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*Automated transcription by Otter.ai*

So this leotard is so old, it's like 12, or maybe 15 years old at this point, that the elastic is spent. But I think with my tattoos, it kind of works as an off the shoulder kind of thing. So, anyway, hello, and Happy Sunday, I hope that you're having a beautiful day and a beautiful weekend.

Let's talk today about compromise, finding middle ground. It's something that I cover pretty indirectly, or briefly, in almost everything that I do there's negotiation. We're in relationship with people, we need to find what works for me, what works for you? And how can we find a happy medium, if it seems like what I want and what you want are at odds? So I thought, since I actually haven't done a resource specifically on this topic, that I would dive into it to the best of my ability. I'll offer some questions and things that I consider, especially when I feel stuck, especially when I want to work through something, and maybe the other person really wants to work through something, but we just feel like, "what do we do?" So I'll share some stuff from my own life, if you relate, if you also feel stuck, maybe that will be of service to you. or at least a jumping off point to find your own solution.

I think it can be easy to feel defensive at the idea of compromise, because we can easily get fixed on what we think will work for us. And there's no other way. this can be a byproduct of binary thinking, of all or nothing thinking, of maybe just not having role models of negotiation, especially particularly in interpersonal relationships. We've all had experience in a transactional dynamic, a professional dynamic, maybe with friends or colleagues, figuring out some common solutions. But I think a lot of people have – and I will say I have included myself in this – it's harder, it's harder when it's a closer relationship. It's harder when they are interdependent. It's harder when it feels romantic or sexual. It's harder when they feel like family.

I think the reason that this is on my mind in particular this week is because I had a video go viral, last week or the week before maybe, but it was about compromise in a roommate setting. And my roommate is also somebody that I sleep with sometimes, we also feel like we're romantically in love. There's a lot of fluidity, and being more anarchistic towards relating, I don't love boxes and labels. But anyway, the short video that I made, "well in this context, it matters that we live together, that we are roommates". But a lot of people hear the word "roommate" and they assign a very platonic, nonsensual, maybe just even purely transactional, like "we live together for rent and that's it". They projected a lot of that onto it. It was the most well received video that I've ever made, ever. There's always going to be like, once you hit in the millions of views of something you're gonna get assholes, you're gonna get some of

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the far right extremists, and you're gonna get some people who are in their feelings. And that's just par for the course. But I and my partner / roommate – who now moderates my comments on the apps – we were just marveling at how relaxed the comment section seemed, overall. At least relative to other videos that I've had that got that level of viewership. And I would bet good money that it's because people thought that it was not a romantic or sensual relationship. They thought it was not a familial relationship. Right? That's why it's on my mind this week, like “what's different?”

So I want to explore specifically with close relationships, however you define or label them. If there's a dynamic that's really tough to stay not-activated, it's tough to stay relaxed, it's tough to stay assuming good intent, it's tough to stay on the same team, what do we do? What do we think about? Let's get into it.

Right off the bat, I'm gonna say there's not a middle ground for some topics. If one person is saying “I should be able to exist, and I have rights”, and the other person is saying, “No, you shouldn't”. The second party is just wrong. They're just wrong. There is no middle ground there. It's non negotiable, we don't argue with fascists. And unfortunately, for a lot of us, people like that will exist in our close proximity, in our communities or in our families. And so I'm gonna say context matters. I'm not speaking about that sort of disagreement, because it's not a disagreement. There's not a debate about whether or not you should be allowed to live and thrive.

I'm talking more about things that are negotiable: ways we treat each other, talk to each other, ways we cohabitate, things of that nature. And to be clear, sometimes those things are life or death, sometimes those things are non negotiable. The partner that I live with is sober. As I mentioned in my video that I described, he's sober and said, “I just cannot have whiskey in the house. and weed, I can't have those things in the house, I will be unsafe”. And sobriety is a matter of life or death. Non negotiable. And so I could either be fine with that, or I could say, “well, that doesn't work for me. So let's not live together”.

While a short video could not offer nuance, I can elaborate a little bit more here of what was beautiful about that discussion. He said specifically, Whiskey and weed. And I don't care about either of those things. But I also easily could have seen a way that it went down where, because of my own history of having my food and drink policed in the community that I was in, food and drink was very much monitored and controlled, and alcohol was forbidden. If he had been incredibly militant, and was like, “you can't have any of these things in the home, full stop”, we would have weighed the options. And I'll get into it in a bit, that stakes matter, but also stakes are not equal for everybody involved. But that wasn't the approach that he took, he was like, “these are the specific things that are really high trigger shit for me. I don't really

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care about vodka or gin. I kind of hate those, and they're gross to me. so if they were in the home, there's zero chance I would be tempted. I will say that I would prefer if you have those, that they're in a cabinet that I don't have to look at them. Once the bottles are done, can you just dispose of them outside of the home so that I'm not looking at empty liquor bottles?" you know, just little signifiers like that.

To be clear, if he had said, "I can't have any liquor in the house", I probably also could have been fine with that, because I would understand, right? But because he wasn't, and he volunteered that and he offered that, I felt just no reactivity at all. because I could see this vulnerability, this clarity and this desire to not control me, because he knows my own history. And he didn't want it to even have the optics of that.

Sometimes I think there can be an attitude of hyper individualism that can be hard to shake. Even within collaborative community, a lot of us who come from overdoing it, who come from just not self advocating at all, or who come from incredibly abusive environments, who have a history of people just walking all over us or not respecting us. It can be tempting to overcorrect and say, "Well, I'm not giving up any ground whatsoever, ever". In my experience, it can do a disservice to overcorrect like that, to become militant, hyper vigilant, forceful, non negotiable about everything.

Especially if that starts getting cloaked in the language of self care and self love, "my self care is that I don't give up anything for you," or that "I will only give things to you so far as I'm not uncomfortable, I'm not inconvenienced". All within reason. We don't want you to feel uncomfortable in your home, and in your safety, and in your day to day life, where you just don't feel secure at all. But uncomfortable in the moment? Might I inconvenience myself in the moment, if it really matters a lot to you, and we're really close? Maybe. [Depends] what are we talking about?

One of the first things that I really try to do if I'm trying to find middle ground with somebody, is name the goal. So with the person I live with, I was like, "I want to feel safe. And I want you to feel safe. That is my goal. Can we find something that both of those things are true at the same time?" He shared that same goal. If instead, my goal was, "I want to feel safe, and I want you to recognize my authority, and that I'm right." No, no, no, it's combative. It is working against their interest while working towards mine. I wouldn't want somebody to work against their own interest for my benefit, entirely. We do compromise. We do sacrifice things, we can choose to let things go, if they're less of a big deal to us than they are to other people. But I don't want my goal to be that "I win everything, and you just let me". So, the goal. Can we be clear about that upfront? Can we name it and maybe save ourselves a whole lot of time and heartache and headache if it's just not gonna work anyway?

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Can we also do a quick spot check of the nature of the relationship? power dynamics, positionality, all of that. So what I mean by that is: a horizontal dynamic with a friend of mine, where we are ostensibly trying to be on equal footing, and don't have any leverage over each other, that kind of negotiation could play out differently than the friends of mine with whom I work, and creatively collaborate. because we have intersecting ways that we relate to each other.

So a couple of my friends are also basically my employers, and a calculation I'm doing in my mind is like, "well, how much money would I lose per month?" That's going to not necessarily be leverage that they use against me, if we were at a big odds, but it is in the back of my mind. And I don't want that to be... I wouldn't want them to pretend that it's not there. It's something that I appreciate when people acknowledge, like, "Hey, this is just a friendly conversation. Please know, I don't want this to bleed into our work collaborations, I don't want that to be something that you think is on the chopping block, if we can't reach a conclusion here."

Because I've been on the receiving end of that kind of ever-so-subtle power imbalance, I also want to be mindful of that, if I'm in that more advantaged position. And it might not ever be on my mind, but that's the problem. For example, with the partner that I live with, I am on the lease, I am the reason that we have a visa. While we don't do this with every single conflict – if we're bickering over something, I'm not like, "Well, hey, your housing is safe". Because that almost could be perceived as a threat of like, "well, I wasn't thinking about my housing, why are you thinking about my housing?" none of that – but when it makes sense, do we bring it up? Like, if we were having such a fundamental roommate disagreement, that I thought we were kind of approaching a conclusion that maybe we work towards not living together, maybe then I bring up, "hey, your visa is safe." Right?

Either way, I want to clock for myself, all of the potential conflicts of interest, or power imbalances that might be anywhere in the relationship. And when it's relevant, when it might contribute to a feeling of safety, then I might also bring it up and mention it, especially if I am the more powerful one in that moment.

Sometimes it's not always a formal power dynamic. It's not always a consistent, ongoing thing. But there can be factors that make one person more vulnerable than another, which are outside of our control. But we still kind of want to take that into account. I'll give an example. I wanted to visit a friend of mine, and she essentially lived on a commune of sorts. She was able to get this big, giant rundown place for very cheap, and was able to welcome in a lot of trans people, especially younger people who might not have stable housing or family that accepts them, or any of that, and it was really beautiful. I wanted to go visit her – she invited me, I wasn't just shoving my way in – she invited me. And also it became a conversation of "well, yes,

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I'm queer. But I'm cisgender. And there are a lot of acutely vulnerable people inside that home. So what is the staying arrangement?" Do I stay down the street? Do I get a hotel? Do I just completely not even be near this home? Or is that not totally necessary, but there could be a middle ground? They had converted this school bus into a tiny house, which was fucking cool. They're all makers and builders, so creative. And it was really neat, in and of itself. I might have even preferred to stay there, just for the novelty of it. But that was the agreement that we reached together.

This is what I mean by asymmetry of risk. For me to stay in another place, or for me to stay outside of the home, sure there was a risk that I might feel unwelcome, or that I might feel awkward, maybe even alienated, worst case scenario. And also, that's going to hit me a lot less intensely than someone in an extremely vulnerable position, where they recently were alienated by everybody in their family. Right? where they currently only have this one place that they feel relaxed, and so threatening that would be a big problem.

We wound up having really great stories and hikes and meals together and stuff, all with that negotiated. And if I had said, "well, I just find it unacceptable that you're not considering how this makes me feel". Obviously I'm allowed to have feelings and reactions. And if that was the arrangement, if it hurt me that bad, then maybe it's a wash and I don't even go. I'm allowed to have the reaction I have, and also we just don't want to feign ignorance to complicating factors. We don't want to assume that everybody has an equal feeling of security, equal access to resources, equal treatment by the people around us in this awful world that we live in. You know what I mean? Let's be considerate of the people in front of us.

So one caveat I will say to this, is we want to be mindful of – if we are in a disadvantaged position – we want to be mindful of not weaponizing that. We want to be team players, we want to be teammates, right? And so let's say, you're inviting me to this giant party. I have agoraphobia and I also have social anxiety. And everybody in that room knows each other, I don't know them. Because of my own cult experience, I'm probably going to be on pins and needles. Here are all of the ways that I might be more vulnerable in that room than you, who walks in and is comfortable and knows everybody and is having a great time. I want you to see me. And because I am so much more vulnerable in that room, maybe I'm going to ask for some extra care, some extra attention. Maybe we figure out times that – if you're going to be my emotional support person, or one of them – that you pause a conversation. You're having to inconvenience yourself for a moment, because I might be having a low key panic attack. And even though I'm great at masking, maybe I really need you to see through that mask in that moment. That can all be negotiated and weighted proportionally. And also, if I enter that party environment, and I say, "Well, you only have an easy time, and I only have a hard time. So therefore, you have

to stop what you're doing no matter what. you don't get to ask anything of me, you don't get to have needs"... you see what I mean about that now not being collaborative? of that now not being teammates?

So, if you have some people at the party that you never get to see, and it's really important for you to have some alone time with them, because you miss them a lot. That matters, right? If you are having this budding friendship or you know, a sensual relationship that you are really excited about, then putting energy towards that matters. And that does not need to be positioned in competition with my struggle. I don't have to say, "Well, what you want, it matters less than what I want. So therefore, I get what I want". Again, this is all about finding middle ground and compromise.

So if I say, "Okay, well, here are the ways that I think my wants could be met by you, what do you think?" Could I come up at any point and tell you I'm having a hard time? and then we agree that we will go off to the corner or take a walk around the block, and you'll support me in that. Maybe you say, "Sure, except around this person. It's really important, I only get to see them once a year, it's really important. I think I would be annoyed, and maybe even resent being your support person, if when I finally get a chance to talk to that person, I'm now interrupted and put back into the support role".

This is where we keep going back and forth. I have my best idea of what could help me feel secure, you have an awareness of what would be totally no problem whatsoever, all the way towards what might be a little bit of a problem, or even a lot of a problem for you. And what are the differences there? What is the spectrum? Having these sort of conditions like "if A then B, but if C then D". Can we explore all of the ways in which this might play out that feel acceptable or unacceptable? And agree on that in advance.

So, I offered my own examples. I hope the themes of them can come across. I hope the approach, and what goes through my brain, and what we try or don't try, I hope that can be transferable. I leave that to you to translate it, interpret it. If anything that I offer is like, "I genuinely don't think you've factored in this element". Totally fair, totally probable, right? In which case, feel free to reach out to me. I could either make a follow up video, or we could plan a one to one chat. We could have pen pals, if you're at that tier. That's what this whole service is for. So I'm sending you lots of love and I hope you have a beautiful week. Talk to you later. Bye