number of reasons, sex is the area where that's not true, obviously, in this monogamy, like putting monogamy on the pedestal. So I don't know if there were... Does that make sense? You know that I'm open to the conversation, and I know that he is too, because we check in on it, if things change in that regard, why couldn't that be something that got met outside of the partnership, if we still also wanted to be in the partnership, right?

**1:25:34.1 GW:** Yeah. I think it's...

**1:25:35.6 NA:** It hasn't happened yet, but.

**1:25:37.7 GW:** Yeah, I think it's like... I feel like Eric and I are definitely on the same page, but I think I've sat with it more recently after just honestly going through what we've gone through this summer with his depression flaring up, and it kind of flaring up a lot of sexual trauma and just talking about it more and it becoming more real to me, it's like, yeah, I really wanna say that it would be like a similar conversation, but I think what makes it complicated is all of the vernacular that isn't available, I think to us with sexual trauma, I think it's definitely... Obviously, it's better than it used to be, but at least for me, I'm so closed off, and I've been so protected from those kind of conversations that I know, I feel in my body that I would get triggered if we had to have that conversation, although we talk about having that conversation all the time, I still think navigating it would be more complicated because of how much trauma is around sex and because of how much nuance is still very unclear with being specific, but I do think it's kind of like everything that we've talked about in our conversation today is like, Okay, we're committed to having conversations about it.

**1:27:04.2 NA:** Yeah. I feel like that's really the through line of what you and I have talked about, this is a really good example of messy and useful conversation where it's like there aren't any answers, but I feel like the through line you keep coming back to is being willing to show up to have uncomfortable conversations with your partner is the thing that makes your relationship work.

**1:27:23.6 GW:** And I feel like that, but also respecting the way that my partner shows up is just as valuable, if not more valuable, because it's going to be dramatic, it's dramatically different than the way I show up, and that doesn't make the way that he shows up less important or better, worse, or the way that I show up being better. It's just a different style. And me understanding that about him makes me not want to ask things that I will never receive from him anyway, and that's why having a system of... Having different avenues and outlets is so important for me too, is like Eric is not going to fill my emotional intuitive thought processes like you are. Obviously, it's very easy to talk to you, and I don't expect that from him because it's just not who he is, but it doesn't mean he can't have deep conversations.

**1:28:28.1 NA:** Right, right. Yeah but it doesn't have to be so binary. But I think that we do a really

beautiful thing, I think in any of our relationships, when we're willing to let that relationship be what it is and not expect that person to meet all of our needs, if we can open up some space and not try to force someone to be someone that they're not.

**1:28:48.1 GW:** Yeah, which is why I love the enneagram so much. I can't stress enough how much I've watched not only my relationship completely transform with Eric, but my relationship with my friendships, the people around me that I've had the opportunity to watch grow in that space. It has changed my life because I no longer... And especially as an empath, I don't feel this need to change anybody anymore or get my needs met because I know what is possible from them and what is not possible for them, and just that amount of certainty in such a complicated space has helped me accept whatever is happening with the other person and not let it define our relationship or me.

**1:29:40.5 NA:** I love that. I think that's a great place for us to start to wrap up. If you could leave people with one affirmation of sorts based on our conversation what would that be? What's your wish for everyone listening?

**1:29:53.7 GW:** My wish is take more time for yourself, I think that it's really uncomfortable, and relationships are super tricky and it gets really messy really fast, but the slower I have moved in that space, the simpler it has become, and I think it's because our human condition is to fix problems. We don't know a life without it, and that's often what gives a lot of us a sense of purpose even, I know it does for me, but giving yourself some space to feel and understand the reasons that you respond the way that you do, I just feel like, it's something that I think it's so easy to talk about, and I don't see a lot of people making time for because life gets busy. There's always a reason. There's always a reason and there's always going to be a reason to not, but the longer you put that time... The longer you put time away from self-reflecting, the more suppressed it's going to be, and the more likely it is to flare in a situation that you didn't intend for it to flare up.

**1:31:26.1 NA:** Yeah, absolutely. What is the best place for people to say hi to you, do you have a favorite way to connect with new folks who are listening?

**1:31:35.3 GW:** Yes. Honestly, the Enneagram Podcast is coming out and I'm really excited about it because for the podcast, we're gonna be doing different workbooks that are gonna come out with the Enneagram, just like different ways to just be processing it because I do feel like this is so important for relationships. And so I think honestly, being a part of the podcast and being a part of those workbook community, Underneath It All, and if anything, the Underneath It All Instagram page is where I wanna be putting more of my efforts, but I have... My friend is doing all auto graphic illustrations for it, and I'm so excited for that and just connecting with other folks who just wanna be working on themselves for their friendships and their relationships, so probably on that. I do have Instagram, but that's a good starting point, but on there, there's so many resources on my website and I honestly read all of my emails, so email is great, and I'm honestly looking, trying to connect with more people right now anyway, who wanna talk about the enneagram, that wanna talk about relationships, that's why I'm so excited about this and elevating the beautiful resource that is the enneagram, that is making mental health more approachable, more accessible, and I'm stoked about the whole entire series that we're creating because...



**1:33:00.5 NA:** I love it.

**1:33:00.6 GW:** I want people to get this resource. It's changed me.

**1:33:03.9 NA:** And it'll be out by the time this episode airs, right?

**1:33:05.6 GW:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yes, yes. Yeah.

**1:33:07.2 NA:** Yeah. Awesome. So I'll put links and everything in the show notes.

**1:33:09.3 GW:** Yeah.

**1:33:10.2 NA:** Thank you, so much.

**1:33:11.9 GW:** Thank you, Dude, I appreciate you.

[music]

**1:33:21.4 NA:** Thanks so much for listening to this very first season of the Pop-Up Pod, all of the intimate and honest conversations you'll hear on this show are 100% listener funded, paid for by my sliding scale Patreon community, that means no ads and no sponsors, just a couple hundred people coming together to ensure that everyone involved in making this podcast gets paid, that includes me as the host and creator, my sound engineer and musician, Adam Day, as well as every single one of our guests. The Patreon community also funds the creation of a full transcript for each episode, which you can find in the show notes to help make these conversations more accessible for all. Those are our production ethics here at the Pop-Up Pod, and if that aligns with your own values, I would love to invite you to come check out our community at [patreon.com/nicoleantoinette](https://patreon.com/nicoleantoinette). It's a fun, easy and welcoming space, you also get access to lots of bonuses, and remember, it's run on a sliding scale, so you can pay whatever amount makes most sense for you each month, depending on your circumstances. That's [patreon.com/nicoleantoinette](https://patreon.com/nicoleantoinette). And hopefully, I'll see you there.

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