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Alrighty, so what I can do is I can go ahead and jump into the questions that were emailed to me. And then as people have thoughts or questions, however specific, you can drop them in the chat, I do try to prioritize people in the chat.

Before I go to my email questions, we just got a first chat question.

“What are some tools to feel less anxious and low in self confidence during forming new bonds with someone? I just came out of a five year open relationship and am bonding with a former friends with benefits, and have experienced quite a bit of anxiety regarding getting emotionally involved with him.”

Yeah, I mean, if you're able to elaborate a little bit more about the points of tension with that, because when we're talking about low self confidence, anxiety, context is everything, you know? has this been something that's very old, goes back to when you're little? Is there some sort of thing about this dynamic, either as part of a pattern or with this person specifically? Are they doing something that is sort of setting you off? and so we try to look at, past and present. at the one to one level, but also patterns, and, you know, how deep it might hit, how hard it might hit.

In terms of feeling less anxious, I've not ever had success in trying to force myself to not be anxious, right? So I go more towards “Am I safe to say I'm anxious to this person?” Hopefully, yes. And it doesn't have to be that that's all you talk about. But it can take the power out of it to at least connect with this person if you're able to. And just say like, “this is what my head is telling me, I'm worried about this. I'm scared about that”, and, of course, that's not everybody's style, I tend to be a bit more of a direct communicator. But with low self confidence, it can help to just ask, what messages is your brain telling you? What is the underlying belief about yourself that might be supporting this? we also can feel a bit more empowered that self esteem can be built through esteemable acts. And so I try to imagine, “What would somebody I admire bring up in this situation? Or how might they take care of themselves? Or how might they advocate for themselves?” So it's tricky to speak in generalities without knowing the exact specifics of your history and the person you're with. But really feeling like we can create an environment where it's okay to be not okay, where we can say everything that's real, where the person in front of us can know that about us, support us with it, see if they're doing anything to contribute, or at least to not exacerbate it.

Yeah, if that's not possible, then you can evaluate how close you want to be to a person that you don't feel relaxed sharing your current state with.

Sometimes the anxiety comes from an action they're doing, but they're not doing something wrong. So like, if they're not texting back right away. Sometimes anxiety comes in that form, and we don't want to be unreasonable. But sometimes people say, "I don't want to, I don't know if I can ask for them to get back to me faster". Just as an example. I still like to share, "Hey, you're doing nothing wrong". I validate, "I'm not asking this of you, you're doing nothing wrong, you're great. This is fun, and just know this about me. So if I'm ever seeming on edge, if I'm ever, you know, kind of sharper, or harsh or more intense, if I seem anxious in my responses, that might be in the mix." and that can at least offer context so they can have compassion as well, so that we are not misunderstood, or we minimize the chance that we're misunderstood. I think that can feel really nice to be known in that way, and give us permission to just be a work in progress in that way.

But yeah, also our support system, Who else can we talk to? Whose opinion do we trust on relationships, on how they conduct themselves, how they manage their emotions and their reactions? and ask them what they do. I just talk a lot. I'm a verbal processor personally. Some people like to journal, some people have access to therapy, some people gotta exercise it out, to an extent. So taking a look at what also relieves stress and reinforces your positive self image so that we don't get so fixated on the other person validating us, because we want to be able to be okay, regardless of what somebody else does.

But it's okay to be anxious, especially when it's new. I think that is some of what being in a new connection is, is that tension, that stress. I hope that that is helpful. Be nice to yourself.

Okay, so my first emailed question is, "how do you avoid burnout, especially when you're polysaturated? Or what can you do when you realize you're burnt out?" The reason I wanted to jump into this first is because I have had a little bit of burnout this week. And I tend to be prone more towards discovering burnout when I'm in the middle of it, rather than anticipating it effectively. I've gotten better but I also take on more responsibility as I get more secure. And as I feel more energy, then I'm like, "okay, great. Now we can do more". And it just perpetuates itself to a degree.

So, avoiding burnout in polysaturation, I think it's important to again, understand the full picture. what does polysaturation mean? Because it isn't always just romantic or friendly partners. It is your work schedule, your sleep schedule, your child rearing, the community you're in, if just living around certain people is exhausting. If you have to interact at your job or in your extended family or in a space with people who are invalidating you, and exhausting you. Just what are all of the things that are requiring resources and energy from you? it can be helpful to zoom out and kind of take stock, at least that's what I try to do.

Because then I can take a look at what is within my power to do something about and what's not. I can also sort of be like, "What is my prioritization of things?" I'll start with survival, like, "Okay, I need to be functioning in a professional context, because I need to afford rent and food", basic things like that. So maybe I will weight that more and focus more on just getting my work life in order. But, yeah, then in terms of my relationships, and polysaturation, we might prioritize some relationships more than others. And I think it helps to be honest about that. "well, I'm building this with this person, I'm building that with that person. I've been on a few dates or for a couple of months with this person, but I think I'd like to scale back because I'm spread too thin", that sort of internal self exploration of what is weighing on us. or what is pulling on our resources, it can start to get the wheels turning of what we might want to dial back, if possible.

What to do when we realize we're burnt out? I fit in rest wherever I can. and rest includes not just sleeping. We don't always have access to that, some people are working several jobs or, the nature of the routine of their life doesn't allow rest, so then I go into quality of rest. chillin on the sofa, not working but scrolling social media and getting exhausted by that, that's not rest, and that can make even an hour of downtime feel like it's not recharged me, you know? And so going into quality of rest, what recharges you? What makes you feel energized after it happens? Is it being with people? Is it not being with people? Is it going outside and doing something manual with your hands and just turning your brain off? Is it going to a sauna, and just having your senses overwhelmed with heat and moisture? understanding the way you respond to different stimuli and pressure points. And then, what are all of the tools at your disposal to be able to rebalance it, if possible?

Long term burnout, I have definitely had to reevaluate entire relationships, if I kept feeling burnt out. like, "this for years is so exhausting. And every time I interact with this person, I am just done. they just take and take and take from me, this connection just takes from me, and hasn't given in a long time." you know? when we notice those longer, overarching patterns. Again, we don't always have control over it. if you are a caregiver to a parent, and that parent is abusive, but also you're their only resource to be able to give them care, it can be complicated. we can't always extricate taxing relationships from our life. But if we do have that option, if we are engaging in optional dynamics that are draining, maybe we start to ask the question of "Do I still want to be in this connection? Or do I still want to be in it in this way? Do I want to reshape it? Do I want to just step back, clear my head, see where things land with some space? And then renegotiate".

But yeah, if there is a degree of, "well, I don't have control over it, I have to be in this situation that is perpetually burning me out". Then I also go into minimum viable product. If I'm showing up to work, how do I not give more than I absolutely have to?

If I'm doing this task, how do I not give more than I absolutely have to? in that way internally, we can not overextend ourselves. if we need to just really be conserving energy, especially if you want to think sustainability, if this is how it's gonna be long term, then how can I really pull myself in and preserve my precious energy? and value it, not just give it away or burn through it at a rate that would just be entirely to my detriment, and might not even have me doing a better job, or have the other person more satisfied?

So those tend to be the different angles that I assess, short and long term, macro and micro, interpersonal but also systemic and structural. In terms of work, in terms of family and community dynamics, legal system, things like that, there will be a lot that is and is not within our control. So whatever is within our control can feel really empowering to get a sense of, and then experiment with adjusting as we can. That's what I'm doing this week anyway.

Okay, next question. "I had a first date with one half of a couple who I've been on a few previous dates with before, but always with both of them. This was the first one with just the woman and not the man. Towards the end, she mentioned she thought he was upset that he wasn't there. I think he sent a text or something. do I get involved and provide reassurance? Or just let them sort out their jealousy problems between them?"

This is tricky, right? when we are interacting with people who are also in relation to each other, we really gotta suss out, what is our business? So if it is – it says you've been on a few dates with them – so what is the nature of what you negotiate with them? Does he talk to you when he's feeling jealous about something that you do? In that case, if he's feeling left out and has something to say to both of you, then yeah, you can talk to him about that, because you are involved. But if he's only going to her and saying that he's upset, then does it feel like that's not really what you are negotiating currently? does that feel like that's not where your relationship is? – by the way, it can be. I can go on one date with a person and negotiate those kinds of things. Right? Because what we feel with each other, how we relate to each other starts the minute we get to know each other. So I think there's often this assumption that only the longer term relationships are worth negotiating, or we have the ability to negotiate. – but yeah, if he has something to say to you, can he say it to you?

Otherwise, if it is just that he didn't like how she handled something, that's between them. Maybe you're involved with the thing that she mishandled for him, but that's not on you. And so, with a triad, if that's what you would call it, but essentially with three people who all date each other, as I've said before, it's four relationships. A-B, B-C, C-A, and A-B-C. so you would negotiate A-B and A-C, and A-B-C. But B-C is between the two of them. maybe you ask more questions like, "Is this something

that I need to get involved with?" Or "is he mad at me?" you know, understanding what is not our business, what we don't want to triangulate. that can really contribute to the health of the triad.

By really delineating who's frustrated by what, what actions are they wanting to have happen differently? Is he only really feeling like he can be vulnerable with her, and he doesn't feel ready to be vulnerable with you? That's, you know, that's fair. So the answer is: it depends. If you want to check in with him, you certainly can. But I do try to avoid triangulation, which can include sending messages between people or taking somebody's accounting of how somebody else feels, and operating on that as fact, without double checking directly with that person. That's how triangulation can also look. So minimizing any of that can avoid the telephone game, where stuff gets lost in translation, or you operate under the assumption of how she represented things. But that's not how he would have represented things. So yeah, if it's on your mind, and it's getting in the way of you being able to hang out with him and you're just stressing about it, then could you ask him and deal with that directly?

But sometimes our partners will just have beef with each other, and we have to let that ride. So I suppose more information is needed on that. But I hope that that's helpful. Navigating the boundaries of that is kind of an ongoing necessity, in more complex relational dynamics like that, especially.

So, next question. "I'm realizing how much I was taught to be self sufficient growing up, to not need things, to be strong." – Same. – "I feel like this attitude keeps coming up in my polycule, people are automatically assuming I'm fine with things, that I don't need consideration, I'm tough, and won't be bothered. In therapy we talked about changing this pattern myself, but I can't change without the group changing too." – 100%. – "Do you have any suggestions on how to start talking about this with them?"

So, that is so clearly expressed. That is so succinct, and I'm wondering if you are able to put it to them the way you just put it to me? Of course, it depends on your comfort level with them, and all of that, everybody has their own sense of what is and is not appropriate. But especially feeling like, "well, they're strong, so they're fine". That is so upsetting. And it does perpetuate – especially as you layer on if they're femme, if they're black or brown – "they can handle it" is such a loaded assumption. I don't know the person's situation who's asking this, but I think either way, if you're tapping into the fact that this was messaging from childhood that is really dysfunctional, and that is actually self harming to continue to be engaged with. That's good information. and especially to see how that pattern reoccurs. my hope is that expressing that vulnerability, saying "I really want to work on this, and also I exist in relation to people. I need to be not okay, how can I tell you I'm not okay? Even if you

think I'm going to be fine, even if I *am* going to be fine, can you just double check with me? because that softness, that care, that lack of presumption that I'm just chill and good, that is loving. just to see that I could be not okay. And that there's room for that."

I think a lot of times people in this position, who get seen as the strong one, can also be "the rock". I've been told that before. "You're my rock, you're this polycule's rock" and I'm like, so where does the rock go to be not okay? And so I've pushed back on that in recent years to be like, "Please, I don't want that framing, I don't want that label, I'm happy to give emotional support, and, that can't just be a fixed status. I want to know that you don't assume that I'm always going to give you emotional labor, or that it's a one way street, because 'I don't need it'."

I wouldn't be necessarily confrontational or attacking. we can easily fall into these patterns. so I wouldn't assume bad intent. If they continue to behave that way after explicitly talking about it, then that's a different story. But I think it's really beautiful that you're recognizing that. And my hope is that yeah, everybody in the group will see it and be proud of you and support you and be like, "Absolutely, let me approach you differently. Let me make decisions differently. Let me not assume any more", you know, so that's my hope for you. If they don't modify or accommodate in that way, that's good information, of how close or how far you might feel comfortable staying. And of course, you can always say no to giving emotional labor, you can always say, "I've talked to you about this, and now I'm upset", it might ultimately lead to some conflict as well. But I 100% support this. Everybody needs space to be soft and vulnerable and not okay. Especially people who were raised to be self-sufficient and like, raise themselves.

Okay, so next question.

"We're polyamorous for five years, but went through a long stretch of only dating each other. Now that I'm dating again, my partner is feeling stressed. She asked if I was going to have sex on a date, but I didn't know and couldn't tell her for sure. We left it open. And I understood it wouldn't be an issue if I did have sex. But then when I came back to her and said I did, she got really upset. is there a way we can prevent this from happening in the future?"

100% This is common, we saw this everywhere after lock downs, that there was this lack of continued engagement with other people in the mix, you know, people would just be functionally monogamous, or in a more contained polycule. And, it can happen at any point, right? I actually date a lot less than I used to, because as you get older and know yourself more, I don't know, my standards are higher, which means fewer people meet them, which means I'm not dating as much. And so that

can be how – no matter how long you're practicing – it becomes a bit of, “Oh, I haven't stretched this muscle in a while” once your partner's out dating, once they're ramping up with people, getting closer to people, and having firsts. Having first sexual experiences, first big moments or milestones. That can make us question, no matter how long you're doing this, no matter how secure you are, it can make us question, “what else might change? will I still be okay with this new change, with this new element?” And that can be humbling for longer term people. But I think it's also just the nature of being human, that once we feel safe and happy, We don't want that to ever change. So it can raise the stakes.

I think in terms of this point, she wanted to know “are you going to have sex?” And of course you don't know that information, right? So it's tough, because, “well, I don't know yet. I can't tell you that. this would involve the other person weighing in on what they think about that”. I like to plan for spontaneity. I've talked about this before, but I like to plan for “well, what if the most extreme version of things happened? If I had sex tonight, how would you feel? How can I take care of you?” Not asking permission, but saying, “How can I love on you? What are you worried about? What are you stressed about?” A lot of times people just want their expectations managed. So maybe it's not even that sex would happen. It's just they don't want to be surprised after the fact. I can definitely relate to being on that end of things, too.

So if there's this plan, like, “okay, let's assume sex is gonna happen. How do I love on you?” and all of that, then if sex doesn't happen, that's fine. That's rarely going to be upsetting. But if the inverse happens, and you're like, “oh, no, it's just a date” or “I don't think that's going to happen” and that it does, that can be experienced a lot differently. Sometimes people experience that even like cheating, or they get this vague sense of distress and discomfort, but they know intellectually that you didn't do anything wrong. And you didn't do anything wrong. It's just the vagueness, the blurriness, that lack of knowing what to expect. That can still not contribute to a sense of safety or security in non monogamy. So, yeah, “how can we build security with this? How can I remind you that you're safe and that this new change is not a threat?” I've got other videos on that as well, I think in my last Live, we talked a lot about proving fears wrong. So you can also go to that video, to hear more about that.

But the good news is, once you do the change, if it keeps being fine, if you reach a new sort of normal and plateau, and there is no functional disruption to your relationship, they actually are safe and you both are good, then it won't feel like a threat anymore. So it's hardest in the beginning, when you don't yet know where all the chips are gonna land. And that's why we give more tender love and care to each other during periods of change. So that's my thoughts on how to prevent that from happening in the future, whatever the future version of that might be.

Okay. So the next question. "I'm financially linked with one of my partners, but we don't want that to negatively impact other relationships. What are things to consider or talk about that can help avoid that?"

That is a great question. Because in adulthood, we often need to, or want to, get more interdependent with people. there can be a sharing of finances, maybe you got married for one reason or another. And so there are also assets that are legally theirs, somebody has more power, and especially if you're working towards an anti hierarchical, or, you know, trying to rebalance the power structure as much as possible, while still living in hierarchical systems. This is important to talk about, because money matters when we're talking about power dynamics. so, in terms of what to think about and talk about, I think about power dynamics broadly. Is everybody on board to be very frank about money? And when I talk about power, I also mean in terms of class, and access to resources and stuff.

So we can see this in long distance relationships, if somebody just has less money than somebody else, and traveling to meet each other is part of your relationship. Does the person with more money travel more often? do they pay disproportionately, in percentage of ability rather than a 50/50 split? because a 50/50 split is not always equal, if there is class disparity, if there's income disparity, or even just the weight of expenses. if two people make the same amount, and even were raised in a similar class environment, but one lives in a rural space, and one is in a city space, then they might just have more pressure in the city, high cost of living and stuff.

So if we can just be dispassionately candid about what we do and don't have the ability to do. It's not always so easy, right? Because we reveal our own internalized classism, shame around money. That can often be gendered, as well. Sometimes men feel more pressure, that they're not good at being a man if they don't have money, it can really be loaded. So I don't want to say that flippantly like, "just talk about it", but if you notice that you're holding your breath, or you don't want to say it, or you're scared, you feel shame or you feel anxiety, like "oh, no, what if I'm going to be perceived in a different way?" That is all good information. Then can that maybe be talked about first?

I've done that before, where I'm like, "I don't even know what to ask, I just don't want to accidentally hurt you. So I want to create an environment where you can speak up, because I won't always clock everything that might be insensitive". if I suggest we go out to eat somewhere, will you default have stress about that if it's a higher price thing, and then that just didn't occur to me? You know what I mean? in all the little and big ways. How can prices and things like that hit different? If I invite you to a



place and I know you're living paycheck to paycheck, do I say "hey, I want to invite you *and* treat you to this thing"? Do I want to include in my invitation that acknowledgement that I'm not expecting a certain outcome from you or I don't want this to be a stressful thing for you? So that tends to be a thing that just across the board I want to talk about, because everybody is usually in a somewhat different situation.

But when it comes to being financially interdependent with other people, then power dynamics are a bit more complex. So if I want to buy a big gift for a partner, if I have a joint bank account with one of my other partners, does that mean they get to weigh in on the gift that I get and how much I spend on it? that's when it can get really tricky. If it stays unspoken, that can get messy. So there are a lot of different ways that people navigate trying to rebalance power in that way. sometimes people will open up a separate account just for dating, just for dating and gifts. Or if they have a couple of long term relationships, I've seen people open up separate accounts just for each relationship, so that they are taking their assets and distributing them. And they don't feel like each partner has a say in how they spend that account. But there's also just an acknowledgement, "can we all sit and talk about it?" because sometimes it won't be possible to rebalance power. If you're raising a kid with somebody, and the kid is the priority, and you want to go on vacation with somebody. Well, in addition to planning logistics, maybe the price of the vacation now is weighing on your co parent, because "what if we can't afford a new backpack, and nice shoes for the kid?" you know? These are complex conversations that we want to always stay open to having. And see, "does the decision have a ripple effect in the polycule?"

It's not that there's only one right way to do it, we just want to be able to all voice our concerns, our fears. When it's all on the table of what we want to have happen, what our current situation is, and what might be the downsides of what we want to have happen, then we can brainstorm. Are there 12 different ways this could go down? Which one would be the best option? We want to avoid binary, all or nothing thinking, because often we can get creative. We can come together as a community, we can come together as a polycule and be like, "Oh, actually, I could chip in with this", or "I have extra this month, so I would love to gift that to you". You know what I mean? We don't always need to figure it out alone in our heads. Actually, I would encourage not figuring it out alone in your head.

So naming the power dynamics, "hey, this is the current situation, I appreciate that it could get tricky". Especially for people who might be in a more disadvantaged or in a less powerful position. Do they have a way to say something? legit, not just lip service of, "oh, speak up if you feel anything" – Do they actually feel comfortable? they could say "This feels weird and stressful to me"? Okay, then you're good. Because we don't

have to predict every possible way that this could become a problem. We want to name it, name whatever we see currently, and then also have a plan in place for when it inevitably pops up again. And the person or people with less power being able to speak up.

I do also want to say when it comes to financial power dynamics, sometimes – I would say often – people who have more resources might feel entitled to more decision-making power. And if that's not what we're doing here, can we talk about that? Because, okay, what if one person in the polycule is rolling in it and generous? And is like, "I'd love to help you with this, and you with that, and help your tuition" etc. Okay, if they're helping you with tuition, that's very generous. "Thank you for balancing things out in that way. That's so great. I feel loved, I feel supported... Do you get to weigh in on what classes I take? because you see this as an investment?" You know, "Are there strings attached? Are there strings attached with money?"

I've literally walked away from entire relationships before that had cushy advantages, because I was like, "I don't like this, I don't like this. I don't like how this is being wielded. I would rather not have the nice perk, than be subject to you feeling like you can dictate what I do now with this perk that you've given me. because that's not actually aid or care. It's a power move". You know, it's not always poorly intentioned. Sometimes people can go on autopilot, and make these assumptions because we live under capitalism, and we've been taught to treat money and assets this way, that you get entitled to more because you have more. But if we actually consciously want to build something different, then that goes all the way down to even the tiniest decisions.

A partner of mine just went on a trip, and they went on a date on that trip. And because they're low income, I was supporting them and giving them some money for spending and stuff. And that was all negotiated in a way that felt really good. And also, I'm not going to tell them what is and is not okay for them to do on the date. Right? That's what I mean by power dynamics. It can be insidious, and it could be tempting. "I'll give you this if..." What is the "if"?

If it's, "I'll give you this if I don't feel punished, I'll give you this if you don't abuse me", sure. But if it's "I'll give you this, if you do what I want, over there or with them. If this plays out the way I want it to"? No. Hard pass on that. And it can be humbling, because money can be power, and power is tempting. But we really want to be intentional and proactive. If we can take the taboo out of it to the best of our ability, and just fucking name it, then that makes it that much more likely we're going to find a solution that everybody still feels like there's equity, even if we are coming to the table with different assets and stuff like that.

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I also think it's really important – Okay, I guess this is a longer topic than I anticipated – but I think it's really important... if we are moving away from thinking that money is a superior power to other things (it is power, it is. we can't function without paying rent, without paying for food, it is survival) But also, what are all of the other kinds of contribution? If I'm saying that I don't really subscribe to a hyper capitalist value system, then am I also valuing emotional labor? Am I valuing domestic labor? Is somebody creative and organizing an event, and then if I'm contributing money to the event, do I see those as equal contributions? Do I see us as all giving? Even if under this system, they are not awarded with dollars or euro or whatever, even if they're not awarded with money for their work, do I still see that as work?

That can be really helpful in reframing, we are all giving in different ways. We don't want to reduce it to a transaction like, “well, I'm giving this amount which equals that amount”, I don't keep score in that way. I think that that's counterproductive. But I do want to validate, “Okay, what are all of the contributions?” and valuing all of those contributions equally, regardless of if the world does. Because I think teachers and nurses should be paid way more than Elon Musk, you know what I mean? So I don't think it's just. I don't think it's fair. And I don't want to perpetuate that in my smaller one-to-one dynamics if that is optional, you know?but it's very easy to do if we fall into autopilot. So that's my little thing to say about that.

Okay. hello to everybody. If you have more questions or thoughts, however big or small, you can drop that in the chat.

Okay, next question that was emailed to me. “You made a couple of videos this week on cults, it really hit home for me, former LDS. I don't like to use the word cult because I don't think my situation was that bad. But can you talk more about coming out of that experience to where you are today?”

Um, sure, let me think real quick, if I actually have energy to talk about cults still, because I did make a couple of videos this week on Instagram that were about cults. I do really want to be an advocate in that space, but there's a reason it's not my primary platform, there's a reason that I really have finite amounts of energy to be able to give to that, because it does tax me to bring up those memories, to kind of go to that place. I do still have in my own mind – like this person is saying, they don't want to use the word cult because they don't think it was that bad. I'm not going to say you should or shouldn't use any particular label – but I also have that language in my mind, that I can literally describe what happened and go through the checklist of a cult, and it matches everything, and I'll be like, “no, no, no, it wasn't that bad, though”. If you're a victim of abuse in any kind of way, it can be easy to perpetuate that yourself, in your mind and in tiny ways. so that can be exhausting to engage with... Also, this week, the cult video got posted to a neo Nazi forum. And so that was,

honestly that's why I'm burned out. I even have a partner moderating my shit but it becomes a temporary full time job, however briefly, there was a day or two of it, of moderating being a full time job, because it was so awful. And that weighs on you, you know? I really appreciate all of the love and the support and all of the people, like this person saying "I'm reevaluating my experience, was it a cult?" That's why I want to be visible, is because other people's visibility helped me name what happened to me. Just like with anything. But if you're public, if you're publicly visible, that does mean you're visible to everybody, including the worst people in the world.

So I will speak on this briefly, I do think I have a little bit of energy in my tank for it. Um, so yeah, alternatives to cult are "high control group," "militant or fundamentalist group", whatever, if all the other things apply, that's all you need. The label is less important, in my opinion.

So talking about coming out of that experience, to where I am today. I finally was willing to Google "cult recovery therapist". It was 12 years after I left, or maybe like 11 years after I left, and I was finally willing to see, "Is there someone who specializes in this? Can I afford them if they're not on my insurance?" when I was looking into actually getting serious about unpacking this, describing what happened, clocking that it's abuse. Like with any abusive dynamic, it's not quote-unquote "all bad". You're not going to look back on that and be like, "they were monsters 24/7", because if they were, it would be that much easier to leave. there's often a lot of love and care, or good things they taught you, or things you like about yourself that you learned from them, that's going to be all in the mix *with* the behavioral control, the information and thought control, the emotional manipulation and control... it is subtle, and it is death-by-a-thousand-cuts. It's not going to be one event, usually.

And so that's why it's cPTSD, chronic...PTSD? I forget what the C stands for. But it's basically trauma from constant repetition of upsetting things, and of misuse of a power dynamic. So coming out of it, I was finally willing to ask for help with it. I really only had five main memories that I thought were the problem, that I wanted to deal with. I was like, "I want to deal with these five things that happened over the six years I was there" during formative years, from 15 to 21. "only five things happened that whole time that were a problem". And as we dug in, I was like, "oh... Oh."

So it's an onion, and internalizing that people were abusive was really painful. Because I had to accept the complexity of abusers, I had to accept the reality that I loved and missed and mourned people who abused me. That is, I think, the case for most people. That's why we don't leave, right? There's always a reason for the most part – I don't, it's always tough to speak broadly – but that's why I didn't leave, is because I was like, "Well, this is ultimately a net good". And by that point, they had convinced me that I would die if I leave. If I left. Non hyperbolically, I thought I would

die. So it was a process that I've been actively working on for five years. I left 15 years ago, I've been working on it actively for five years, which is why I'm only now in the last year or so really talking about it, because I feel like I'm in a place of being enough on the other side of a lot of it. So just, patience. Finding other people who relate to you, who can validate you, who can say "that was not okay", is how it also worked for me.

And going slow with getting back into building community. See, that's the thing, is a lot of high control groups capitalize on the fact that you're lonely, and you want community. Usually that comes back. You leave, and then you're dead to them, and you lose everybody you loved overnight, you have this mass trauma and mass abandonment and you're mourning. I was mourning 200 people, but specifically – I wrote out a list – it's 30 people that felt like siblings or surrogate parents, 30 close relationships that I would say were primary relationships. I was grieving all of them at once. In addition to that, it rippled out, they were my employer, they were my educator, they were my plans on a Friday night, they were everything.

So, when it comes to needing community (because it goes to instant loneliness) I started slow, with one person at a time, and they definitely didn't know each other. That felt safe. I have a friend over here and a friend over here. I still don't like being on group chats. Or if I go up to an event, and there's 20 people all sitting together, I'm like, "no, no, no, no, no" even just the optics of that, gets me in a headspace that isn't going to be relaxing. So, be nice to yourself about that, because there can be a lot of really subtle, frustratingly commonplace triggers that a lot of abuse survivors might not relate to, because it's the fact that a group is congregating itself, or a group is doing a ritual itself. I cannot go to exercise classes, because one person is saying a command and everyone's doing it. And I'm like, "get me out of here", you know? because it's too real. So. I think finding people, at least a couple of people, that you can at any point say that shit to, really helps. Because it can make you feel really lonely, if you don't have people who know that about you. If they're just like, "why are they acting so weird? they can't even hang. They can't even go to an exercise class". We need people who know at least intellectually, and they're like, "How can I help you? How can I support you? How can I remind you you're safe? You don't have to do anything you don't want to do."

We need people who keep reinforcing our own autonomy. That if you feel compelled to say, "tell me what to do, what should I do?" they will gently say, "let me help you find what you already know you want to do." that tends to be my approach with mentorship or with peer support, like, "let me just ask you a lot of questions. Because I think you already know in there somewhere, what you want to do. but let me help you find it." Because I will not and cannot do what was done to me, which is to have an agenda for your life.

And so definitely if people are militant, black or white thinking, tell you how you should be? fuck that. we're done with that. people who encourage your self exploration, encourage your independence and autonomy, especially partners, especially people who we bring the closest. We heal in relationships, as well. So there's a lot of healing that I was not able to do until I was willing to be closer to people again. And to get ready to do that I had to start doing trauma recovery work with professionals. So that's as much as I think I have energy to give. But, hey, you're a patron, reach out to me. We can have one-to-one chats as well, if you relate to any part of this. Even if you just had this with one person, because you dated one person who was really controlling, it can be very similar in some ways, you know? So I'm around for peer support for any of that. You're definitely not alone. And if you're ever thinking, "Oh, it wasn't that bad." Does it have to be that bad? Does it have to meet a standard of victimhood in order to be taken seriously? Or is that just the norm that they gave you? Was that just a way that they taught you to suppress your own needs and suppress your own reactions to things because "it's not that bad"? Any amount of it being bad, any amount of it feeling Not OK, have you feeling queasy, have you feeling disempowered, have you feeling insecure? That matters. That matters. So let's talk about it. Let's not negate our own reactions to things, even if you perceive it to be small. It's there. So it matters.

Okay. All right. Yeah, I could not do cults as a main topic. Funnily enough, I do encounter a lot of – I mean, it might just be a self perpetuating thing because I talk about it so more people come to me – but I do encounter a lot of people in polyamorous spaces who were in high control groups at one point. And I think there's a common thread, I've mentioned this before, we're drawn to relationship structures that both encourage community, they encourage us not putting all of our eggs in one basket, but encourage decentralized power, especially with relationship anarchy. I don't want anybody telling me what to do ever again. I was in a 24/7 D/S dynamic non-consensually. I'm good. Been there, done that. Not into it. So it can, in my experience, sometimes attract survivors to have this build-your-own-relationship structure. Not following social construct rules, in terms of what you should do. We're done with shoulds.

Anyway. Okay. Next question. "You recently made a video on veto power. But what about when a partner basically says you'll have a consequence, they'll leave you, like a threat or an ultimatum? Technically, it's not veto, but it feels like it is. How do you deal with that?"

Yeah. When I did a Live, that question came up as well, I did a Live on Instagram last week or the week before. Okay, so veto power, that conversation really can't be had comprehensively unless we – again – talk about power dynamics, right? If somebody has shared finances with you, if they are co parenting with you, if they financially

support you, that matters. If they are unhappy with what you're doing over there. So this kind of loops back around. So technically, "I'm not going to tell you what to do. But I might have a direct consequence, I'm going to pull away from this relationship, which means I'm pulling away your funding". So now we're not just talking about me as a partner being in distress or having frustration about someone you're dating, we're talking about me as someone with power over your situation, threatening to change your situation dramatically. And we want to have an honest conversation about both of those things. And is that power deliberately being wielded in a manipulative way? Maybe it's not intentional, but that's what's effectively happening. And so if we call it out, do they say, "okay, how can I step away from this and work with you so this isn't just removing all of your support overnight?" how can we mitigate this? Because we don't want to say, "well, they're not allowed to leave you." That is within anybody's ability at any point. But if it is punitive, if it is reactive, if they remove the relationship and now have caused harm as a result, then yeah, it's going to be coercive to an extent. And hopefully, they will be able to name that.

So yeah, they can leave at any time. And that is a choice that you can make. I've had long term relationships say, "it's either me or them". And I'm like, "I don't want to date somebody who would give me that ultimatum. So you're kind of opting out yourself. I don't do that. So I guess go? That sucks. I wish that you wouldn't, but I'm not doing that". That can be a turning point for people in terms of what they feel entitled to be able to tell their partners to do, what status they believe they should have as a fixed setting in their relationships. But it is not so simple as like – unless you're in high school or something, and you don't have a whole lot of power to your name yet and then it literally is just a breakup. But even then, there's social dynamics, "do they have power in the social group, and they can spread gossip and get people to shun you?" That all matters. Can we talk about it, and how me stepping away from this relationship or vice versa – if that is what it comes to – how that then impacts this part of life and impacts that part of life?" if we're really not trying to be punitive, if we're really not trying to veto or coerce, then can we talk about ways to minimize harm in those spaces, or to slowly dial back or to proactively tell our friends, "please don't shun them? this is just a difference of opinion". Can we offset that potential harm? Because if not, then that becomes a bit clearer if they intended to, you know, manipulate you.

We can't promise that a breakup won't negatively impact you. But like, I live with a partner, if I was going to leave them, I don't want them to now struggle with housing. So it would be two separate conversations. "I no longer want to be in this relationship in this way. So what is the plan, that you are not now in crisis?" You know what I mean?

If ultimately that is an ultimatum that is coming your way, you maybe reevaluate if that is the kind of dynamic you want to be in. It does set a precedent that now they can just say, "I'm gonna leave you, so do what I want." Do you really want that to be possible? And on the other side of it, if a partner says "my partner is making me, it's kind of an ultimatum", it's like, "well, but you could say that's not acceptable. You could say 'I don't want to'". I do want to address somebody who wants veto power, but ultimately, the hinge partner who goes along with that request, is the one who has made the actionable decision there. And so, be mad at that person if they're leaving you because their partner said that they need to. it's like, "You're grown" right? like "you, you're deciding this, you're deciding that that relationship is a priority over this one. So say that. Own that."

So yeah, it's not so black and white. I think that is why some people can get really mixed up and say, "Well, what's a boundary? And what's an ultimatum?" Because when it comes to leaving a relationship, it is kind of both. And also, it depends how you do it. Parsing "what would do harm?" versus "what do I just personally not want to be involved in anymore, but I don't want that to now pull the rug out from under you and cause harm" – You know, "maybe we're both grieving this, but it's what needs to happen. And also, we don't want either person to fall into despair". That's very different than leveraging power to have plausible deniability. "I didn't ask you to, you could have walked away at any time..." Going back to the cult shit, they would always say, "there's the door, you can leave at any time". Meanwhile, they were in charge of my money, my car keys, who I lived with, that's so disingenuous. I cannot leave at any time, this is a huge loss if I walk away. They would leverage "you're grown, you're over 18. Now you can leave. And so if you don't leave, therefore, you're accepting this treatment". And I did. for three more years after that, until I was finally ready to just leave all of it behind. But ideally, if somebody is engaging in that kind of fuckery, then if we get clarity on that, then we can see, "Do I even want this person close to me? and who do I have in my corner, who can support me if push comes to shove, that can help me mitigate my own fallout if they actually are trying to harm me or abuse me?"

I talked about abuse a little bit more than I anticipated. But that is unfortunately common in any kind of relating. And it can happen a lot in polyamory, in this gray area where people don't feel like they have a roadmap for how to build a relationship. They don't know what's okay to ask, or reasonable to have asked them. And bad actors – even if they don't think they're doing it – can fall into these patterns of wielding power over each other. And so the more that we can actually be conscious, come online and be conscious of who's pulling which strings, who has the ability to pull which strings, to make which decisions. That gets factored into how we are resolving conflict, however small, however little



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So. Okay, well, that hour flew by. Thank you. We had a more intimate turnout today. But I do always have a lot of views on on the Lives after the fact. I'm really happy that this kind of setting is accessible to people. I just don't have the energy to do it every month, but I try to do every month and a half or so.

Anyway, if there's anything that I said today that you have more questions about, or I wasn't nuanced enough about, or I missed an entire angle of something, definitely reach out. Maybe I can make a longer form video on it. I'm always taking requests for longer form videos. I want this space to be supporting you, because you pay my bills. And as always, I have one-to-one video options available. And pen pals if you want to talk more directly, and we can get a little bit more specific about your situation.

Otherwise, I hope that you have a beautiful rest of your day and your week, and I will see you next time. Bye

xxx