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0:00:02.3 Nicole Antoinette: Welcome to the Pop-Up Pod, a sporadic podcast that pops up a few times a year to dive deep into life's most common and interesting questions. The question we've been exploring all throughout Season One is this, "Should I get married?" Twelve episodes, 12 different people, honest conversations about the joys and struggles of long-term romantic relationships. I'm your host, Nicole Antoinette, and these intimate conversations are 100% listener funded, paid for by my sliding scale Patreon community. That means that you won't hear any ads or sponsors on this show, it's just me backed by the support of over 400 people who have come 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 and good friend Adam Day, as well as every single one of our guests.

0:00:53.4 NA: Our 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. 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. It's a fun and easy and welcoming space, and remember that it's run on a sliding scale, so you can pay whatever amount makes most sense for you, either as a monthly payment or an annual payment, and you will get access to a wealth of bonus content, you'll get the chance to help shape the topics and conversations of future seasons and more. So one more time, that's patreon.com/nicoleantoinette, and hopefully, I'll see you there.

0:01:40.2 NA: In the meantime, I'm excited to introduce you to today's guest, Holly Whitaker. Holly, whose pronouns are she, her, joins us today to talk about her experience of being mostly single over the past 10 years. She shares honestly about what it's like to really want a partner, to feel like you're missing out by not having one, and yet to somehow also know that you aren't ready. It's so, so good, everything that she shares. The conversation is filled with wonderful nuance and with us each holding space for the both end of life, where seemingly contradictory things are true at the exact same time. And you might be able to hear that my voice is a little off today, I'm recovering from a sinus infection that's got me all congested. [chuckle] So sorry about that, but here we go.

[music]

0:02:37.6 NA: Okay, here we go my dear, Holly, welcome to the show.

0:02:42.5 Holly Whitaker: Thank you. I mean, this is like, I think the favorite podcast I've ever done twice. So, let's go for three. I love talking to you and I'm really honored...

0:02:53.7 NA: Thank you. I... Yeah, every podcast I start, I'm just bringing you along with me, [laughter] so thanks for being along for the ride.

0:03:00.8 HW: I'll do them all. Yeah.

0:03:01.9 NA: Great.

0:03:03.2 HW: No, I really appreciate it. And this topic is so important and interesting and... Yeah. I'm here for it.

0:03:10.0 NA: Then let's start with a question I've been asking everyone for you to introduce yourself with your relationship bio. So less of what do you do and more of a who and how do you love? Basically like, how do you wanna situate yourself for this conversation that we're gonna have?

0:03:23.6 HW: Yeah, so my name is Holly Whitaker. I think something that's really important to understand is that I'm recently out, and I don't really know how to define that yet, just because it is so new to me. So, I'm 43 and I'm still figuring out what my sexual preference is, and I have been relationship crazy since I was a baby. And I have... I made out with my next door neighbor when I was five years old, we used to make out, we would hide and make out. I have always been somebody that, I wouldn't say is sexually charged, but is absolutely romantically charged and loves love. And I have been chasing it for... I had boyfriends very early, I had sex relatively early, or not sex, but I think... I've always wanted to have that kind of intimacy, it's always been really important to me. And I would say I was a serial monogamist until I got sober, and for the last decade I have been sober, and I've mostly been, I feel like learning all over again.

0:04:32.5 HW: Like, I feel like when I got sober, I became, the way I connected romantically was very, very... It was like I was five years old and making out with Gabriel Moraza all over again, and just out of my mind. And it has been a really interesting decade, and I have not been in... I've had relationships, but I haven't been in what feels like a relationship, like a really solid relationship in about a decade. You know, I've had some things, but nothing that feels of substance or that feels like I could point to that and say that was a real relationship. So, I'm 43 and I'm single, and I've had to really learn what that means, and I have gotten the chance to really think about how I feel about sex, who I want to be in relationship with, and that's where I'll leave it. Is that... How is that?

0:05:30.2 NA: That's fantastic. I wanna ask [laughter] you a thousand more questions, so congratulations on a successful introduction.

0:05:34.7 HW: Whoo! Okay, good. Alright.

0:05:36.5 NA: So, when you were describing this feeling of chasing love or chasing intimacy, can you say a little bit more about like, what is it that you're actually chasing? Like, what did you want out of that? Or what do you want?

0:05:49.6 HW: Well, I think it's always changed, right? I think over the years it has just... There's nothing better than being newly in love. There is nothing better than that feeling of wanting, of longing. And I think that my first taste of wanting and longing was Gabriel. And like, he was the neighbor on my block, and I just wanted him, and then there was Sean Wensikal; I remember their names. I don't remember many people's names, right? And I remember these boys names, and I

think like, what I wanted was, honestly, I think validation. I think that as a woman or as a girl, I was absolutely indoctrinated into this idea that the male gaze and how you appear in the male gaze is what establishes your value. So I think that it has been that like, that being recognized by other and it's changed over the years. But I'm still chasing it because I love love. I am such a porous person, which means I feel things extraordinarily. And to me, it's like, I get swept up in that sense of what I would now call...

0:07:05.2 HW: Used to be like this sense of completion by another, and now I would say is more of just like mutual celebration and what... That's what I'm looking for, but it still is that connection with another person that goes beyond what to me personally is available in friendship. And I think that there is a lot of ways that people can find that intimacy, that span, the definition of relationship. But for me, it still comes back to, that's the thing I want. I want my person, and I want that, I want my love story. And I'm much more grown up now and realize a lot more things about myself that I still... When it comes down to it, I still want my love story. It just looks different.

0:07:53.7 NA: What do you think it looks like now?

0:07:56.1 HW: I think it is... Like, what I was saying before, I think before, I thought I needed someone else for my life to be good, I needed someone else to validate me, to recognize me, to complete me, to fill up the... To plug up the holes. And now, it's just more of like, a partner to explore life with, just somebody to witness it with me. Not to witness, to witness me, sure to see me, but also, I think like as... It's just different. It's a different kind of longing, right?

0:08:26.2 NA: Do you have... And this might be too vague of a question, but do you have a memory of when it changed for you from wanting like that validation and someone to complete you versus what you just described as what you want right now? Like, was there something that happened where you were like, "Hang on, why am I looking for someone to complete me?" Is there something you can point to that was like a fork in a road?

[chuckle]

0:08:48.8 HW: No. No, I mean, it's interesting, because I had... All my relationships prior to getting sober were very much about... They were contracts, you know, "I'll do this for you if you do this for me." And I was always at the mercy of my partner. And when I got sober, it was like, there was a period of time of just like, wanting to not... I don't know. Like, it's so hard to explain. Because it was... No, it wasn't like that. It was just a very slow change. I think it's like, you read stuff and you start... Like, you know, you get sober, you're in recovery, you start to have like a self-awareness you didn't have before, you start to see your patterns, the same patterns you have with drinking or drugs show up in behaviors and how you obsessed or compulsive around another person, or how much you are dependent on another person's actions for... You just start to notice these things, like, "Oh shit, I'm not okay unless this person has sent me a text message with these right words," or this person is doing this.

0:09:52.0 HW: Or you start to notice the ways that your self-worth have been totally... Like I had

no self-worth at the beginning of this, and the ways that my self-worth were completely dependent on how men treated me. And I saw how little I settled for. And so, I think like the self-awareness around my value, my standards, my boundaries, and also just my own behavior, what I expect of myself, it's very different. When you're showing up and you're so grown up around your relationship with alcohol, like, I feel very mature when it comes to that decision. But it's like an intelligence, right? Like, there's multiple intelligences, and I think my intelligence around certain things are very high, and I think my intelligence around intimate love... Or let's just say, yeah, like a relational love was very low. And so, I think that I'm really far off the [chuckle] question that you asked me, but I think what I'm trying to say is, it flipped because I did the work on myself and I could start to see what I was doing.

0:11:08.4 HW: And I knew it didn't feel good, and I read a lot of stuff that made sense to me, like Marianne Williamson talking... Or not Marianne Williamson, but A Course in Miracles talking about like the special person, the special relationship, which is where you define... Like, the special relationship is elevating this other person above other people to say like, this one person will do this thing for me, and it doesn't exist, right? That doesn't exist. What does exist is the way that we find other people in order to... Not to make us better, but in order to... Essentially, they call... In A Course in Miracles it's the holy relationship, and it's just like two people come together to create. Two people don't come together to fill a deficit within the other.

0:11:54.3 HW: And I knew that intelligently, but I didn't know that experientially. And I think that it's just the intelligence and the experience have lined up and lined up and lined up and lined up, until it got to the point where I can actually say to you, I know that the next person that I'm with, both of us are going to be in the place where we know we're coming together to be with each other, but also to not make each other whole.

0:12:25.9 NA: I... And what you're saying is making me reflect a little bit on my own relationship history. And I don't know that I would say that I was ever looking for someone to complete me, but I definitely was looking for this particular kind of validation that comes from being chosen by some dude, that like, you're special, you're wanted, I pick you to be my girlfriend, and it's been a really interesting reckoning. I mean, through doing this podcast, to be honest, it's made me like... Of course, when you're recording episode after episode, there's like a deep dive into relationships, it makes you, surprise, think about your own relationship history, I'm really sort of grappling with the relationships that I was in or that I stayed in, that I didn't even really like the person or I didn't like who I was with them, or... But it just felt so good to be chosen and to not have to do the labor of dating, and I thought it made me special.

0:13:31.6 NA: I'm not proud of any of this, this all feels gross to say out loud, but... Yeah, that there were so many times where I'm like, "Man, I think I would have benefited for spending more time alone or being un-partnered at that... At those points in my life," and I am trying to have a lot of compassion, but also, I have sadness for my younger self, particularly in my early to mid 20s, where I'm like, why were you just so obsessed with being picked?

0:13:55.7 HW: Oh my God, I mean... First of all, I feel that like a sonic boom, it just reverberates,

because I know exactly what you mean. It's interesting, one of my friends says, it just flipped for her one time where she realized... She was thinking, "Does he like me?" And worried about, "Does he like me?" And then she was like, "I don't like him." And I think that it was such a thing... It was like a lightning bolt to her to consider what she... Because her first filter is, "Do you like me?" and not, "Do I like you?" And I think that's extremely common for women. I don't know. Don't you?

0:14:42.4 NA: Yeah, no, I definitely do. It's... Yeah. We're raised that way, right?

0:14:49.2 HW: We're raised that way.

0:14:50.3 NA: I mean, look at like every... I mean, maybe not currently, but like, this sort of rom-com culture that I grew up on, or like the Disney princess culture that I grew up on, right? There really was feeling of this person picks you and then they provide for you and then you're safe and you are worthy, and you've reached kind of the high of this relationship escalator or this pinnacle or whatever, and people don't have to worry about you, that there's something wrong with you, that people didn't pick you. Which all is fucked up, but...

0:15:19.1 HW: Well, it is always about... It's always about... I mean, it's always hetero, and it's always about the male picking the woman.

0:15:26.3 NA: Yup.

0:15:27.6 HW: Or about the woman transforming into the one that could be picked. It's always through the male gaze. But I also think like... I wanna go back to one thing that you just said too, which is like, you said, it's gross, and I... This was what was... This was a turning point for me. So I was dating somebody and he just... I'm an anxious attached, and he was an avoidant and without getting into attachment styles, let's just say that's just like the two that... Like, the opposite ends of the battery, they're just like... It's a terrible combination, but he was not into me and I was so into him and I acted... This was like 2000... Late 2017, and we're now really good friends. Hi, Jordan. [laughter] But like I...

0:16:06.4 NA: I like all the name-dropping you were [laughter] doing of like, "This was the person I kissed when I was five years old," name drop. It was great, it's great.

0:16:11.4 HW: Oh, Gabriel. I know it's funny. No, I mean, he's always... Whatever, he's always asking to be named in my work, so, there you go, Jordan. Anyway, I... We were dating and I was really into him and he was not into me, and I was acting like such a fucking freak about it. It just like... It imploded me. And I was watching myself with... 'Cause it's late 2017, you know? Like, I'm I don't know how many years sober, I had just raised \$2 million for my recovery company, and I think this part of me was so fucked up still, and I remember thinking... I was like, obsessing about texting him, I lost a ton of weight. You know what I mean? My whole world got so... I'm raising money for a company, and also, I think I'd just gotten my Asian contract for my first book. My whole world focus was on his text message response.

0:17:04.4 NA: Oh my God. That's so real, the like... So successful...

0:17:07.5 HW: Right?

0:17:08.1 NA: In other areas of your life, and then how does it become like boiled down to...

0:17:10.6 HW: And all I can think about is, why isn't he texting me back and what I'm gonna say, and my whole world hinged on his responses to me. And I remember talking to my therapist at the time about it, and I was just like... It was just... I was so disgusting to myself and so embarrassed of myself. And she was like, first of all, this is a really beautiful part of you, do you see that this part of you that's willing to take risks, this part of you that is so open and so willing to be vulnerable? And that this idea that you are the weird one or the really sick one, or the weak one, or the dumb one, and all these thoughts I had about myself, 'cause that... Nothing made me feel worse than running after men. Nothing made me feel smaller or more unattractive or just a fucking this... Like a piece of shit. And I did start to understand that in that moment and appreciate the girl that sent the crazy text message to this guy that was so obviously not interested in her. And that kept doing it and was like getting... Was electrified by it. And when I look back to that too, and I think about how I am now, I wouldn't fucking do that again, but I did that a hundred times, you know? Like...

0:18:33.0 NA: Yeah.

0:18:33.0 HW: 100 times, at least acted with different people that I met online that I was trying to date in the last 10 years, and I had to go through that and I had to kind of almost burn off that karma, I guess you could say, or work out that behavioral pattern and keep making these tiny little adjustments, and I think so often that we're so hard on ourselves for being where we're at. And I know that what made it the worst was how embarrassed I was of myself, and I think... But there's no other way I could have... You don't get to just not take the staircase, you don't get to just bypass the growth you have to go through to learn the things you need to learn. And so for me, the turning point was accepting where I was at and being really nice to myself about it, or trying to be really nice to myself about it, and trying not to think I was a fucking ogre because of it.

0:19:33.9 NA: Yeah. And also, at the same time, it's important for me to internalize that any sort of growth and the evolution that you're talking about, in my experience hasn't been linear, meaning that I will get to a point where I'm like, I thought I was over this, or I thought this behavior was done for me, or for me, it pings a lot on this fear of being too much, like too intense, too big of feelings, too needy, all of that, that's like... Which is either the too much, not enough, which maybe that's the same thing, I think is a part of a lot of people's story. For me it always manifested especially in relationships with wanting to act like the cool girl and not be too much, and there was a lot of healing that I have done around that, and I have come so far, and still a regular part of my current partnership, because the person I'm in partnership with, he also has that wounding around being too much, being too emotional, being... Thinking that he's too needy and it's part of our practice.

0:20:33.7 NA: "Hey, can you reassure me that I'm not too much. Can you tell me that I'm not being

too much?" And when we first started doing that, I was like, ah, what's wrong with me that I need this? Isn't this something that I'm over already? And I just want to keep remembering that yes, you grow, yes, maybe you don't respond the same way that you would have responded five years ago, or 10 years ago, and yet it is... Not the two steps forward, one step back, I don't even mean that, but the things just kind of come up in different ways and it's like when I expect that I've reached this pedestal point of healing, that's when I usually wind up getting really knocked on my ass.

0:21:08.5 HW: Yeah, no, I mean, I appreciate you bringing that up because I think that I'm in a place right now, where I feel really good about myself, but also you're exactly right, which is that these behaviors are ingrained, they're lifetime, and not just my own lifetime but my ancestral lifetime, all the women that came for me under patriarchy have essentially existed as the thing made out of Adam's rib to exist for Adam, and so I think that undoing this stuff is really hard. And when I think I am past something and then I engage in that same behavior, it is probably one of the most demoralizing things you can go through because you're just so exhausted by yourself and you've done all the work and then you're doing that same fucking old tired pattern again. So yeah, I appreciate you bringing that up because that's also true, it's not linear, but it is where I'm at now, and I have to remember this in a moment of strength is so different, I've never felt the way that I feel today in all the years of my life. That feels good.

0:22:20.6 NA: Yeah. So I wanna talk a little bit about expectations versus reality, because the way that you were describing who you were growing up, who you were in your 20s, maybe even in your 30s, this kind of chasing and really wanting the love or wanting the relationships and maybe not finding the kinds of relationships that you wanted, do you feel like you held an expectation or a set of expectations of what your relational life would look like by a certain age or by 30, by 35, by 40? Did you have a clear picture that has turned out to be different from what has happened? I'm always interested in people digging into the gap between the fantasy of the thing and the reality of the thing.

0:23:02.0 HW: Yeah, I think I gave that up when I was with somebody that I thought I was in love with. I set my sights on him and I was like, you're the one, and he was a lawyer and came from a good family, and by that I mean wealthy, and he went to an Ivy League school. And it was exactly in my mind what I thought my life should look like, which was being his wife. I wanted to have many children with him, and that was my goal, was to become someone's wife as if I had fucking gone to college just to meet a man like women did in the '50s, and when that fell apart, that was really what escalated my addiction, and I was probably 29, 30 when that fell apart, I was 30 when that fell apart, and I think that that dissolved my expectations for myself, and I don't know if I ever reclaimed them, and for me I had a boyfriend for seven years right out of high school, through my first part of my career and he and I had a miscarriage.

0:24:14.4 HW: We were living together and we were gonna get married and we were gonna have this baby. And I'd had an abortion, this was the second time getting pregnant by him over that time, and when that happened, that just kind of planted the seed of knowing I wanted to be a mother and knowing I wanted to... That that was a really important part of my identity. And I think that that was my focus from my early 20s into my early 30s, and then when that fell apart in my early 30s, it was

almost like...

0:24:53.1 HW: I'd aged out of it, and then I was struggling with really... With multiple addictions and thinking I was gonna die, and then I somehow didn't die, and I was so focused for so long on that part of my recovery that was really important, and I think that... I guess what I'm trying to say is, I had very traditional and typical heterosexual, uppermost expectations, and then that died, and then it just in some way it feels like I just recently started to want a family again, and want that like I wanted it in my early 20s, just desperately, and I almost feel like... I was crying about this to my mom a couple of days ago, and I'm trying to...

0:25:48.6 HW: I don't know if I'm saying this exactly right, but I have chronic hair loss, not like genetic hair loss, but chronic hair loss, and I was crying about losing my hair and having hearing loss and being the sober bitch and in my 40s, and my mom is disabled and I was like, you understand this, you just don't want one more thing to count against you as a viable person that is datable or lovable, and I'm paying a lot of money to figure out how to not fucking lose my hair because I just don't think I will live through it, and I said, I think I just... And I started crying and it's this... I think that what... I guess what I'm trying to express is for 10 years, I really didn't have any expectations for any of this. I've wanted it, but I had no expectations of it. And I think that that's what feels the hardest, is almost... We're raised to dream of these ideas of what a relationship or a family is, and I think there's like... There's this part where I think a lot of us who maybe started out with that, 'cause there's plenty of people that just never wanted that, but I think for those of us who it didn't come to pass for...

0:27:10.8 HW: There was that original heartbreak, and I think the heartbreak I'm trying to describe right now is like the years in which it was still possible in my mind, possible to be like... To reproduce or whatever. It just wasn't a priority. It just wasn't what I... It was not my top priority, and it feels like I'm just waking up from this nap, and I'm like, "Oh fuck, I forgot to care about the thing that I wanted."

0:27:36.4 NA: Yeah, and the grief that come... 'cause there's the grief that comes with an unmet expectation or with, you know," or with, or, "I thought my life was gonna look different than this, and that could be in terms of career or finances, or family, or there could be any area of life. And I also think, culturally, we don't have space for that kind of grief, there's like, this is the plan, and this is what it's supposed to look like, and if it doesn't look like that, then there's something wrong with you. And I felt my own degree of this in getting divorced. I felt so much relief in getting married, just sort of that like, "Oh God, okay. Yes, check box. I don't have to think about this really anymore," and I don't know that that was a conscious thought, but it definitely was part of it, I felt a sense of relief.

0:28:23.4 HW: Yes.

0:28:23.5 NA: And then in getting divorced, I was like, "Huh, okay, so am I back at square one? Do I have to keep trying to chase this thing? How do I grieve?" And honestly... Obviously I'm doing an entire podcast called, Should I get married again? Right? Like do I wanna do this? But there is so

much grief of things not turning out the way that we have been sold that they're gonna turn out.

0:28:48.3 HW: Uh, God, and what you're saying too... 'cause there's this whole other dimension, right, of a thing that's not even mine, which is, I'm the single friend, you know, I'm still the single friend. I'm the friend that's never been married, and so that is not my doing, but it is absolutely my identity, and I feel like it's this almost infantilizing thing that follows me into... Friends up here, I had this thing happened a couple of months ago, where friends of mine up here all got together over dinner without me, 'cause it was a fucking couples dinner, and I found out about it later, and I was just like, that felt infantilizing, just like you do not... You have not earned your entry here.

0:29:37.8 HW: And so when you say checking the box, I get that, and I almost feel like... I wonder if I had checked... Like as part of what I feel like compels me to want to be in partnership is almost just to have that box checked, because I think that for women, so much of our value for so long has been tied up in whether or not we can reproduce or be good wives, and that there's almost this... It's just... She's weird because she didn't figure that one out, she's bereft.

0:30:18.9 NA: And also like how infuriating that there's such a narrow way... I was gonna say, to avoid criticism, but I don't know that we ever as women avoid criticism, but it's like, is it better to be the perpetually single one... Societally, right? That's seen as a failure, but getting divorced, having your marriage fail, that's a fail. It's all...

0:30:39.1 HW: Which is the better failure?

0:30:40.2 NA: Can we just live, actually?

[laughter]

0:30:43.4 NA: I don't know, like...

0:30:44.7 HW: But I would rather be a divorcee, because I feel like I could at least say, "Well, somebody... Somewhere along the line, somebody wanted me," or I figured that... I figured that part out of my social contract.

0:31:00.8 NA: When you talked about that dinner party, one of the things that I was gonna ask you is what has your experience been of other people's couple privilege or what you see as...

0:31:09.0 HW: Couple privilege.

0:31:10.5 NA: Yeah, couple privilege.

0:31:11.3 HW: Yeah, I mean, well, couple privilege is huge because first of all, I live in an area where it's pretty... I live in a rural area, and that means a lot of things, it means sump pumps, it means, fucking figuring out your propane, it means keeping your yard up, it means getting plowing service, it means... And this is not stuff that like I'm saying like, "Oh, wish I had a man to do this.

It's more of I wish I had a partner to do this," and I wish that all the things that I have to consider and think about, it's kind of high resistance living in that, there's just... There's a lot to do to make it work and make it go around, and I think that...

0:31:48.4 HW: So that's just one. I went to a breakfast and everyone there like... I didn't take a COVID test before I went to it, and I was just thinking about this, the couples there all had done that and they had their supply of COVID test, and I'm just like, "Well, that's because there's two of you to fucking go online and figure like this out. There's two of you to split up these fucking... " Like life is so hard to figure out between taxes and utilities or whatever the fuck it is we have to do, and I think there's that piece of it, but I also think it's just up here, especially I live in the Hudson Valley, and very few single women move up here on into cabins by themselves, so there's not a single scene to begin with, and there's definitely not a single lady scene, and I think that all of my friendships, all of my friends are in partnerships, and so it's just harder, it's just... You don't get invited to the fucking couple things, and that's supposed to make sense, and I'm sure it does, but it's just like, fuck, I don't know...

0:32:57.8 NA: Yeah, no I mean...

0:33:00.3 HW: I'm bitter. I have been up here for years in COVID, and I am bitter about that part of... It is just, a couple is a pod, a single is not, and there's so much single privilege, there is so much... Or parents... I don't have kids, and so I don't wanna just be like, "This sucks. But I think I've lived in cities my whole life and there are so many single people in cities. And here I just didn't realize, I think, how much of an entrance fee there is.

0:33:31.0 NA: Yeah. I mean, I also think that you're naming something that's important that often goes unsaid, is a lot of the conversations about having a partner or being married or being in a couple, is this kind of romantic love story aspect of it, which of course is relevant, but the logistical things that you are naming, like how much easier it is logistically and financially oftentimes, to split your life with somebody else, right, whether it's like you said, dealing with the propane or whatever, just like the tasks of life. I've thought about that. Like this winter, just personally for me, has been quite hard and low capacity and not great mental health time, and the amount of times that my partner has handled dinner, there have been a couple of just instances like that where... And it could be a housemate, that type of logistical stuff, to your point from earlier, you can share your life with other people in a very committed and non-romantic way, there are certainly other ways to get those needs met, but our culture is built assuming that you are gonna have that person to take care of you.

0:34:34.9 HW: Yeah, and I think... I would say there have been periods of my life in the past couple of years where almost 90% of my desire to be in a relationship is just to have somebody like fucking [chuckle] help, to just help do things, that has been over just the loneliness, and it is real, our society is very much set up to reward those that are in partnership and heterosexual partnership, and so...

0:35:11.2 NA: Yeah, you mentioned at the beginning in your introduction being newly out, how does that factor into where you're at right now and how you're feeling about dating or potential

partnership?

0:35:24.7 HW: Not a lot. I think that... I just recently finished Angela Chen's book on asexuality. And it's really interesting because I think it's a book everyone should read, but she is... Asexuality runs on a spectrum, and I think one of the points that she really drives home is this idea of the gold star asexual, the one that never masturbates, the one that never has sex, the one that never watches porn and really fits this tight definition of asexuality, and doesn't allow for there to be a spectrum or fluidity, and I think what was so refreshing about that, I think the hardest thing about being out is this idea that now that I'm out, I need now only to be in this really comfortable almost gold star state of being, of being clear, and I don't even know if I...

0:36:17.0 HW: I don't even know what my preference is. I don't know if it's pansexual or if it's bisexuals, I've barely had a chance to be even... Experience it or test it out. I have had one relationship, and for me, the only complication of it is thinking that now that I'm out, I owe more queerness, that it's some violation of my desire to still wanna be in a hetero relationship or a relationship with a man, and so I think that right now, it is really hard for me to wrap my mind around... Like first of all, dating up here's just hard, and I haven't had enough of an experience dating women or other genders, women or non-binary genders, to figure out what I... Like I can't pattern-match from like... And I can... I've only dated men, and so I know what I want in men, and that makes it...

0:37:19.0 NA: You have so much more data.

0:37:21.6 HW: I have so much more data, so it's easier if I'm using the internet to like kind of... I'm pretty good at typifying people that way, but I'm not... I have no idea what I want. So I think that like, and it's just already hard up here. And also I just really have a desire to be in... With a man right now, and I think that that has been hard because it feels like I'm not really gay, and I think that like that's the only complication, is this idea that I need to prove something in my dating, but I know it's not real, I know that is performance over reality, and so I'm okay, just mostly...

0:37:57.8 HW: I'm so open to dating women, but also I don't know how to do it, and I'm not gonna fucking pressure myself into figuring it out, and also I'm going with what feels... What I've been conditioned to do my whole life, which is like literally, I have a date today, it's a man, a cis man, he's coming over to my house and he's gonna help me mulch my yard, and I know this is not things that just men do, but I still want a handyman; he's a woodworker, I still want that, I still want this idea. My ex-girlfriend, they fit that same bill, they fit that idea of, I know how to fix all the tech in the house and I know how to fix the door and I can tune a piano. And so I think still in my mind, it naturally falls to that, so I don't know what I'm even saying anymore, but it has only added a layer of just more pressure on myself to figure something out that I haven't figured out yet, I guess.

0:38:54.6 NA: Or to get to a finish line of identity and to be able to say, "This is exactly who I am, this is exactly what I want. Okay, check." I appreciate very much your honesty around that, I think that it's rare that people are honest in real time when they're still figuring something out. I think that it's a lot easier and more comfortable to talk about something once you can put a neat bow on it.

And having to...

[overlapping conversation]

0:39:29.1 NA: No, but having to grapple with... We're talking about the larger expectations of, you thought you would be a wife, you thought you would be a mom at this point or whatever, and those expectations, and then combined with a... I don't know, should we call it a sexual awakening? Or something that...

0:39:47.1 HW: Or like a real... Being able to... 'cause it was like, it was not even awakening because nothing changed in my desire. It was just a... I think it was more of the conditions that allowed for me to acknowledge I didn't know I was gay, I never gave myself permission to... Anyway.

[overlapping conversation]

0:40:03.8 HW: But I was, yeah, I think awakening, it wasn't like I just desired, it was just like I was just not really in touch.

0:40:12.6 NA: But that's what I was gonna say, how much of as we continue to widen what we see as possible and valid in terms of relationships, in terms of desire, in terms of ways of being, it does permission us to explore within ourselves things that for any number of reasons, whether it was cultural judgment or childhood shame or any number of things didn't seem possible for... And so it's like I think my... I didn't realize I was gonna talk about it today, but I am also grappling with, realizing that I'm not straight in the last couple of months, which has been a very, honestly, very fun self-exploration. I haven't talked about it publicly before, so apparently this is my coming-out podcast.

[laughter]

0:40:57.2 NA: No, but I resonate so much with what you just said of not knowing, I'm gravitating more towards bi, like bisexual seems like it fits me better, but are these words that I can claim after a lifetime of thinking, I was straight-ish mostly right? And coupled with... Exactly, and being in monogamous partnership with a cis man that I'm not expecting to change, right? And so it's like, does it even matter? Does it even matter? And the difference, what I am feeling is there is a gap between what I intellectually believe about this or what I would tell someone else versus the emotional embodied experience of permissioning myself to step into this identity in a way where... What does it mean to claim an identity if you're not really changing your behaviors?

0:41:47.7 HW: Yeah, and I can't speak on a half of the LGBTQIA community, but I can tell you what a lot of my queer friends have told me over many years of having this conversation, which is, it's okay to be a little gay, Holly or... You were valid. Your choices are valid, your identity is valid, it is all valid. And I think that for me personally, I can say the thing I grapple with the most was because I have a gay father, because I have a very, very large number of queer friends who I'm very

protective over and value what... Most of them who can't stray past or who have identified from a really young age as queer and had to deal with the repercussions of that and still have to deal with the repercussions of that, dangerous things, and limiting things and painful things. And I think that for me, it was really hard because I so didn't want to just take this identity without paying my dues or having... Or knowing exactly, but that's what I'm getting at with what Angela Chen and what I thought that was just such a free thing, which is that you are allowed, you're allowed to be fluid, you're allowed to come and go, it doesn't... Like claiming an identity or at least exploring a different identity, I don't believe invalidates other people's identity who have had a different experience than you.

0:43:15.5 HW: And I think that as gender fluidity and also orientation fluidity, I just think these things are starting to... I think that what changed my entire perception of my own sexuality, and I think what was so important to read about, I'm not ace or asexual, I'm allosexual or allo. But at the same time, reading of the experience of somebody who is asexual has given me permission to not be so constrained by compulsive sexuality and our ideas around sexuality, and so I think that that is what is so beautiful about creating the conditions for people to be who they are, and for people to change, which means that those that are out and on any spectrum are permission givers to those of us who maybe have more subtle spectrums. So I don't know if I'm saying this right or not.

0:44:20.7 NA: No, that's... No, that's incredibly well said, I'd love to talk more about this book, 'cause it sounds like it was really impactful for you. Will you share a little bit more specifically, like were there things you realized about yourself or what were the self-reflection takeaways for you?

0:44:36.2 HW: Well, I think it was... First of all, I didn't know anything about... So we're talking about Angela Chen's book, CE, what asexuality reveals about desire, society, and the meaning of sex. And so for me, prior to reading this book, I could not have explained what asexuality is, other than an organism that has sex with itself, which I think is... It's just a term I never thought to look into, even though it's right there at the end of LGBTQIA, and so it's a sexual orientation, and essentially an asexual, it can mean many different things, but it's somebody who does... I feel like I'm gonna butcher this, I'm gonna try my best, but I encourage everybody to read this book, it's defined so well within it, but somebody that is asexual is somebody that just does not... Their life is not... Like sex is not a priority to them. They may not want sex at all, they may not ever have sex, but they may engage in sex, but it's not a primary drive, it's just like... I think one of the ways that she puts it is, it's just like maybe you don't like bread and sometimes you eat bread, it's just... It is a way that...

0:45:51.0 HW: It's a thing that I think is not discussed enough. And so for a lot of us, me included, I never really understood it as a sexual orientation, nor did I understand what the implications of it were, right? When you hear "asexual", you think of a gender, which is just genderless. Well, I think that that's a really good way to put it, which is just to a degree, it's just, "a-" negates, so asexual, not sexual. And another topic that she goes into in the book is about aromanticism, which is not romantic. And so I think for me, reading this, so I have never really... I think probably because my early exposure to sex, a lot of my early sex was a lot of dick-sucking and it was in high school, and it was in response to... In response to my dad being gay and being afraid that I was gay myself, and

also wanting male validation and male approval and just wanting, wanting, wanting, a very, very misguided approach to it and I... All my sex was drunk, prior to getting sober, and I think even in sobriety, there have been times where I have absolutely enjoyed sex, but I can be a very sexual person, I'm definitely not asexual in that I...

0:47:15.1 HW: Sex is a drive for me, it is something that motivates me, but I rarely enjoy it and I'm not as motivated by it, and I think that that's always felt like either... And I think when I've even talked to doctors about it, it's like, "Is something off? Do you have a low sex drive? Is there something wrong with your libido? Do you have a nutritional deficiency?" In relationships, like this idea that if you're not having sex and you're not... That sex is such an important part of a relationship, and that if you're not... And usually the one that wants it, like I had in my last two relationships, it was a problem, you know, my ex-girlfriend asked me if I miss dick because I couldn't orgasm. And my ex-boyfriend, he used to throw fucking tantrums when I just didn't want it, there was something wrong with him. And I think that in both cases, those were wrong things, I just didn't want sex, and this idea that was so freeing this book, along... Everyone should read it because I think it goes into so many things. Like Angela wrote it not just for an asexual audience, she wrote it for everybody, because we are all...

0:48:27.3 HW: I think essentially, we are all shackled in a way by society's expectations of the dominant expectations of who we are supposed to be, and anybody that actually does not fall within that, any minority that exists is also essentially normalizing, or not normalizing, but calling attention to the structures that are in place that are actually suffocating all of us. And to me, reading this was like, "Oh my God..." First of all, I completely identified with it, and I identified so much with feeling like there was something wrong with me because I've had friends like... I was talking to one of my friends the other day, and she was saying something about about having sex with hundreds of people or something.

0:49:17.3 HW: And that's just so foreign to me, and not in a way where like, "How could she?" It's more of like, "How come I can't?" And I think that we normalize that like it's... I have always had friends that like... Where sex was just easy, they just somehow go out and get it and they enjoy it when they do it, and that has never been me. I just for some reason, have not figured out how to fucking just go out and get fucked. I wish I could, I wish I could be that kind of person that just had a lot of sex and was like, "Oops, did it again," or whatever. I am not that person, I don't have that much sex, it is very hard for me to get there. And not only that, even when I'm in a relationship and it's just there for me, it's not what I want the most out of my partnerships, and I absolutely want passion, I absolutely do want really good sex, I love having an orgasm, I masturbate, whatever, but it's just not... It's not up there for me... It's very low on the list of things.

0:50:19.2 NA: You're not building your life around it, yeah.

0:50:20.4 HW: So I could go on, but I'm just kind of curious as I'm talking about this stuff, is any of it hitting you? Or like...

0:50:31.8 HW: Oh, yeah. No, completely, I mean, we live in a culture that is simultaneously sex-

obsessed and purity-obsessed, that... And there's no way that that doesn't have implications on everyone, and so much of what I have had to unlearn as an adult was the slut shaming of my younger years that I was subjected to, that I was participating in, that I did to myself, all of these things. For me, it sounds like my experience is different than yours, in that I feel like sex... I wouldn't say that I'm sex-obsessed, but it's definitely really important to me and it's been really healing to let that be true. Like a lot of my internal stories was like, "What's wrong with you that this is so important?" We're given...

0:51:19.7 NA: And I know, I feel like in this conversation, we've over simplified and generalized a lot, but the generalized perspective that I was given, is like women aren't supposed to feel that way, that's how men feel, that sex is really important or that sex is a thing that you might want outside of a deeply in love relationship. And so for me, a lot of the experiences that I wanted to have, I could only have them drunk, and so that was sort of my get out of jail free card, or your drunk pass or whatever. And so much of my drinking was drinking more and more and more to give myself permission to do things that I wanted to do anyway, right? And so I'm now almost 11 years sober, and it's been really interesting to have to step back and be like, "Huh, how do I wanna do things differently now? What in the realm of sex is actually important to me?" versus when you said high school was just a bunch of dick-sucking for validation or whatever, that's so relatable to me, like what were the times my past that I thought that I really wanted sex, but actually what I wanted was to be chosen and I wanted approval, and if I was willing to do those things, then I got chosen. It's all so wrapped up, there's so many threads that are knotted, and I feel like getting curious about this, and again, not expecting there to be a finish line, but just perpetual curiosity and exploration has been a much more self-compassionate way for me to approach this kind of stuff.

0:52:47.0 HW: Yeah. Well, and I think what's so interesting, of what you just said, what I found fascinating about it is here we are, kind of polar opposites, or at least like the opposite ends of the spectrum, right? And we both think we're terrible people because of what we naturally want, or that there's something wrong with us because of what we naturally want from me. When I meet someone like you, that feels like you have figured out something that I should have figured out how to want sex, and that it's some kind of pathology, and that there's just, like I had some experience that made me this way, and I think that was another piece of the book that made it so helpful, so can I... Let me digress. There's one other thing she talked about that I thought was so fascinating, and when people identify as asexual, right, there is often the question of, "Are you sure" Maybe you just had this experience that made you this way. Maybe you haven't found the right person yet." And when I read that, I immediately was like, "No, it's just how some people are," because I so closely, I closely identify with it, right.

0:53:51.2 HW: Again, not asexual, but very, very close to identifying with what it must feel like because of so many different lived experiences, but I'm very romantic as we talked about very early on, and aromanticism is this lack of feeling a romantic connection to a partner, and you might still be very into sex and have a high sex drive, but that's just not a thing, and when I read about that, my first thought was like, "Well, maybe they just haven't had met the right person yet and that's just how they are." And so I think that in this, what was so thought-provoking about it was I just... I've tried to kind of pull apart why am I the where I am when it comes to sex and thinking that

something happened to me, instead of letting it just be who I am and how I am and how I operate. And I think that again, that has been really relieving. It's just how I am and I think... I don't understand you...

0:54:57.4 HW: I don't understand that. I've never understood it because I've never lived it or experienced it, and I think it's so hard sometimes for us to really understand someone else's experience when it's so far from our own, but to me, yours has always felt like the one I should be, that I should be enjoying sex.

0:55:14.0 NA: It's so interesting. Listen. That's why I made... I like making this podcast and I like podcasting as a medium because I think that there's something that we can get to in these long, meandering, honest story-sharing conversations that we just can't get in an Instagram caption or in any kind of a sound bite thing, that it creates so much freedom for me to hear other people talk about what's true for them, whether or not it's true for me, and here it obviously feels really good when someone says something that you relate to that makes you feel less alone, that's its own special kind of feeling. But I think that it's equally valuable to hear someone say something where you're like, "Oh, I don't know what that feels like," because it almost expands for me the fact that, "Oh, well, what else don't I know about?" or what... It just takes anything that can take us out of that really narrow relationship escalator, check box, check box, this is what you have to do to be like okay, and worthy in the world, anything that can blow that apart even by one more inch, I feel like is so worth-while.

0:56:17.1 HW: Well, because we're so egocentric and all of us are, we just naturally see things and we believe our world view and our feelings, our beliefs are the right ones or the natural ones or whatever it is. And I think that it is really satisfying to be able to realize someone can experience a world so entirely different, so entirely different. Anyway, yeah, I agree, I think it's great. And also, can we just go back to the part where you came out?

0:56:49.5 NA: Oh, yeah, sure, sure we can go back to that. Yeah, what do you wanna talk about, Holly?

0:56:51.9 HW: No, it's just a really big deal. It's just... It's a really big deal. I just wanna honor it.

0:57:00.7 NA: Thank you. I feel very excited. It's been really sweet to have lots of conversations with the people that are close to me, and like you described of having a lot of close queer friends, that's my situation as well, and it's just been so nice how everyone's been like, "Welcome." And have things to say about that.

0:57:17.8 HW: My friend, Valentine, sent me a huge bouquet of flowers, and it was from... It was like... It said, "Welcome the gays." And it had no name on it, and it took me forever to figure out who it came from because they denied it at first. But, yeah, it was so welcoming and so beautiful, but also I think two people's work who really helped me, Marley Grace, they've talked about this many times. Their conversations around it helped, and then also Tracy Murphy, they also talk about this, and they were two really influential people whose work helped me to figure out my own

sexuality.

0:57:55.7 NA: I feel like you and I could start the Marley Grace fan club because I very much agree. Yeah. Very agree. Love Marley. Yeah, it's... What you said before about wanting to figure out why you're like this, I think that there is such a... Especially those of us that are more self-exploration or self-help oriented, whatever you wanna call it, that have that desire to look inward and ask those questions. I think that there's so much about that that's wonderful and I've really had to check myself though, that there is a point in which that is like... I weaponize that against myself, where it's like not everything has to be pathologized, not everything came from some catalyst incident that... I want things to make sense and to understand why I am the way I am in so many different capacities, and sometimes that's worthwhile, but sometimes it's just, "Okay, well, I'm just like this, can I just be actually... Can I not have to turn over every single rock?"

0:58:49.8 HW: I fully understand that, and I think it's... To me, it is a gift, and then it also is like a gift to know when to just accept that this is how I am, this is who I am, this is what I do, this is how I live, and they both have their place and time.

0:59:05.6 NA: Well, and the end of all of those sentences for me would be right now, like, this is who I am right now, this is how I live right now, this is how I want... What I want right now. Because if I look back on any... I was... Five-year, 10-year period of my life and like, "Oh my God, things have changed so much." They've just changed so much. It's so cute that I think that the past was full of so many twist and turns and possibilities, but I think that the future has to be fixed. That doesn't make any sense. And it's with the sexuality and sexual identity and that exploration process, obviously part of it for me was putting together some pieces from my past and exposure to people's work, like Marley, like you talked about, people like you who are coming out... Even if they don't know the words that they're using, it's been so many things put together that I think have opened up the space for me to look at this. But I will name something else that has been really useful that I never could have predicted is... My partner and I, on and off for the last... Since September 2020, have lived with his dad, like periods of time living in our vans, traveling, but then for most of the pandemic, living in a house with his dad where, especially when you are quarantined at home together, there's not a lot of privacy.

1:00:21.5 NA: And sex is something that's been kind of a foundational part of our relationship from the beginning, wanting to be sex and adventure partners was really a lot of what drew us together, and then living in circumstances where that wasn't really possible, and kind of grappling with what does that mean. And I feel like it was only over this past winter that we were like, "You know what? These are just the circumstances, we're gonna stop fighting against them, and what if we just downgrade the importance of sex in our life right now and trust that when our circumstances change when we move in together into our own place, that this connection is still gonna be there and we can kind of nurture it in other ways." And it was a really interesting experiment because something shifted for me... I don't know if this is making sense, but something shifted for me. Being in a monogamous partnership where we are not really having sex, created a circumstance that I've never been in before, because in periods of time of being single, I was looking for a partner or out there or dating or sleeping with people, or do...

1:01:25.1 NA: It was always this thing that was on my mind that I had to do, or a box that I had to check, or a validation that I wanted, or an itch that I wanted to scratch, and something opened up for me when I had all of this sexual energy inside, but didn't have anywhere to really put it, that... I started to notice who am I feeling attracted to, whether it's like people I follow on Instagram or what porn am I watching, or what... Any of these different things and realizing like, "Oh, none of it is straight." It opened up a space for like... That I don't think would have been there had I been in my usual hamster wheel of like, gotta find a partner, gotta find sex. I don't know if that makes sense, but it was really interesting to see that that is part of what came out of it, was like actually not having sex and opening up that space without it feeling like a problem or I had to meet someone else, let me put the energy into something different.

1:02:19.4 HW: You know what makes me think of? Have you ever heard of Brahmacharya?

1:02:21.6 NA: Uh-uh.

1:02:22.6 HW: So it's one of the yamas, which are one of the... Part of the eight-fold path into enlightenment, and the yamas are the five restraints or the regulating behaviors or whatever you wanna call them, but anyway, Brahmacharya, it's basically not being loose with your sexual energy, and it's tied to creativity. It's interesting because... So this is Hinduism, this is yoga essentially. And it's interesting because... I learned this years and years ago, controlling my... I didn't masturbate for a year, and to me, controlling my sexual energy meant basically not letting it spill out the bottom of me and contain it, and if you contain it, essentially you can kind of... Hopefully, I haven't lost everyone, and I'm also not slaughtering this because it's been years since I talked about it, but the idea is your sexuality lives at your second chakra, that's kind of like close to... It's around your sexual organs, and basically, if you can imagine it, you either let their sexual energy fall out the bottom of you, or you waste it, or you keep it in and basically crank it up and shoot it up through your higher chakras, and that allows you basically to access creativity. And so anyway, it makes me think of this because when I learned about that, I was so absolutely... I just, it made sense to me, and it truly does make sense to me, the eight-fold path makes sense to me, and...

1:04:02.9 HW: The Yamas are amazing, like himsa. There is truth-telling and non-violence and all sorts of really practical principals live. But it also is one of these things that I think about containing our sexual energy. These things were created really for male privilege, right? This is a... Any spiritual tradition that exists today was created to purify male privilege, those that were having sex or that were driven by sex or more likely to be driven by sex. And so...

1:04:30.5 HW: When you were talking about it, it made me think of like... I've kind of rolled back, I think, on thinking, on believing fully, that principles like this apply to the entire population of people, just because of different lived experiences and who these were created for. But then also when you're saying this, I do think it's interesting that the withholding of sex whatever, or at least sex as you knew it opened up a different portal of creativity.

1:05:01.4 NA: Yeah.

1:05:03.0 HW: Or desire that you didn't know existed...

1:05:05.4 NA: Well, and it's like, what is possible for us if we do something different than what we've always done? Something's gonna happen, right? [chuckle] And that I am finding myself really interested in that. I wanna ask, when we were emailing, whatever it was last week, couple weeks ago about this episode, and you said, "I wanna talk about almost 10 years of singleness, about wanting to have a partner and feeling like I'm missing out so much by not having one, but also knowing I'm not ready and that this alone time is precious." I wanted to ask you about the not ready piece. What do you mean by that? What makes... What would make you ready?

1:05:40.5 HW: Well, I think... What would make me ready? Look, I think that I know a lot of different people that have gotten... Been in recovery. And there are some people, and I've just envied them, right? That just immediately have a partner that comes in at this period of time, and I know a lot of people for whom it seems very easy to be in committed relationships. And I think that again, for me, it has felt like, to some degree, it's interesting, it's my energy, it's my vibe, I'm not manifesting, I'm not doing the right things, whatever it is. I have wanted and wanted and wanted, and felt many times along the way, I am ready for this. Where is this person? I am so tired of this bullshit.

1:06:37.8 HW: Like, why do I have to go through the hardest years of my fucking life and do it alone without somebody here to just tuck me in or make me coffee or one... Just help me carrying the fucking groceries. I don't know. And I think it was just like that morning I was trying to tell you about where I mentioned earlier, I went to a brunch up the street and it was two couples and I didn't have a COVID test and I'm just sitting there and I'm just like the fucking one that's like wearing their mask. And everyone there had done their COVID test in plenty of time and had plenty of COVID tests, and I'm just like...

1:07:11.7 HW: I just... It was one of those moments where I just wanted to fucking vaporize, right? Because it is sometimes so painful to not have your person, to be the single one, to be whatever. And so I think that I have gone for 10 years in between this, where is this person? And this feeling of an extreme deficit. And then also at the same time, where I am today... In this time I wrote a book, I got sober, I overcame bulimia, I overcame alcohol addiction, overcame drug addiction. I got out of six figures of debt, I bought my first home, I started a company and left that company, started two podcasts.

1:07:58.2 HW: I've written hundreds of thousands of words, I've moved multiple times. It just... I got into gardening. Stuff has happened in my life. I'm so different, and I think that there was no room to a degree, especially with the building of the company and doing this thing that I felt very compelled to do, and it was written in the stars for me. And more important to me at the time than a family or a relationship. And let me just be so clear on that, I would have chosen, if a person and kids were standing physically in front of me and creating Tempest was standing and writing the book, was at another, was on...

1:08:42.7 HW: If I had to choose between the two and I could hold them in my hand, I would have still even now how everything has turned out, I would still have chosen what I chose. And I don't regret it, but at the same time, it doesn't mean that I haven't felt that there was something missing in my life. And actually, when I... In August 2020, when I started the process of hiring a CEO to replace me, and going through this process of changing my role there, I just blurted it out to my friend one day talking on the phone, "I just want..." It was one of my advisors, not even a friend. Well, friend and an adviser.

1:09:19.5 HW: And I said, "I just want a fucking... I wanna partner, and I want kids." And I didn't even think about it, it was just what came out and then from there, it was just like, well, now this person should come in, I've made these choices. And that was August 2020 and is now... That's a year and a half ago. And it's... And there still hasn't been. And still... And it's been a really, really hard couple of years. And still I don't think I was ready, and by that I mean that I think there is some work we can do with partners, and I think... And that's different for every single person. Some people do their work in relationships.

1:09:57.3 NA: That's me. For sure.

1:10:00.0 HW: Yes. And some people do not. And this work that I have done, it's been a solo mission, and that is not... I'm not guessing it, and I'm not retroactively painting a story over something... I'm not explaining by putting the story in place to explain it. I'm just saying, I know now, having gone through what I've gone through and experienced what I've experienced and being where I'm at, that anybody in my space during this time... Especially this last year, when I wanted to die, when I didn't wanna get out of bed, when I couldn't understand why I was alive or what the point of my existence was, when I was bankrupt of any sort of creativity or desire, when I was just napping through my life and just kind of waiting... There was so much I would have missed if I had been in a relationship because it would have been such a distraction for me, and I wouldn't have done this work, and so that's it.

1:11:01.0 HW: I think it's like I have wanted so badly, almost single pointedly, like neurotically, to have a person, my person, my love story, I want it, and also, I've made decisions that did not prioritize that, and also I have had the most fucking wild and beautiful decade, and I wouldn't change a thing, and I think that really goes to show me today, still single, still without this person that when I go into that "Oh, it should be different, I'm missing," I just remember being in Rome for two and a half months and texting with this guy that I was fucking the whole time back in the United States, and just thinking out of it how much he consumed my thoughts on that trip to the detriment of me being there and experiencing it, or thinking there's something, I'm not enough here in this moment experiencing this, and it's just like wasting my life because I'm obsessed with a future outcome or some future thing. And like, that this isn't enough?

1:12:13.1 HW: And I think that I've had to consistently remind myself, this is enough. You being the sad girl without the COVID test at the brunch, you're not getting to the fucking couples party, you're feeling like there's... You've missed... This is enough and it's great and it's perfect, and it's not a mistake or a detour, it's just like your timing, and it's your life experience. And I have tried, Nic,

like I have... I deserve all the awards for how much effort [chuckle] I've put into trying to get into a relationship. The hours of therapy, the fucking books, calling in the one, or like the exercises or the journaling or Melody, whatever, P. I've read all of that shit, all of the couple people, every person that got into a relationship and now is a relationship guru because they fucking did it, I've read all of their stuff. Those people are the worst.

1:13:13.5 NA: "I can do it, so you can too."

[laughter]

1:13:17.9 NA: I mean, that's not a formula that... Not just in relationships, that's not a great formula. Just because you were able to do it, actually doesn't mean that it's replicable by other people.

1:13:27.3 HW: Well, it's just like... It's just one of those things where you could have been like the most desperate person, but somehow you landed somebody and now you have like... And now you're gonna show us how... And I think it's just timing. A lot of times it's just like, it's such a personal experience, and believe me, if you can vibe your way, or if you can vibrate your way into a fucking relationship, I would have done that by now.

[laughter]

1:13:55.7 NA: Oh my God. [chuckle]

1:13:55.8 HW: You can't do it. You can't vibe shift your way into a relationship or manifest it, and I'm... I believe in manifestation and all this stuff, but I think that sometimes that's a really, really mean trick because to someone like me who has done all of the things and had all the affirmations and all the positive thoughts and who's done the... I fucking did the... Like there's this 30-minute Kundalini chant that you do for 40 days. The... Oh God, what is it? The... It doesn't even matter. I've done it all, and still alone. And part of this has just been I'm enough here on my own, and if I die tomorrow, I'll have had a good life, a great life. And I think that's a gift that I only got to because it didn't work out the way I wanted it to work out. That feels like a gift to be so in love with what's right in front of me and not dependent upon the possibility.

1:14:58.3 NA: Yeah. And not making yourself stay stuck in this, "I'll be happy when..." "Where you're withholding all the joy from yourself, where you're withholding joy and pleasure and self-esteem and all of this stuff from yourself until you reach some arbitrarily decided point in the future.

1:15:17.0 HW: That's right, that's right. And I think what is so fascinating to me and what has been such a tremendous value has been, I think the work we do on ourselves the most comes from how we relate to other people, and that's all people, that's our family, that's our friends, that's our partners, and I think that one of the biggest misconceptions, I think, is like, that we can't do partner work when we don't have a partner, but I think that I've done more partner work on my own,

meaning I think I have done more work on intimate relationships without one, or at least just as valid work, not being in a relationship, than as if I had been in one.

1:16:05.3 NA: Yeah.

1:16:05.5 HW: Does that make sense?

1:16:06.9 NA: It makes complete sense. I was just gonna say, I don't know if my response is gonna make sense, but let's try. I think that sometimes, if in any area of your life, you meet the normative expectation that in a lot of ways, you can use it as some kind of a shield for not doing the work. I think about this in regard to sobriety, for me, that it's, I have spent a lot of time in the past being angry about... Why is my relationship with this thing not something that I can just do, "normally" right? That I can't just drink normally. Right? Or whatever that is. And so much of who I am and what I love about myself and what gave me self-esteem and basically everything that's good in my life came on the other side of having to do that work, so it's like... I think there is some parallel to what you're saying, that if relationships or a partnership or whatever was this easy Disney princess story, would you have gotten as far in sort of like a self-actualization way? Right?

1:17:11.0 NA: I don't know. There's something, there's something to this, and it's like at the same time that I'm saying that, I don't want to glamorize the things that make us feel like we're suffering, right?

1:17:21.1 HW: Yeah, or diminish what happens when you do get what you want because thee things...

1:17:25.7 NA: Exactly.

1:17:26.6 HW: That work is just as important, right.

1:17:27.6 NA: Exactly.

1:17:27.7 HW: Right. Like you said, you do your work in relationships, and my work isn't better because I did it the hard way.

1:17:34.8 NA: But this is all the best example of the both end, there's so much nuance here, and I think that we want to boil it down to this is the right way, this is the best way. Or even the stories of like, well, you can't be happy in a relationship until you're totally happy on your own, and that has not been my experience at all as someone who does a lot of their work in a relationship.

1:17:56.8 HW: Or you can't love somebody until you love yourself or truly love someone until you love yourself, which is such a myth.

1:18:03.5 NA: Anything that puts us in a linear, you must do this and this, and then you get to this and then you arrive here. I am skeptical of all of that, honestly, I think it's all really messy, I think

there's no one way to do it, I think there's no right way to do it, I think times in my life where I have felt like that was true was mostly just me trying to make myself feel better. It's all this like beautiful clusterfuck.

1:18:22.3 HW: Yeah, it is. And I think the thing I have to continuously go back to is that the point of this is to experience it, like our point of existing and living is just to experience it, is not to make something of it. And I think that the just experiencing it is how you make something of it, which is just being here for it and not having to turn it into something else, or not having to have it work out in this specific way, and not like... Like this last year, again, of like, and we talked about this in the last podcast together, but just... I was the CEO of a company and then I changed my role and then I got pushed out of the company, and I spent a year in total grief and confusion, and I wanted it to be over so much, and I think that there was... And I was alone in the woods most of the time, and I just felt like... And we're still in pandemic, and I just felt like kind of cratered in this weird space in the world, so far removed from so much of it, and I hated my house, I hated where I lived, I hated my life.

1:19:39.3 HW: For a lot of it, I just didn't want it. I felt like such a fuck up, and I remember one night I was just standing on my back porch, and I was... From being, going through that and just living through that, there was just a shift and I was like, oh, it's enough, like, oh, this is enough, it's enough if this is just it. This house is enough, my life is enough, even if I have nothing to show ever again for the air I breathe, this right here is perfect, and it's enough. And I think that that has been a really hard, hard thing to grasp, and I don't think I would have grasped it had I not been in such a protracted period of a feeling like my life didn't matter.

1:20:29.9 NA: Yeah, no, that repeated phrasing of that, this is enough and this idea that the experience is the point, I actually find that really comforting.

1:20:41.7 HW: Yeah, because it just can be about this, like this right now, you and me doing this...

1:20:46.4 NA: Right, like this is the point, it doesn't have to lead anywhere, it doesn't have to... Yeah.

1:20:51.0 HW: Turn into some value later, doesn't have to be the best podcast you ever did, it doesn't have to save anyone's life, it doesn't have to be great art. We could just sit here and talk to each other and have fun, and this could be the point of actually being alive.

1:21:03.9 NA: Last fall, I was in Asheville, North Carolina hosting a retreat, and I went into this small art shop, and I bought a little print there that it's just really simple, it's got a picture of a crystal prism on it, and it says, "ay I Experience This Completely? I feel like that has been my touchstone ever since. May I Experience This Completely? And I will tell you when things feel hard, I don't wanna experience it, I wanna avoid it, I wanna get out of it, I don't wanna be there, I don't... You know. And just like, okay, this is what's happening. Can I experience this completely? And sometimes the answer is no, but I think about it all the time.

1:21:42.9 HW: Yeah, no, I agree, I agree. I think that's a really beautiful way to put it.

1:21:48.3 NA: Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you wanted to bring up?

1:21:52.7 HW: No, I feel like we really covered it all. I mean... Do I answer, do I wanna get married? We haven't talked about marriage.

1:22:00.6 NA: Sure, let's do that. Yeah, let's do that. Do you? Do you wanna get married?

1:22:12.2 HW: Yeah. I've listened to a lot of your episodes, and I think marriage is a trash institution. Of course it's, and I think that there is so much about it that is... That I fundamentally disagree with. And yes, I wanna get married. And I think that is part of... It's less about, I want a certificate... I mean I still want the trappings, believe me, I want to wear a... I do, they're still a part of me. And we're being honest here right? So they're still a part of me. I will never be a mother, I don't think I will, but... It's so stupid, but I've been watchin *This is Us*, and Chrissy Metz, her character is mothered, like she became a mother. Do you watch *This is Us*? No?

1:23:12.4 NA: I watched I think the first season or so.

1:23:17.4 HW: Alright. Doesn't matter. But basically, this character on-screen, it's just like she reminds me of all the women I know that have had kids, and there's just a thing that I feel happens to women that have children, or a thing that happens to women that get married or whatever it is. And I think I still am bought in that that is a missing part of my puzzle, and I don't know if that... If I'm talking to... This is such an almost anti-feminist thing to say, which is like, I believe I should have children and get married because that will make me more of a woman in my own eyes and in society's eyes.

1:24:04.1 HW: So I'm acknowledging that sentiment is against my politics, and at the same time, I cannot also argue with the fact that it feels like a thing I want for myself and a thing that I feel is missing. And again, die tomorrow, fine, I'm happy with my life, I'm happy with what I've done, I'm happy with what I've accomplished here. I also believe in multiple lives, I don't think this is it. And also, I feel in this lifetime, a longing for something that feels like it has something to do with those two things, and I don't know how to pull those two things apart, and I don't think I have to. And so...

1:24:53.1 NA: I feel like the through line of this conversation is nuance and both end and just allowing it all to be true at the same time.

1:25:01.3 HW: Yeah, so yeah, I do, I do, I wanna get married, I want a partner, I want a forever thing, and I'm not interested in polyamory. I'm not interested in... For me, it's just... It's just, I'm simple and I want a person to do this life with, and I think another beautiful part of Angela Chen's work is talking about, a lot of times these types of things, they could be satisfied through friendship, deep committed friendship, and I think that the spectrum of what I'm looking for is not my wild love story, even though I want that very much so, but I'm also... It's like 50:50. I want the love story, but I also, I really want companionship and committed companionship, and I want a person who's

back will have mine and who's back I'll have.

1:25:52.9 NA: Yeah. I think that's a very beautifully honest place to wrap up. If you could leave people with an affirmation of sorts based on our conversation, what would that be? Like what's your wish for everyone listening, besides to read that book? 'Cause that's my homework.

1:26:08.5 HW: I think my wish is, we just don't have that much time. And when I look around at what's happening in the world, it's just like, we don't have that much time. We should know that by now, that our lives are so short anyway, and the world is changing rapidly, and what we prioritize and how we use our time counts and it matters. And so much of it, I think, is used to... So much of it is mental processing of what we should be doing for everything, and I think that we can have it all right now if we just allow ourselves to actually invest in what we value.

1:27:02.1 NA: Yeah.

1:27:04.2 HW: That's not an affirmation.

1:27:04.3 NA: No, but it's excellent nonetheless. What's the best place for people to say hi to you?

1:27:10.5 HW: You can find you on Instagram, and my handle is just @Holly, H-O-L-L-Y. Or you can also find me on Substack. I write a newsletter called The Recovering...

1:27:21.8 NA: An excellent newsletter that I highly recommend.

1:27:24.2 HW: Thank you. Yeah, I've gotta write mine today. I'm gonna go on a date and then I'm gonna write this fucking newsletter.

1:27:30.0 NA: Right.

1:27:32.6 HW: Yeah. And I don't know the web address for it. I think it's like Substack...

1:27:34.8 NA: I'll put it in the show notes. Don't worry.

1:27:37.6 HW: Okay, cool, thank you. But you can just Google Recovering Holly Whitaker, and you can find it.

1:27:41.2 NA: Yes. I love it.

1:27:43.5 HW: I love you.

1:27:44.7 NA: Thank you so much. I love you too. Thank you, thank you.

[music]

1:27:54.1 NA: Thanks so much for listening to this very first season of the Pop-up Pod. All of the internet and honest conversations you'll hear on this show are 100% listener funded, paid for by 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. It's a fun, easy and welcoming space. You also get access to lots of bonuses. Aand 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. And hopefully, I'll see you there.

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