

I think that kink is basically, it could be anything outside of, like regular old sex in the missionary position between people who are monogamous and love each other.

Kink is very, very broad. And it's broad for a reason and that is to make sure that it's a space where people can really have some time to play with and experiment with things that are hot for them and find people who are also into those things without feeling judged or shamed for them.

Jaia Bristow - [00:02:26]

That makes a lot of sense. And so Kink often gets associated with BDSM. What is the link and how are they different?

Dr. Liz Powell

I think kink and BDSM refer to basically the same kinds of things. Kink is just a much handier shorthand for a lot of folks than BDSM, it's far fewer syllables. BDSM is an acronym that stands for three subsets of kink that exist. One of them is bondage and discipline. One is dominance and submission, sadism and masochism. And so those are the three different subsets that exist.

So bondage and discipline refers to liking to tie people up or have people tied up. And then also various forms of discipline including tasks that you do for a person or assign to a person, or ways that you enact punishments or praise for behavior that is wanted.

Domination and submission refers to consensual power exchange, so ways that we agree to either take power from someone or assume power for them, or to give some of our power to someone else. And that could be around anything from what you call a person, what you say yes or no to, some people go as far as, what we call, a 24/7 D/s dynamic, which is where they are always in role. And I have friends who have done that where, as the submissive, if they wanted to make a purchase over a certain amount they had to talk to their dominant about it. If they wanted to wear certain clothes, they had to talk to their dominant about it. There is a wide variety of ways that power exchange can show up.

And then sadism and masochism refers to people who enjoy giving pain or enjoy receiving pain. And in this case, a lot of times people get confused, isn't pain always bad? But there's different kinds of pain. Most people who are into sadism and masochism have kinds of pain that they really enjoy and then kinds of pain that they don't enjoy. The same way that all of us have, when we've done certain exercises, certain exercises feel really good and even if we feel kind of sore or they feel tough when we're doing them. Where other ones we just kind of hate, even if they're not harder necessarily, it's just not as much our jam.

Jaia Bristow

Brilliant. I think that's a really good explanation of kink, which is quite broad, as you say, because some people have this idea that all kink people, all kinky people, are just constantly covered head to toe in black leather or latex and always have their whips out. But that actually there's all these different varieties and elements and it's a spectrum. And I'm excited to get into more of that with you today.

Dr. Liz Powell

Yeah. And I think it is really important to recognize that there's a wide spectrum in terms of, even people who are kinky, how much kink they want to do or need to do in their life. Some people think kink is necessary for them. They don't enjoy relationships or sex that don't have some kind of kink element to them. For some people, kink is more like a spice, like it's nice if it's there and if it's not that's totally cool too. And everything in between. And so kink is not a one size fits all box. There's a huge variety of people, a huge variety of ways of doing it.

Jaia Bristow - [00:05:30]

I think that's so important to mention. And then again, you and I are both non-monogamous. And so again, I know for myself at least, it's very different with each partner that I'm with. It's not always like this is my kink style and therefore it's exactly the same with each person. And of course, lots of monogamous people are also very kinky. But again, that might change depending who they're in a relationship with.

Dr. Liz Powell

Oh, absolutely. For me, part of how I am in sex and kink in general is I call myself a big compersionist. So compersion is basically joy for someone else's joy, happiness for someone else's happiness. So for me, what gets me really hot and what makes me really turned on and into stuff is seeing my partner really into stuff.

And so there have been a lot of kinks that I never really thought I would do and they weren't really my thing until I had a partner who is really into them and seeing how hot it was for them helped me see what was hot about it. And so there's a lot of interplay, there's a lot of choose your own adventure with each partner that you have when you're kinky.

Jaia Bristow

And so, a lot of people have started, I think it was so taboo and in the fringes of society for a long time, but recently, especially when *50 Shades of Grey* got super popular, but also with other mainstream depictions of kink, suddenly everyone's talking about kink. And most people have at least heard the term or are familiar with the concept. But what are some of the issues with the way it is portrayed in these mainstream situations?

Dr. Liz Powell

I would say different mainstream depictions have done better or worse at displaying healthy kink dynamics. So, 20, 30 years ago, the big mainstream one that blew up, that got everybody into kink was the *Story of O*, which is a story about a very, very significant hardcore D/s relationship.

Around that same time was also the *The Sleeping Beauty* trilogy by Anne Rice, writing under her pen name Anne Roquelaure. And that was also very extreme BDSM kind of stuff and in a fantasy world. The *Story of O* was set in the real world.

The thing about real world depictions that we get in the media is that a lot of them are fantasies. But for folks who aren't in the kink scene, they don't necessarily know the distinction between what works in a fantasy or a story versus what works in the real world.

If we look at *50 Shades of Grey*, if we look at *Secretary*, which was a big movie probably about 20 years ago I'm guessing. Or *9½ Weeks* with Kim Basinger. Those are all movies and stories about kink where there's not a ton of very clear negotiation or a lot of clear boundaries or understandings of how consent works within BDSM dynamics.

Most of the mainstream portrayals of kink, because they're coming from this fantasy perspective, if you were to try to do that in real life, would actually be much closer to abuse than to kink.

If we look at *50 Shades*, *50 Shades* started as *Twilight* fanfiction, and *Twilight* is a story about a multiple 100 year old vampire who's in love with a high school girl. And that already is a huge issue. But then there's also all of this stalking and controlling of her life and manipulation of what she does. And that all made its way into *50 Shades* as well. If you're starting from a place of a highly controlling and abusive relationship, probably the fan fic based on that is also going to have those characteristics, particularly if the person who wrote it doesn't know their stuff.

The folks I know who have read *50 Shades* and who have told me all about it, who are kinky people, make it pretty clear that the person who wrote that book probably hasn't done kink in real life. And I think that that's one of the issues, is a lot of people who write these mainstream kink popular things have had minimal real life experience with kink and, or they're writing their fantasy, but depicting it in a real world setting.

And so the thing about kink that I think a lot of people misunderstand is when we talk about this power exchange, there's a misconception that once you've agreed to be submissive to someone, you have to do everything that they say, and that is not true.

Dan Savage, for all of his flaws, came with a great way of describing kink, which is that it's cops and robbers for grown ups with your pants off. It is play. It is make believe. So when I tell someone that they get to tell me to do whatever they want, I also still get to say no because I'm not actually their literal slave.

And so I think that a lot of people who are newer to kink don't understand that as a bottom or a submissive you still get to set boundaries. As a top it's important to be paying attention to how your bottom or submissive is doing and making sure that they are enjoying what's happening, that this is still working for them that you're checking in with them about where their boundaries are at.

I think a lot of these mainstream portrayals kind of hand wave away a lot of that process because in fantasy it's not as hot to keep checking in every couple of minutes and say, okay, red, yellow, green, where are you at? 0 to 10 how hard was that? Do you need to take a break? Do you need some water or a snack? That's real life kink and that's not as hot to read in a story or to watch in a show.

And so I think it's important with these mainstream portrayals for folks to just be mindful that real kink you don't actually have to sacrifice your personhood or your autonomy or your agency. It's a game. It's something that we're doing for fun. It's not real real. You can still walk away, leave, never see someone again.

Jaia Bristow - [00:11:01]

That's fantastic. And I think there's two really key points you're making there. One is the difference between fantasy kink and, you know, fantasy is fun. It's great to have...

Dr. Liz Powell

Fantasy is super hot.

Jaia Bristow

Exactly. And it's nice to read erotica and to fantasize and to watch stuff but it's really important to understand the difference between fantasy and real life kink.

And the second thing is the idea of boundaries and consent within kink, which again, it's 101 of kink I think. And I'm very much a switch, which means I'm sometimes dominant, sometimes submissive.

Dr. Liz Powell

Me too. Switches always. Switches are the best.

Jaia Bristow

100%. You get so many more options as a switch.

But I noticed that I'm only comfortable being submissive with people and partners I feel incredibly safe around. And even if there's a part of me that wants to be submissive with someone, I won't do it

unless I know that they 100% respect me as a person, they respect my boundaries, they respect consent.

And then that's when the fun can begin. And so I think that's such an important point you're making. And I really, really want to emphasize that point.

Dr. Liz Powell - [00:12:11]

And I think another big thing I see in a lot of these mainstream portrayals is it's almost always a dominant cisgender heterosexual man and a submissive cisgender heterosexual woman. And that is not all of kink. Like you said, you're a switch, I'm a switch. I'm assigned female at birth. I'm not a woman, I'm gender queer, but a lot of people, because I have boobs assume that I must be a bottom or a submissive. And actually, I lean top.

So I think that there's a lot in these portrayals that's about reinforcing traditional gender roles and reinforcing traditional ideas about relationship that just isn't true in kink. In fact, in a lot of kink world, especially if you're a switch who is assigned female at birth, so many cisman submissives are looking for a top. They are just dying for a dom. And that is really, really common. And I think a lot of cis dudes have a lot of struggle with unpacking their desire to be a bottom when they're told so much in this world that they're supposed to be a top.

And that's super normal. Like we would expect that there would be no significant difference between who wants to top or who wants to bottom, because it's not like men and women are naturally more anything along those kinds of traits.

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. And I think if you're going to be playing, and again I use the word playing, because once again, kink is all about play. If you're going to be playing with power dynamics, it's also really important to acknowledge the real power dynamics, whether they're around gender around age, that's a big one as well. Around your relationship to someone, around race. And all these different elements which are true in real world life and therefore also true in relationships.

And I've done a few interviews on this conference about racial relationships, gender relationships, with Kevin Patterson and Dr. Alex Iantaffi and Zayna Ratty and I talked about intersectionality in relationships. And it's so important to be aware of the power dynamics that exist to be able to start playing with other power dynamics. Because if they're left unsaid, it can cause some very uncomfortable situations.

And again, the idea that you can go as far as full on rape fantasy in kink and feel 100% safe. And rape fantasy has got absolutely nothing to do with actual sexual abuse and rape. And I think it's so important to really, really understand that differentiation.

Dr. Liz Powell

Yeah. And I think one of the things that I love about kink is the way that it takes so many of these subconscious background dynamics and allows you to put them in the foreground and consciously make decisions about and play with them.

If I am someone who makes a lot more money than my partner, we can do a scene where they're withholding money from me, or we can do a scene where we have a whole thing about the money and play it out. There are ways that we can take these things that are working on a lower, less conscious, less foreground level in our relationship and make them something concrete and real that we can then address and make decisions about and play with and experiment with.

It's a way to take those things that we try to avoid a lot in our normal day and actually consciously engage with them. And that's really important and really helpful for most of us.

Jaia Bristow - [00:15:21]

Definitely. And so what advice do you have then for figuring out what should stay in fantasy worlds and which fantasies might translate well into reality?

Dr. Liz Powell

I mean, I think a good first step for anybody is to find kink in your community and go to, when it's not pandemic times, go to some play parties and just see people playing and watch people doing stuff.

I think that there's a lot of stuff for us that is really hot in fantasy until we see the reality of it and then we're like, oh, actually, I don't know about that. Find people who you're comfortable experimenting with and set up explicitly experimental play dates where the idea is not, we're going to have a super hot, perfect scene. The idea is we're going to try a bunch of stuff, see what works, and see what doesn't. And it's expected that some stuff is not going to work. So it's expected that you're going to be saying no to stuff. It's expected that you're going to be not liking stuff. So that there's a space where it's safe for people to say no.

Because I think in all kinds of relationships, not just in kink, anything around sex or intimacy, people a lot of times have a lot of fear of saying, hey, this isn't working for me, because we don't want to mess it up for the other person. We don't want to disrupt the flow or break the vibe. And that's not healthy for anybody. Sex and kink are not necessarily endurance sports. You shouldn't be enduring the time that you're spending with your partner.

And so I think setting it up with this explicit, you're going to have stuff you don't like. You're going to have stuff that you're going to tell me you want less of, you're going to have stuff that you're going to tell me more of. All of that is expected, we're going to bring all that to the table. Makes it much easier when you do need to say no, when you do need to say, actually, let's redirect.

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. And I think again, you're pointing to something really important. The word play have come up, experimentation, trying, giving feedback. And we can have this idea that kink, especially the way it's depicted, is this super serious, like everyone knows exactly what they want. You signed the contract and that's exactly the way it plays out. But the reality, as with most things in life, and especially most things sexual, is if you haven't tried something, you don't actually necessarily know what you like.

So this idea that it's okay to experiment, it's okay to try and then change your mind or say no or say, I like this element. Could you do a bit more of this and a bit less of that? And then to check in with the other person and be like, how are you doing with this? Because again with dom sub roles, for example, it can be really uncomfortable to be dominant if you're not used to that as well. So it's not always just checking in with a sub, but also checking in with every person involved in the situation.

Dr. Liz Powell

Yeah. And making sure that everybody is getting what they want. And I think really normalizing that sometimes you're gonna try a thing that sounded really hot and it's not gonna work for you. And that's not like a huge, terrible world ending thing, that's just life. Sometimes we try a food that we thought we were gonna enjoy and we don't like it. That doesn't mean that food is ruined forever now, and we've ruined everybody's dinner forever. It just means that's not the food for us. Maybe we order something else. It's not a big deal. You just get to say no to stuff, stuff gets to not work for you, and we can move forward and be okay.

Jaia Bristow - [00:18:32]

And I think the comparison with food is a really good one. Because a lot of people get a lot of pleasure out of food and out of experimenting with different types of food and combining different ingredients together in a new way and trying different dishes. And sometimes you have a few favorite dishes that you fall back on. And sometimes those dishes are simple, but sometimes they may be more complicated, but they're still ones that you know you like. And then, depending who you're sharing a meal with, you also have to check in and see if they have any dietary requirements and what foods they do and don't like.

And so I really like that as a comparison.

Dr. Liz Powell

Yeah. And in terms of depictions of kink that I've seen in the media that are good ones, Kit Rocha, which is the pen name for two authors who write together. They have an amazing series of books called the *Beyond* series, that's about a post-apocalyptic gang in a sector outside of a perfect religious city who has a giant strip club and makes alcohol, and they're all kinky and non-monogamous. And it's full of hot kinky porn. It is just the hottest kinkiest queerest porn you've ever read. And it's all clear negotiations.

They talk about needing safe words, they talk about monitoring each other and making sure everybody's doing okay. And it does a really good job of depicting how this stuff actually goes. That you can check in in ways that are still hot and part of a scene. You can be monitoring how each other's doing without it being a mood breaker or a problem. There's lots of ways that we can do kink that are healthy that are still super super hot. And finding those occasional, really great depictions, I think, is helpful.

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. And I think for people who struggle to figure out exactly what it is they want or don't want or to express desires to, around consent, Dr. Sophia Graham does a great talk on self-consent on this conference, where she talks about how to tune into your body and understand what you do and don't want, because that's the first step to asking for things. And I think if you're someone who's curious about kink and wants to go forward and explore and experiment, but you're a bit unsure, it's really important to know how to set boundaries.

Dr. Liz Powell

And I think one of the biggest things I've run into with bottoms who want to play with me, and they're very new to kink. Is a lot of them say, oh, whatever you want to do, I'll do whatever you want to do. And that is the worst thing that you can say to a partner in any relationship context ever, because I can guarantee you don't want to do anything I want to do.

Because people are into weird shit. Like, if you're brand new to kink and you say to me, yeah, whatever you want to do, I just want to experiment, do whatever you want to me. Cool. I'd like to shave one eyebrow. I'm really into CBT, which is cock and ball torture. And I've also really wanted to have someone wear a chastity cage for two weeks. You down? No. Cool. So not anything I want. Let's try again. Let's actually talk about what you want.

I think that there's a lot of vulnerability in acknowledging things that you're interested in, and that can feel really really scary. But if you aren't willing to take that step to talk about what you want, you're not ready to get it. If you can't name, I think I'd like to try being spanked, you're probably not ready to actually be spanked, because how are you going to handle it if something's not going the way you want. You need to figure out how to use your words and talk about what you want and talk about what you don't want because your partner is not going to be a mind reader. And even if we're really good at tuning into other people's signs, that's not enough for communication.

Jaia Bristow - [00:21:58]

Absolutely.

And I think again, the idea of tuning into what you want, being explicit, communication people. Communication is so key in all aspects of relationships, but especially if you want to experiment and go against the grain of what's standard and conventional because suddenly you're no longer working from a preexisting rule book. And that's great. That's exciting. But that's the time to really learn to check in and communicate and express your desires and clarify questions and not give vague, general answers.

I love your example. It's like, no, trust me you might not want me to do everything you want me to do for you. And again, because it is a spectrum. Someone might be like, I'm kinky. Cool, me too. And they might have very different definitions of what that means.

Dr. Liz Powell

Yeah. You could have two people who are both very kinky, have been doing it for a very long time, who have basically nothing in common that they want to do. And that's just part of life is that sometimes what you want to do and what they want to do doesn't line up. There are people who are your friends who may not want to do the same activities you want to do. That's fine, it just means you don't line up. And I think especially folks who are newer, feel a lot of pressure to be into what the other people are into or be into the right things. There's no right things. Whatever you're into is the right thing for you.

Jaia Bristow

And that's so important. I know that when I first discovered the world of kink I felt so much pressure of what was right and what was wrong. And I didn't know yet what I liked and didn't like. So when people would ask me, what do you like? And it was like, a really scary question for me. I didn't know yet. And so I think, especially when you're starting, it's okay to be honest where you're at and it's good to ask people maybe more specific questions.

So what would you say are some ways, like some really concrete ways and practical tips to get started and to figure out what you do like and what might work for you and what might not?

Dr. Liz Powell

There are a lot of, especially in larger cities, a lot of kink communities will have what they call a munch, which is a social get together for kinky people, where you get to meet people outside of a play space. And that is a really great way to start exploring kink, is by not doing it but meeting the people and talking to them as humans because it is way easier as a way to enter a community, and it's also way less pressure on you. You don't have any expectation that you're going to have to do anything while you're there other than talk to some folks, maybe make some new friends.

And meeting more people, talking to more people, talking about what they like is a good way to start feeling out what feels like it might be interesting for you or what might not.

If you're wanting to experiment I think it can be helpful to find someone who is more experienced who is willing to do very explicitly defined experimentation sessions with you that can show you stuff that will work or won't work. And have you try stuff to see what feels good for you.

And that could be any number of different things. If you're someone who wants to be a top and you haven't done much topping, you could find another top who's willing to hang out with you and has a bottom that both of you could play with who knows how to bottom, and that top can walk you through things.

You can find classes, kink.com has a great education program that you can attend. They have classes on just about everything, and you can go take a bunch of classes virtually and see what kind of stuff sounds appealing and learn some technique and learn some ideas.

You can find instructions online in other places. There are books. There are DVDs. There's all kinds of stuff online that you can access to help you start learning skills, learning about what kink is and experimenting with what might be good for you, even if you're not going to see a ton of folks in person.

And again, if you're going to start playing, I think a lot of folks do their first kink play with other people who have no experience. And I get why, there's a lower barrier to entry in some ways. But I used to be a skydiver, and there's a term we have for a formation jump that you're doing with all new skydivers and it's called a Zoo jump because it's going to be bananas, just a bunch of animals running around. None of you have any idea what you're doing, so there's nobody to anchor the experience.

I think it's much better in general if you can find an experienced person to help you explore because they're going to already know how to communicate, how to do things, how to set up boundaries so that they can take some of that weight off of you and help support you in that excess exploration process. It's not necessary, I do think it's helpful.

Jaia Bristow - [00:26:39]

Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. I really like that comparison. And I love that you were a skydiver before. All the thrills, whether it's skydiving or sexual.

Dr. Liz Powell

You know, I had a motorcycle. I've covered a lot of thrill bases.

Jaia Bristow

This is starting to make a lot of sense.

And so I think again, whether you're starting with a new partner who is experienced or starting with a new partner who has less experience, talking can be about through your desires and through what is fantasy, and what you'd like to put into test can be really helpful. I know I keep going on about communications, but it really is important.

And I know, I have a partner of mine and when we first met we didn't have sex the first time we met, we spent the whole night talking about sex. And it was someone I met outside of the kink community. We met traveling. And it turns out that we are incredibly compatible. And it is very, very nice when we get together. But we only realized that because we were both willing to share. And we went gradually. I didn't just be like, hi, nice to meet you, these are all my sexual fantasies, do they work with yours?

But it's just gently dropping a few hints and seeing how the other person responds. And then once we established that we both at least wanted more than, as I think you put it, missionary between two straight people.

Dr. Liz Powell

Who gaze longingly into each other's eyes and connect in a soul deep way. Which can be nice sometimes. That's some people's jam. That's great.

Jaia Bristow - [00:28:17]

Exactly. But once we both realized that that wasn't what we were looking for and we're under the kink umbrella somewhere then we gradually started figuring things out. But again, it's super important. I've also had partners where we were sexting and sending each other lots of filthy messages. And I was writing all kinds of stuff because I was in fantasy world, it was a long distance relationship. And then they were like, great, next time you come visit, we'll do that. And I was like, oh, oh, okay.

And so again, it's really important to clarify when you're talking about fantasy and when there are things you actually want to experiment. And it's fun as well, especially when you're sexting in the fantasy world, to make it feel very, very real. And so to write in such form as, I want you to do this to me, and I want you to do that to me.

But it's always important to set boundaries. And again, kink doesn't have to be as serious as people think. It's fine to take a time out, to have a water break, to have a snack break, the number of water and snack breaks I've had during a full...

Dr. Liz Powell

So important. Because your body burns so many calories and so much water while you're doing kink stuff, so like, water and snack breaks are the best. You have to do it.

Jaia Bristow

Exactly. And it's fine to have a time out and check in with a person and be like, is this working for you? It's okay to break character I think, and I say character, it's not that all kink is necessarily role playing, but when you're in it, whether your role is sub dom, whether it's some other role play, the French maid, the police officer. I'm coming up with quite strong stereotypes, but I think it's really important to remember that you still are humans and that you still get to be you and get to express your boundaries and your consent.

And so let's talk about that a bit more. Let's talk about how does one set boundaries? How does one clearly communicate consent? And how does one, if we feel like it's going too far or we're feeling fearful or a real trauma response has been triggered within a play scenario, what do we do in those situations?

Dr. Liz Powell

So I mean, the most common thing is to use some sort of safe word. So a safe word is just a phrase that you and your partner agree on that means we need to stop and check in, because sometimes when we're playing no doesn't mean no. Sometimes no is not real. Sometimes no is part of the play.

So safe words, like a standard system that a lot of people use is green, yellow, red, where green is yes keep going, this is great. Yellow is, depending on the person, either that's slightly too much, let's take it back or you can go right there, but no further. And then red is we need to stop and check in and talk about what's going on.

I think safe words are like an emergency break. The thing about your car is you probably don't use your emergency brake very often, but if you're parked on a hill you're sure glad you have it. And so a lot of people don't use their safe word very often but knowing that you have it gives you a very easy tool when words are hard, to be able to get a breath and be able to check in.

I think another really helpful thing is to just be very explicit about what you say. When I talk with people, especially if I'm doing sexting or we're sharing hot stories, if they sent me something I'll ask, that was super hot, which parts of this do you like in real life and which parts of this is fantasy for you? And if I send something to someone and they're like, oh, that's super hot. I'm into that. I'd be like, yeah,

here's the parts I really love in real life, here's the parts that are great in fantasy. And just be very explicit about where those lines are for me so that there's not a lot of gray area.

When I'm bottoming for folks I tend to be very communicative as a bottom and say like, oh, no, that's not quite working, let's try something else. Hey, a little bit higher, a little bit lower. You can definitely go harder. There's a lot of ways that I just give very clear and straightforward feedback. I think folks have that expected of themselves that they have to have the perfect right words that are still in role in order to communicate. And if you can do that, great, but if you're not a master at improv, just use regular words. Just be like that's not quite working. Something feels off. I'm feeling kind of funky. Whatever you need to say, just let your partner know what's going on.

I think too, that the thing about communication, especially this fantasy reality dynamic is, whenever someone shares something with you remember to check in about which parts of this for you is reality? Which parts of this is fantasy?

Like in fantasy I freaking love all of the bareback sex happening. I love the really extreme stuff. In reality I care about STIs, so I want to use condoms and because I have chronic pain some days I just can't take that much actual severe impact as much as I want to.

I think it's important that we all are very clear about this, this stuff is really hot for me in fantasy, here's stuff that I know works for me in reality. Here's stuff I'm not super sure about. I might or might not. Here's the stuff that is firmly in fantasy for me. It's super hot to talk about in sexts and stories, but not something I want us to do in real life.

And just feel empowered as much as you can to be clear with your partners to just say, oh yeah, that's super hot in fantasy, I'm not really into that in real life. So here are the things that I am into in real life.

Jaia Bristow - [00:33:31]

100%. And I think that's where things like sex menus can be really useful. And I'll ask you a bit about those in a sec. But for me I know that it's not just having something to center a partner, it was just clarifying for myself, what are my definite no's?

I do not like being tickled. This is something I really, it's a clear line, if it happens accidentally, I'll sort of let it pass and I'll tell you once or twice to stop. But that is something. So that's something now that if I'm going into a new relationship, whether it's kinky or not, any kind of physical relationship, that's something I'm very clear with the person. It's like, do not tickle me. That is a clear, hard no for me.

And I think again, being really clear with oneself so that one can be clear with one's partners is super important. So do you want to say a little bit about sex menus?

Dr. Liz Powell

Yeah. So a lot of those are yes, no, maybe lists where it's just a list of a whole bunch of things and you check, yes I want this, no I don't, maybe I do.

And there's a variety of different ways those show up. There's a whole bunch of different ones on the internet. One of them that I really like, Bex Talks Sex has a great yes, no, maybe list that's very in depth and has a lot of great ideas for you to go over for yourself or with a partner.

Another kind of like talking about sex tool that I like is Autostraddle has a, here's how to talk about sex thing that you can do with a partner that involves a yes, no, maybe list. It also talks about terminology related to your body, your genitals, your gender. It talks about what kinds of things are maybe for you, what kinds of things are off limits. What kinds of things might trigger you or hit land mines? And that's another really helpful tool in terms of expanding beyond just, do you like floggers or whips or canes? To what gender words are weird for you? Are there any triggers that might come up for you? What

kind of words do and don't work? What kinds of activities do and don't work? What do I need to know about your body in terms of any physical issues or disabilities?

So I think those are also important things to consider is that, you as a whole person are engaging in this experience, so it's not just which tools are we going to use? It's about your mind, your heart, your experience, your body in a holistic way.

Jaia Bristow - [00:35:45]

Absolutely. I love that. And I love specifically the idea of terminology, because I think so many of us use different terminology for different parts, but also in terms of gender as well. That's a super important one, depending on which gender people identify with, but also around genitals. There are some words that if someone uses will really turn me on, and some really just irk me out and I have weird associations with. And if you're in the middle and someone starts repeatedly using that word it can be awkward. So once again, it's so helpful to be really clear with yes, no, maybe.

And to know that list can adapt and different things can move to different columns. You might have something that's a hard no, and one day it becomes a maybe or yes and vice versa. You might have something you think you love, and then after you've tried it a few times, you're like, oh, I actually really like that with that one partner because they liked it, and compersion like you were talking about. But it's really important to remember that none of these things have to be fixed and rigid and that there's always room for fluidity.

Dr. Liz Powell

Yeah. And I recommend that folks, whenever they're going through these kinds of lists, that they go through it once, just regular, normal, everyday head state, and then once when they're halfway through masturbating. Because sometimes the stuff that it turns you on when you're sitting down to have lunch is very different than the stuff that sounds good to you when you're already super turned on. And so just checking back in with your body about is this something that I'm genuinely not into? Or is it that I was over my tuna sandwich and when my tuna sandwich is in front of me it doesn't sound as hot. And just getting yourself in different mind states.

And I think the thing you brought up about terminology is super valid. I teach a class on dirty talk, and one of the things I give folks in the class is a hand out with a whole bunch of terms that they could use for dirty talk. And I purposely included words on there that I know pretty much everyone will hate so that there will be some things on the list they say like, no, I don't want this.

And I've had many people in the class who were in the class with a partner where they found out that they had been each using words for the other that the other didn't like for a decade or more but then neither of them felt comfortable talking to the other person about. In an ideal world, and hopefully with the people you're playing with, they want you to have a good time and they want you to get what you want. So if you don't want something, tell them, because why would they want to keep doing a thing that you don't want?

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. And I love that you lead workshops on dirty talk. I might have to sign up to one of those.

Dr. Liz Powell

They're available on my website. It's called Nasty Naughty Negotiation.

Jaia Bristow

I love that. So yeah, I think we've covered a lot of stuff today. So if people want to sign up to your workshops on dirty talk or find out more about you, how and where can people do that?

Dr. Liz Powell - [00:38:28]

My website is drlizpowell.com

And I've got links there to my book, to all my classes, even to my project with Kevin Patterson, which is *Unfuck Your Polyamory*.

That's all available on my website. There's also a link to my Patreon, which is patreon.com/drliz

So drlizpowell.com is your one stop shop for all the good stuff.

Jaia Bristow

Amazing. Well, thank you so much for your time today. Is there any last minute words you would like to add to anyone listening?

Dr. Liz Powell

I think the last thing I would add is just that I think most of the people watching this conference most likely grew up in a culture where there's a lot of shame about sex just in general. And so for a lot of us the stuff that gets us hot is also going to be tied to the stuff that we feel shame about, because those things have been linked in our brains since a very young age.

So kink is a way for you to take that shame and dance with it rather than hiding from it or trying to lock it in a box.

Your shame is something that was handed to you, you didn't choose it, but you can choose what to do with it now that it's there. So why not play with it instead of letting it run stuff from the background?

Jaia Bristow

I love that. I think that's such a nice way to end.

And, I think it's also nice for people to hear us talking so openly about these topics because often they can be seen as super taboo and super secretive. And whilst that can be sexy in some ways, it's also really important to be able to openly communicate because, A, it gives more possibility to then experiment. And, B, it makes sure that you experiment in a safe way.

Dr. Liz Powell

Yeah, I think particularly those of us in the U.S. and England, there is so much silence around sex, and yet we swim in sex everywhere in our advertising. Sex is all around us but we can't talk about real sex.

The best thing that we can all do for ourselves is to start talking about it and being open about it and being honest about it and giving ourselves a chance to have what we like be okay and giving ourselves a chance to get that from the people in our lives.

You deserve to have sex that is fulfilling for you. You deserve to have people in your life who want you to feel good and who want you to be happy. And so if you're not getting that, those people aren't doing you right. You need someone who's going to care for you and want you to be the person you are, not the person they want you to be.

Jaia Bristow

Amazing. I'm just thinking of the phrase, "they're not doing you right", and my mind is interpreting that in other ways...

Thank you so much for your time today. Everyone, go check out Dr. Liz Powell's website. I know I'm going to be signing up for some of your courses, and I really appreciate having you on board.

Dr. Liz Powell

Thank you so much for having me. This was great.