

Sexual self-care

Guest: Rafaella Fiallo

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Jaia Bristow - [00:00:09]

Welcome back to the Relationship Super Conference. My name is Jaia Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. And today I am delighted to be joined by Rafaella Fiallo.

Welcome, Rafaella.

Rafaella Fiallo

Hello. Thank you so much for having me.

Jaia Bristow

Thank you for being here. I'm really excited about the conversation we're about to be having.

So, Rafaella Smith-Fiallo is a licensed sex and trauma therapist and sexual liberation activist who will guide you to reimagine pleasure throughout your journey of healing trauma, increasing relationship intimacy and releasing shame.

She owns Healing Exchange, a therapy private practice, and cofounded Afrosexology, a sex positive, pleasure based sexuality education business.

Her work has been featured in numerous media outlets like *HuffPost*, *Teen Vogue*, *Vibe Magazine*, *Broadly* and other online and print publications.

So, Rafaella, I'm excited about this conversation where we're going to be talking about sexual self-care. So to get us started, what exactly is sexual self-care?

Rafaella Fiallo

Yes. Well, I define sexual self-care as the actions that we take to preserve or improve our sexual wellbeing. And it's so important that we talk about this because oftentimes we, in this conversation about liberation and autonomy and consent, things like sexual self esteem, sexual self advocacy all are built into the way we take care of our sexual selves and our sexual health.

And so we can see a really strong correlation between the amount of pleasure that we're able to derive from sexual experiences, and not just from sex itself, but in the communication, in the relationship building, into self advocacy. And so being able to talk about sexual self-care and how to improve it is really important to living the pleasurable lives that we want to live.

Jaia Bristow - [00:02:00]

Brilliant. And so, you talk about sexual wellbeing and being in touch with our sexuality. Do you want to say a few words about that?

Rafaella Fiallo

Oh, absolutely. It's one of my favorite things to talk about.

When it comes to sexual wellbeing, I like to look at it from different components. So first, really talking about understanding our bodies. What does it mean to have command over our needs, being able to express ourselves in a way that feels authentic and amongst people who know will honor that and help support us in our journey of sexual liberation. And so taking care of our body from literally listening to our body. What messages are we receiving from our body?

But also, it's important to remember that there is a lot of static in the air when we're trying to get these messages. There's a lot of interference, maybe actually is a better word. And so being able to stifle out all of those really oppressive messages, miseducation, lack of support, to then come together and say, this is exactly what I need, what I want in my life. And this is how I am going to honor my needs through my body.

Jaia Bristow

And when you talk about the miseducation that happens, are you talking about the culture around sex education in general? Where does the miseducation come from?

Rafaella Fiallo

That's a good question, because when I said it, I was thinking of just in general, how systematically there's a lot of intention behind making sure we don't get the information that we need, not only in the realm of sex and sexual health and sexuality, but just about the power that we have within ourselves.

And then on another level, yes, I'm talking about lack of education regarding sexual health. Abstinence only education where it is really more about inciting fear into people about, oh, if you do this, this bad thing is going to happen. Or you're a bad person if you enjoy this or if you behave this way. And then also just a lot of things that are not backed by science when it comes to sexuality.

I've worked in the sex education field with teenagers, people in junior high, adults, college age. And I've just heard so many things that are just incorrect that were actually passed down by family members as well. So I don't want to put it all on school because some things are just cultural in terms of what we learn from one another, and that's passed down from generation to generation. And so just looking at all of the sources where we get our education from and where we get these messages from is really important.

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. I think you're touching upon something really important there. And in so many cultures sex is just so taboo, and so people aren't talking about it or when they do it's all very hush hush. And so we're not getting the information we need to have healthy and positive sexual relationships but also relationship with ourself when it comes to our sexuality.

Rafaella Fiallo

And our cultural values definitely influence the way that we practice our sexuality, the way that we engage in exploring our sexual selves and even our attitudes that we have about sex and sexuality. Which we know that that can then influence the legal world to write the laws that we may pursue or implement in our communities based on our culture and our values.

Jaia Bristow - [00:05:40]

Absolutely. So what are some things that are useful to know then, to be able to make informed decisions?

Rafaella Fiallo

Well, the first thing I think that's really important is to know where to get medically accurate, sex positive sex education. Where are your sources? Oftentimes right now it looks like online. But there are also some really great resources.

For example, I used to live in Missouri, and there was this organization with Planned Parenthood called TASH, which was a student based organization. It's like Teen Advocates for Sexual Health is actually what it stands for. And so Planned Parenthood was training or educating these teenagers to be more sexually aware and educated so that they could be advocates in their own high schools when it comes to sex and sexuality. So having resources and people available that you know you can go to and get correct information from is part of the process.

Oftentimes, kids are left to search things on the Internet by themselves because of this maybe negative connotation or silence around sexuality, they may not know that they can go to an adult or they get the message that they can't go to people in their family. And so they're left to their own devices. So knowing that that is true and knowing that not all caregivers and parents are going to be open to being a sex positive influence, how can we make sure that there are more reliable and accurate resources for people when they need them?

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. And that's one of the reasons it is so important as an adult to be open, to have these conversations, to provide these resources for people who want access to them. And especially in cultures where you're talking about abstinence culture, where it doesn't necessarily work. It just means that people feel like they don't have access to resources or can't ask an adult.

And I remember with my family we've had a lot of conversations when I was a teenager. I actually sat my parents down to have the talk with them when I started being sexually active, but they were really responsive, and I felt safe to be able to do that. So I think that's such an important point you're making.

Rafaella Fiallo

Absolutely. I love to hear that that was your experience. And that you were able to say, hey, I am having these experiences, and I would like to talk to you about that. And is this a space for me? And the response that you got was, yes, you can talk to us. That's beautiful.

Jaia Bristow

And I feel very lucky to have had that because I know it's not the case for everyone. And I think that it is largely due to parents making me feel safe enough to come and approach them with that in general.

So what are some other limits to sexual wellbeing?

Rafaella Fiallo

One thing I think we don't talk enough about is this conversation around consent, autonomy and boundaries. So often I've worked with people who just did not feel like they had a voice to advocate for themselves or to speak up about what their needs, their limits, their pleasures, their turn ons, their turn offs are. And so they felt like they're in a position to just take what they get, in silence usually

without someone to go to to say, hey, I had this really either unsatisfying sexual experience or problematic or violent, whatever the experience was.

And so creating these dialogues, I think oftentimes when we talk about consent and boundaries, it is all about how the person who wants to exert or communicate their boundaries all of the onus is on them. All of the responsibility is on them to communicate correctly, at the right time to the person or to the people. As opposed to the person who may need to listen to the boundary.

So I often tell my clients, if you don't really have a problem with boundary setting or expressing consent, it's more likely that you've experienced negative responses when exerting a boundary. And so your mind and body wants to avoid that feeling because our bodies are invested in keeping us safe. And if conversations around boundaries have ever felt unsafe, it makes sense that our response has been to appease someone else or dismiss our own needs.

And so a conversation we need to have more often is one where we are talking to folks about honoring others 'no', and managing their feelings of rejection. So all of the work should not lie in the hands of a person setting a boundary. The receiver absolutely has a responsibility in managing their emotions and being respectful when someone says, hey, not tonight. Not this way. I want to stop now. This is not feeling good. I like this instead. Do this.

And one way that I try to encourage people to practice that is by doing it themselves. So if someone says, hey, no, I can't come to the party. You don't say why not? Well, you're lame for not coming. It's, well, thanks for letting me know. Maybe we will see you next time. Instead of trying to add that pressure on to people. So how can we use these opportunities to say, I hear you. I see you. I honor what you're telling me, and that's okay.

And when we can do that for other people, we're also telling ourselves well, they took that well, to mean, I can do that with them as well. They can say no to me. So if I say no to them, I know that they will honor that. And we just have to continue practicing and modeling that behavior for one another.

Jaia Bristow - [00:11:19]

I think that's so important. And I think that's a really amazing distinction that you're making around people who are able to set boundaries and people who aren't necessarily able to receive them. So practicing and modeling receiving boundaries as well as setting boundaries is super important.

And for people watching and listening who are interested on this topic of boundaries and consent, I recommend checking out Dr. Sophia's talk on self-consent which is really fantastic on trying to understand what your needs are and how to then be able to set boundaries. And also Justin Hancock's talk on consent.

But what I'm interested in this conversation with you, Rafaella, is again, this receiving boundaries. And if you have other tips on modeling and practicing, I think that's a brilliant example you gave about when someone doesn't want to come out, for example, or cancels a plan. What are some other tips on how we can receive boundaries?

Rafaella Fiallo

Well, often we say that sex education should start as soon as possible. So if you are a caregiver or if you are entrusted with any kiddos in your life you can start now with them. Because so often the autonomy of children is just not respected and honored. And so I think that is where we start.

So when we're talking about sex education for small kids, no, we're not talking about positions and maybe not even, you know, pleasure points and stuff like that. We're talking about consent, we're talking about body awareness. We're talking about communication and feelings and emotions. And sometimes kids, they're just seen as just little people who don't get to speak up for themselves, who don't know anything about themselves in the world. And there are just so many opportunities for

them to be in conversation with us as adults. And we have the opportunity to model listening to them, setting boundaries with them, helping them set boundaries with us.

And so if a kid is not wanting to share a toy, do they have to share a toy every single time? Can we be teaching the other kid like, hey, they said that they didn't want to share right now. Maybe we can revisit this later or you can redirect them to play with a different toy. Instead of saying, oh, you have to share this toy right now, or you have to hug this auntie or you have to stop crying and that didn't really hurt. So we are doing a lot of silencing and dismissing in those situations.

And I think that is part of sex education as well, because we're talking about consent and setting boundaries, and we're modeling better communication.

Jaia Bristow - [00:13:55]

I love that idea. How early it can start modeling behavior around consent, autonomy and boundaries, and that it's not always sexual. It can start as early on as playing with toys or hugging relatives for children. And that then will play out within our adult lives, in our sexual relationships, but also in all different types of relating.

Rafaella Fiallo

Yes. And it starts out with them exploring their own bodies. How many times have you heard a story where a kiddo had their hands in their pants and someone slapped their hand and said, no, you can't do that. As opposed to saying, I'm sure that probably feels good or it's so soothing, but in the living room is not the place where we do that. Maybe have some private time.

And so being able to say your body is yours and you get to explore it the way that you want to. And then you can also insert conversations that include, and other people can't touch you here. And these are the names of your parts so that you're aware. If something happens, they can talk to you and say this happened to me.

So many different opportunities. I think sometimes parents and caregivers and adults we tend to over sexualize kiddos and experiences that they have. When for them it can literally just be, it is curiosity. It is learning their body. It is self soothing. And we are putting our adult experiences onto some of those experiences.

Jaia Bristow

And that's how so much shame and trauma gets inherited. I remember myself, the shame I felt as a child when I was exploring and the shame I felt from my parents or other adults being like, you don't do that. And I was like, and again and not understanding because as a child, like you say, it's just curiosity. We haven't learned to sexualize our bodies at that age. And so I think that's such an important distinction you're making. And I really appreciate you bringing that in.

Rafaella Fiallo

Yes. And I think having this conversation more and letting parents know that. One of my favorite things from a dear friend of mine, she said, discomfort is not danger. I use it for everything. Because we have to learn to just sit with our feelings and emotions and knowing that we are not under threat at the moment, but we may feel very uncomfortable. Maybe that is the sign that we need to address some things regarding the sex education or sexual experiences that we've received. Maybe we need to go out and work with a sex therapist or just get more sex education because something is coming up for us. And then we do not want to project that onto the kiddos in our lives.

Jaia Bristow - [00:16:38]

Absolutely. I think that's so important.

And so, I'm also curious, because we're talking about a lot of the time, the shame that adults project onto kids is shame that they've also inherited from the previous generation or from their parents or guardians or other adults in their life. And so I think it's so important to learn to be comfortable and do the work on oneself before then, to undo that pattern as it were.

Rafaella Fiallo

Yeah.

Jaia Bristow

I'm curious as well in that, you're talking about discomfort around sexuality. And for me, an important distinction is the difference between discomfort and unsafety. And so for those who have experienced violent, painful, traumatic sexual experiences and/or abuse, how does one reclaim one's sexuality? How does one work through that?

Rafaella Fiallo

I love this topic because it can be, it is so big. There's so many different ways that we can talk about beginning this journey of healing, of processing, of being curious about our experiences in a way that we can say we're trying to reclaim our sexuality.

And so one thing I always want to say is just to keep in mind that there isn't necessarily an end goal of like, oh, I've addressed all the triggers, and I'm never going to be triggered again. Or I don't feel badly about myself sometimes or my body. Or I don't have these type of experiences that I have no idea where they come from. Because very often our body does things and we're like, how is that connected? And we have no idea.

So going back to the brief conversation we had about shame, working through how that may show up and knowing that it may continue to show up. However, the more that we process and the more that we work with our body, we can have a new relationship with those experiences that may not be as destabilizing as it once was.

So that's the first part, it's just remembering that this is a lifelong journey because we are alive and we're always going to be dealing with something, but we can start to get the tools together to better manage it and to maybe change the meaning of things, especially if we've taken a lot of blame and shame based on our experiences, how to release that and insert more pleasure and autonomy.

Jaia Bristow

And do you have any practical tips on how to release shame and become more connected with pleasure and autonomy?

Rafaella Fiallo

The first thing that I want to say is that everyone in the world deserves pleasure in all of the forms that it exists in. The way that I practice pleasure politics, specifically, is just an awareness that pleasure exists in everything, but it's up to us to see it and to engage with it.

So in this moment, talking to you, I could slow down a little bit and deep breathe and notice the beautiful background that you have and just be really present with you and notice what I'm feeling in my body. Even looking at the design behind you, if that's something that I'm into, can be a pleasurable experience visually.

And so oftentimes pleasure can be another word for sex, sexual intimacy and things like that. So I'm working with survivors to really expand their definition of pleasure to include all of the instances that they have access to, how they derive pleasure from it in terms of enjoyment and playfulness. And excitement is part of pleasure. And we know that with trauma survivors, sometimes all of that goes out of the window. There could be depression and anxiety that makes it hard to enjoy life, to enjoy community, to enjoy being in a room full of people, especially if you're hyper vigilant.

So giving back that opportunity to redefine for themselves what pleasure is can be really empowering because it doesn't just mean sex anymore, if it ever did. But if it didn't, fine, we're still going to expand it to mean, how can I find pleasure in the environment that I'm in? Even if it is, I am breathing in and I'm in control of that breath right now, and I can find pleasure from that.

So you deserve pleasure just because you exist and you have the right to find it in all the ways that it may be present around you.

Jaia Bristow - [00:21:30]

That's so powerful. And I really appreciate that distinction between pleasure and sex because not everyone does derive pleasure from sex. And there are so many other ways to derive pleasure and define pleasure. And the idea of pleasure is multisensorial and sights and backgrounds and senses and slowing down and coming back into the body again and again is always such a useful tool in so many areas. I love that you're bringing that in.

Rafaella Fiallo

Yes. So the next thing I would say would probably be, for someone who identifies as someone who enjoys to explore their sexual selves as a sexual being in that way specifically, is to redefine sex for yourself.

And so, because sex can be triggering. And oftentimes there are certain ways that we think sex happens and what it looks like. And so if you are a survivor of sexual trauma and you experience sex in a certain way that's very common to other ways that you've experienced it, it may all get muddled together. Even though it's a different person, different scenario, you feel safe and secure with this person, the body may still say, this reminds me of something that happened once that was not pleasant, pleasurable, safe, consenting.

So being able to define or redefine sex for yourself and slow down your experiences is really going to be essential.

Jaia Bristow

Yeah. I think that's so important. So I'm really hearing, the first part is, you deserve pleasure and slowing down and finding pleasure in all different areas. And then the second part is redefining, what is sex? Because again, with all the miseducation we're getting around what sex is, we often have this idea that it has to be a certain way. And actually what you're talking about is that, yeah, it's finding out what it is for you. And again, how you derive pleasure from sexual activity.

Is there anything else you want to add to that point?

Rafaella Fiallo

The only thing is just to remember that any type of sex is never a should, it's never an obligation. And so when you are deciding to explore your pleasure and listen to that voice of, I deserve pleasure, that it doesn't have to include sex.

Jaia Bristow - [00:24:00]

And again, on that point I think it's really important around consent that reminding people that you can stop and start at any time. You can be really clear with your boundaries around what it is you want and don't want, how far you're willing to go or not go, what type of sexual activity you enjoy or don't enjoy or that you're willing to engage in or not engage in.

Rafaella Fiallo

Yes. I love that you just mentioned that because that's something that I talk about often when we are talking about boundaries, is you can change your mind. But making sure that people are practicing that all of the time as often as possible. Because usually we hear it in the sex world. Like no means no, yes means yes, you can change your mind at any time, always seek consent with every act in the moment. But how often are we doing that with other things in our lives?

So just like I mentioned before, if I said, hey, yeah, I want to go to that party. Well, guess what, you can say, actually, never mind, I don't want to go. Or I would love to participate in this event with you, and I'm going to bring the cups and the spoons or whatever the case is. And then you can say, you know what? I can't make it anymore.

So oftentimes we need to really make sure that we are widening the examples of what it means to change our mind and how it's okay to do so outside of sex, because that's how we get good at it. Because it's not the first experience that we're going to have with having to change our mind and express the need and have it be honored. It's going to be those smaller things that really aren't that small. They're really important.

And so I love that you just said that because we need to practice that more often and model that with one another, saying, it's okay to change your mind. And also being able to read the person and say, you know, I'm hearing you say yes, but I know you don't really like big social gatherings, I just wanted to check in to see if that was something you really wanted to do? That's a responsibility that we also have in our relationships, as friends, as lovers, as caregivers, co-workers, whatever. If we know people and we know a history of their boundaries and what they're uncomfortable around, we can check in with them and say, are you sure? Are you sure that's something that you want to do? I think that's really powerful in relationship building as well.

Jaia Bristow

I love that. I love that idea of practicing and modeling, once again, consent, boundaries, all of this in less pressure situations than sexual situations.

So all the examples you've given, an example again, another really common one, I think is around alcohol. For example, I don't drink for health reasons. And the number of times people try and pressure me rather than just accepting, when they say, do you want a beer? I'm like, no, I'd rather have a glass of water. I'd rather them be like, oh, cool. And that kind of why, why do you? And trying to pressure people and question people.

And so to practice and model just accepting people's answers. And then when it's people you're close to, if you feel like they're either being pressured by someone else or they're pressuring themselves just checking in and reminding them that you don't have to do anything. I think that's so important in the ways you're talking.

Rafaella Fiallo

Absolutely. And it is such a beautiful and liberating exchange with one another and to know that, hey, I actually shared a struggle that I'm having or I'm sharing with a friend I want to push myself more. But to know that you're going to have that support in either direction, as opposed to feeling like I have to say yes, and then I'll just be uncomfortable, and I don't really want to be there or I'm going to flake

and then people are going to be mad at me as opposed to just saying, yeah, I really don't want to, I don't want to do that

Jaia Bristow - [00:27:49]

100%. And really, again, I'm curious if you have anything else to add around the justifying of when we talk about boundaries and consent and the needing to sometimes feeling like we need to justify.

Rafaella Fiallo

Yeah. You don't have to. You don't need to justify anything. That's my go to. I've always been known as a person that, well always, I don't know, but my friends will definitely say that I'm someone who doesn't really give explanations for things because I don't think that I need to.

And when I was, back in the day when I was in a different career and I was in management, I would have employees who would maybe request off, and they would come up with all these reasons why they need it off. And I'm like, hey, I just need to know that you're not going to be here. Have fun, take care of yourself, whatever it is. Because then people are put in situations where they feel like they have to make things up. As opposed to doing what they need to do for their body, for their wellness. And so me doing it for other people, I'm just like, and I don't need to give you an explanation. I'm not going to be here. I'm not coming to work this day. So that's why. You don't need a reason.

I don't want to drink. Regardless of what the reason is, it's no one's business unless I want to let them know. And so how do we, when we're talking about modeling, get out of the habit of trying to make someone justify their decision. And just say, okay, I'll go get you a club soda, or do you want lemon in it? Instead of why don't you want to take tequila shots with us? So we don't need to really justify.

Now sometimes, with people that you want to have that conversation with, that's definitely okay if you want them to have more understanding of your inner world and what's going on with you and your life. That's absolutely fine, because that's part of relationship building that you want to do with that person. But you don't have to do that with everyone. So wherever you've heard that from, no, you do not have to justify things, your decisions, unless you really want to.

And then on the other side of it, we need to stop putting people in positions with making them feel like their reason is not enough, that they have to do better and give us an excuse. Because then people lie or they're just more uncomfortable.

Jaia Bristow

100%. I think that's so important to remind people. And again comes back to what you're talking about, about putting into practice and modeling good behavior. So modeling this idea that you don't need to justify and also not expecting other people to justify. And differentiating that from the people you're in close, intimate relationships with where you want to understand what's going on for them to be able to support them, is different to some acquaintance you're going out for a drink with who says, I don't want to drink that or I can't make it out or whatever it is. So I think that's so important.

Rafaella Fiallo

Yeah. And that is part of the healing in relationships that we're seeking. And so often we are talking about breaking generational habits and behaviors or curses, or however you want to frame it. We have to look at the ways that we are in relationship with one another and the things that are just not working, the conversations we are not having or not having well. And the ways that we are not creating space for one another to just exist. And so I think this is definitely part of that.

Jaia Bristow - [00:31:23]

Amazing.

And so when people aren't respectful of our boundaries, when people aren't receiving our boundaries or aren't so good with the consent, or are demanding explanations or justifications or pushing on things, let's talk a bit about that. How does one respond to those situations? What are the red flags to watch out for? And how do we respond to those?

Rafaella Fiallo

Yeah. Well, I loved that you mentioned that it's a red flag, first of all.

So I think oftentimes in relationships we're looking for these big blowouts that kind of signal maybe this person isn't the one, the person I thought they were or someone I could trust or someone I can confide in. But they are small things like this.

And so you could be in a relationship with someone and you say, hey, I want to tell you something. And then maybe you find out that they shared that with someone else. So that's all data that you want to collect and you can decide what you want to do about it. You can say, okay, well, I didn't say that this is a secret, don't tell anyone this. Is that something I want to revisit with this person and say, hey, when I share things with you, I don't want you to tell anyone. Or do I reflect and say, maybe every time I need to say this, you can't tell anyone. Is that the type of relationship that I want? Where every time I would have to have these conversations. Or what type of trust are we building in a relationship?

So that can be a pink sign, maybe it's not red. Maybe it's a different color. But something, when it comes to setting boundaries, what you like, what you don't like, what you need, it could be so simple in terms of, like what you said earlier, hey, my boundary tonight is I don't want to say out past this way, I only want to go to one bar. And also, you know that I don't drink. How are people around you responding to that? And how do we not ignore those things?

Because so often we want to see the best in people. We want to give people the benefit of the doubt. But the issue that typically happens is we don't talk about those mishaps. We just keep it all in our head and we're just like, oh, maybe they didn't mean it that way. Of course, they just want me to have fun. As opposed to saying, hey, I don't like that. When I set this boundary expectation, that's what I want it to be. And you kind of pushing back makes me feel uncomfortable. And also it doesn't make me have a good time. And the whole point is for me to have a good time.

And so we have to move towards having those conversations more often to name it because people don't know. Oftentimes we make all these assumptions like, of course they know that I'm mad at them, of course they know that that's a problem. No, our world's are typically self centered. And so they're thinking about themselves, and they're rarely thinking about you, so we have to bring that stuff to light.

And so I think that's really important when we're talking about red flags in the first place is we need to call out the behavior or the discomfort or the unhappiness or the disappointment that we experience as opposed to just testing people without telling them that they're being tested. That happens so often. And so just being real with ourselves and our needs and saying, hey, I expected more from you, and it really hurt me that this happened. I would like to repair and explore and repair what the relationship looks like. But what do you think about that? What's your response?

That's something that's been missing all the time when I'm doing couples, family therapy, any type of work when it's about two or more people, there's always a lot of silence, a lot of assumption. And then there's anger and disappointment because that person didn't just magically fall in line with what we want. But we never said anything.

Jaia Bristow - [00:35:24]

And how does this then correlate, for example, with sexual self-care, sexual wellbeing and these boundaries and red flags in our daily lives? How does that then translate into our sexual lives?

Rafaella Fiallo

Oh, yes. Thanks for bringing it all back together.

Because with sex there's a lot of things that are silent, a lot of things that are hush hush. There are a lot of things that we're told to expect and to do, and it just becomes kind of like common knowledge, but it's incorrect common knowledge.

A common thing that, so let's talk about something as common as contraceptives. So on one hand, one partner may think, oh, they should bring it. They should take care of that, that's their responsibility. No one's talking about anything, we're just all making an assumption that it's this person's responsibility.

Then you get to the moment, there's been no conversation, and the person is gonna want to maybe have sex and they're like, what are you doing? You didn't bring this, dental dam or external condom or whatever the case is. And they're like, oh, since you didn't bring one I thought maybe you didn't use them. And then they're just like, no, that's not what I would want. But you're both operating under this assumption that you would do what you need to do, and I would do what I need to do. But we're not having this conversation about what our sexual needs are.

How do you want to take care of our sexual health when we're engaging in sexual play with one another? How do we make sure that we have everything that we need in the moment so we don't have these disruptions like this? Of course, there's going to be some, of course. But how can we plan ahead?

And I think that also goes in the mind space of sex should be spontaneous. And that means it's more fun, and it's more exciting. But then that leaves people ill prepared for a lot of situations that they find themselves in because everyone is just doing what they think they're supposed to do from TV and movies and stories from their older cousins from when they were younger.

I always jokingly say, I didn't really have people to go to when I was learning about sex and relationship, and so I got a lot of information from older cousins. And as I got older, I was like, so you didn't know what you were doing, and you gave me bad, bad information.

And so I think when it goes to our sexual health, we have to know ourselves and our needs. Continuously explore and be open to hear what other people have to say about what they need for their body, their safety, their comfort, and then being able to have more open conversations about that. So that way we can make sure we have a satisfying and pleasurable experience.

And that doesn't just mean, oh we orgasmed. To me, having a pleasure satisfying sexual experience is, I was heard, boundaries were honored on both sides, we had fun, we laughed, even if someone fell off the bed. That I know that I was safe. Those are satisfying and pleasurable to me, even if there isn't climax or something like that.

So being able to say this and this equals pleasure, equals satisfaction, and it doesn't have to look one way. But we're not going to get there for not having transparent conversations with one another. And we're definitely not going to get there if we're not telling people that it's okay to think about these things, to get educated about these things. So long as there's a lot of shame, then we may feel shameful even when we're trying to research about our sexual experiences and our needs or our fantasies and fetishes. If it is backed by shame, then it's never going to be as fulfilling and pleasurable as it could be.

Jaia Bristow - [00:39:45]

I think that's so important. And I'm so glad you brought that in.

I'm mindful of time, but I wanted to touch upon one more point before we came to an end. You talked to me about sexual self expansion, I think it was. Would you say a few words about that?

Rafaella Fiallo

I love that you mentioned that. So it's actually erotic self expansion. And it is an approach that I developed while working with military veterans and my sexuality clients, because I saw a pattern in which they were struggling to be in touch with their erotic selves.

And so the way I define it is it's just a desire to enhance one's own potential erotic efficacy. It is a way to increase your eroticism, your sexual self efficacy. And through the process we are learning more tools, we're getting more educated, and I'm providing resources that will make more erotic self expansion possible.

So that can look like being more connected to playfulness, being more awakened to your own desires, and that just means in general, it doesn't mean just sexual desires. It can be my desire to go out in nature and be connected with the ground. My desire to reconnect with friends and family and have a good time and invite them over. My desire to get closer to myself. And not feel so disconnected. And so that is part of the process.

And so essentially it's basically how can I be more attuned to my erotic self? And I'm really clear to make sure that when I'm talking about eroticism, it is not treated or seen as a synonym of sex or sexual play, because those are two different things. There can be overlap, but for me, when I'm talking with clients about eroticism, it's really about how do you get in touch with yourself, with your senses, with your pleasure, with your delight, with your desire. So that's erotic self expansion.

Jaia Bristow

I love that. And I love that distinction between eroticism and sexuality or your sexual play, and the definition of eroticism. So thank you.

Rafaella, this has been a wonderful conversation. How can people find out more about you and your work?

Rafaella Fiallo

Oh, wow. Okay. So as you mentioned, I do have a private practice so you can contact me through my website, which is healingxchg.com

And also on all social media I'm [@healingxchg](https://www.instagram.com/healingxchg), which probably will be linked somewhere.

And that's really it. I am taking a little bit of a break right now from social media, but I'll be peeping in every once in a while, so feel free to reach out to me. And I would love to be in contact with you.

Jaia Bristow

Amazing. Thank you so much for your time today and thank you for taking time to talk about these really important topics. I'm sure they will be supportive for a lot of people.

Rafaella Fiallo

Yeah, well, thank you so much for having me and giving me the opportunity to share with you. And I am really excited to tune into all the other talks as well.