



Wild & Sublime® Podcast, Episode 7
“The Sex-Positive Parent”
Aug 20, 2020

How can we get better at talking to kids about sex? Karen chats with sexologist Jennifer Litner about her new online course for parents. Logan Pierce returns to discuss the term “nonbinary.” Audience member Jade shares her experience being polyamorous and gender variant while raising kids.

Host: Karen Yates

Guests: Jennifer Litner, Logan Pierce, Jade

[Music under]

Jennifer Litner

We asked quite a few parents about, you know, what kinds of things do you feel really comfortable talking about? And a lot of people said, I can talk about anatomy, but I don't know what to do about — when they ask about *touching* my anatomy.

Logan Pierce

Growing up in this society — and in the world, in fact — we've been told there are two boxes, and you must fit. There's not just two boxes for anything.

Jade

I'm having a connection with someone, I want to be able to have have it in the context of my marriage. So I'm going to have a discussion, the hard conversation.

Karen Yates

Welcome to Wild & Sublime, a sexy spin on infotainment®, no matter your preferences, orientation or relationship style. Based on the popular live Chicago show. Each week I'll chat about sex and relationships with citizens from the world of sex positivity, with spicy additions from storytellers and musicians. I'm Karen Yates. In today's episode, sex-positive parenting. I'll talk with therapist Jennifer Litner about her new digital course to help parents and caregivers educate kids about sexuality. I also talk with Logan Pierce on What's Up with That?, about the word “nonbinary.” Plus, Putting It Out There, a segment where I interview someone about their sex and relationship

journey. Today, Jade talks about their polyamorous marriage and what it means to be gender nonconforming. And my Sermon on the Pubic Mound®. Keep listening. Wild & Sublime is sponsored in part by Uberlube, long lasting silicone lubricant for sex, sport and style. I highly recommend it. Go to Uberlube.com. [Music ends] As I mentioned in the last episode, we're going to spend some time over the next few weeks looking at how people can best dismantle old sexual messages in order to create a more sex positive household as they raise kids. Sexologist Jennifer Litner appeared on the live show last year. Hey, Jennifer, welcome.

Jennifer Litner

Hi, thanks for having me.

Karen Yates

I'm so excited you're here because I was so impressed with your digital course, "Building Ease Talking about the Birds and the Bees." And I wanted you on because I thought there were some really interesting things that are part of your course. And I wanted you to be able to tell folks about it. So first off, just give me a general overview. And also, what was like the moment you decided, I need to do this?

Jennifer Litner

So the course is a six lesson developmentally appropriate guide, essentially brought out into different lessons based on topics. And it helps parents and caregivers talk with or learn about what to share and how to share it and really build confidence around having these conversations. There's quizzes, and there's activities, videos and worksheets, as well as a component for interactivity with myself and other caregivers in an online portal that is sort of a community based aspect. And what really led me to start this is I was teaching a curriculum that I had developed in schools, and it was a much lengthier in-person curriculum. And I realized that so many caregivers were having a really difficult time approaching these conversations. They just weren't feeling prepared about how to navigate this. And so they'd show up to the workshop or the event. They feel really anxious about what I was going to say. And then they would leave and there would be there just be like a sigh of relief in the room. And it just, it was palpable. You could just see it. And I was so energized by that, that I really wanted to keep doing it. And then I figured that adapting it to an online version would just make it so much more accessible for people.

Karen Yates

Yeah, I mean, one thing I'm thinking about, you know, you go to a live event and you get information and then you go home, and maybe you have forgotten half of it. Even if

you have like a worksheet. It's like, What happened? What did what did she say? But there is probably a great resource, and you're probably able to put a lot more information into it.

Jennifer Litner

Yeah, we actually took apart the curriculum, which was three 90 minute sessions and put it into six approximately 30 minute sessions, which can be done in small chunks. So if somebody has five minutes, they can start it do five minutes of the lesson and come back to it, which is super ideal because we all know parents have very little time and you depending on the age of their children, they may happy things still for too long. So, right.

Karen Yates

So tell me a little bit about, um, I know you said you did some market research, but what, what, what, what part of it like, um, who were you who was vetting it? Who was like beta testing it like what did that whole process look like?

Jennifer Litner

Yeah, so we did our market research was meeting with parents and caregivers before we develop the course. And then after developing it, we hired some sexuality educators as well as parents to review it. And during that process, they were responding to questions about user experience, how easy it was to use, video quality, audio quality, things like that, as well as more specific questions about areas for improvement, and how we can make the course much more inclusive. It was really important to us to ask about neuro atypical folks and making sure that the course is going to be adaptive. For children who are neurotypical and for caregivers as well, as well as groups who, parents who are in a variety of different types of families, right, so blended families, single parent households, parents who are in polyamorous relationships and have many caregivers at home, it was is really important for us to have a center really at the diversity within the course. We also asked questions about how we can make it more inclusive to folks have a variety of racial backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, religious backgrounds, etc, as well as gender and sexual orientations. So that's kind of that's a mouthful, but yeah,

Karen Yates

Oh, yeah. I mean, that's what I will talk about a little bit more about that. But I was pretty impressed with some of the questions that you were asking us parents, caregivers and guardians throughout the course. And we'll talk a little bit about that in a minute. But how do you handle — like one of my questions is, how do you handle the

range in age, you know, say from toddler all the way up to teenager, like how is that dealt with in the course?

Jennifer Litner

Yeah, that's a great question. So we have different segments that are — it's really a topic that is broken down into different categories based on the child's developmental stage. So I think you know, when we were looking at the course we looked at the chapter on talking about explaining sexual behaviors. And there's a topic on talking about where babies come from, and reproduction and that segment is broken out into a section for speaking to toddlers and preschool, kindergarten age and then elementary age, up to about sixth grade and then there is seventh grade and above. And for the most part that's pretty consistent with how we offer different strategies and topics and conversation starters. So that way caregivers can watch or participate in the activity that's related to that child's developmental stage.

Karen Yates

And one of the things I, I just have been thinking about is you're talking is how there is so little sex education going on in the schools. I mean, when I was growing up in the 70s, and 80s, it was, you know, there was kind of the standard anatomical talk in like fourth and fifth grade. And then there was like biology and then maybe the gym teacher was teaching. I don't know why it was the gym teacher teaching. Like this is, I don't know, a couple of weeks thing on sex. But now, a lot of kids aren't even getting that really basic level.

Jennifer Litner

What was interesting when we did our market research, we asked quite a few parents about you know, What kinds of things do you feel really comfortable talking about and what are the things you need the most help with? And they a lot of people said I can talk about anatomy, but I don't know what to do when they ask what I thought about touching my anatomy, right? Like, it was kind of like the second piece, the secondary stuff that they really had a hard time with. And, you know, I think like, most people get the anatomy lesson at some point, or they can look that up on the human body chart somewhere. It's, it's not that hard to find in the internet these days. But it's, it's like, what do we do with our bodies? Or how what does it mean when we do X, Y, or Z with our bodies? Those are the questions that I think caregivers tend to float around.

Karen Yates

Well, yeah, cuz I mean, on the show, there's a lot of talk about how there's not enough pleasure education for kids, you know, to understand to put the pleasure piece

foremost, rather than the like, a pregnancy biology aspect, and, and I'm getting the sense that that is, you know, one of the major focuses of your digital course.

Jennifer Litner

Yeah, it's definitely something that we incorporate into our definition. Around sex and sexual behaviors we talk about, you know, when we when we talk about why people are sexual we talk about because it feels good. But there are also lots of other reasons. And you know, this is pretty similar to even when I'm teaching graduate level students, and we talk about why people are sexual. There's probably 100 reasons we could come up with and put on the dry erase board. But it's important to center pleasure because I think it makes a lot of sense to children with Okay, well, when I have a hug from my friend, it feels good. That's why I do it. Right? Like That makes sense. And so being able to be honest with kids about that the pleasure piece is really important.

Karen Yates

So how much I mean getting back to anatomy how much anatomy and biology is in this in this course.

Jennifer Litner

Honestly, there's really not a whole lot that's something that we decided to leave some room for our but we didn't focus on a ton because we know that people do find access to that information. So So what we do have is some diagrams that were created by one of our favorite illustrators, and they are diagrams of genitalia talking about the different parts. And we offered, we offer those to use the caregivers who are participating it to use as an educational material for themselves. But that's pretty much what we offer. And then there's a number of like continuing education resources that cover anatomy, but we don't cover a lot of, okay, like, this is the body and this is why this works and its function unless we're talking about it in terms of reproductive health.

Karen Yates

Sure. So, um, one of the things that I thought was so awesome about the course is, you know, on the show, especially in the recent episode we just had talking about sex lies and the The myths, the half truths, the cultural assumptions, all of these things that sort of come that seep into us as we're growing up. What I thought was so exemplary with your course is you really include a lot for parents, caregivers and guardians to, to work with for themselves. There are a lot of questions and I want to read a couple. It's about it's about your own bias. So it's what are your views about engaging in sex simply for pleasure? Like we just talk? What are your views about people using sex toys? Do you use sex toys? Are your views about sexual behavior, similar or different

from your parents, family of origin or dominant cultural background? That I'm in these? There are a ton of these questions in there about there's a lot of questions about kink and about like, gender and how do you orient and how do you see gender and I just thought That general excavation for someone taking care of a kid is so important.

Jennifer Litner

Yeah, I'm so glad that you're recognizing that I think it's really important to understand, you know, where our own biases are, and also look at and biases not being a bad thing, but just a thing that we carry, right? We all have sexual scripts, which is kind of a formal term in the sex ed world that we think of, which are ideas that impact how we see sex in the world, why we think is right or wrong related to sex, how we, we think we should behave, they impact so many things. And, and if we can't understand where we both where these things come from and what our own attitudes are, it's really hard to convey values to children in a way that they're going to understand it. So this is the first chapter or first lesson really is helping caregivers. as guardians and parents be able to really identify where are these things come from themselves? And there's a lot of questions that they can kind of go as deep as they want with it, you know, I hope that they will engage with the, you know, all the content at some point. But, you know, it's this idea of like, Where, where do my values come from? And how am I going to then convey it to my child, but we have to build that awareness first?

Karen Yates

Yeah, there was one thing on the segment on values, it's like, and I thought it was like, right. It was something along the lines of, I might be clear enough on my values, so that my family knows them so that my children know what my values are. And I was like, yeah, that's how clear it needs to be like, what are the values and it doesn't, you know, everyone's going to have a different value set. But a lot of this is about clarity, right?

Jennifer Litner

Yeah. And I am also super clear with people that you know — a lot of times people are really hesitant about this kind of work. Because they think that some sex educator is going to tell you how to feel and what you have to do and what to believe. And I'm really clear with people that I'm not here to tell them what their values are, I'm here to help them understand their values and then communicate them to their children, while also balancing that with scientifically accurate information and for that, to get an inclusive way and things like that.

Karen Yates

Right, because, I mean, you know, when one aspect is I was looking through the modules is, you know, when it you know, when do you as a guardian or caregiver feel that sexual behavior should begin or activity should begin, I'm like, Wow, that is one of those, you know, all over the map kind of answers and, you know, to just to know, instead of being flummoxed when you find out that your kid's been making out with someone at school, you know, and it's like, What do I do? You know, where do I stand on this? One to kind of read through some of the modules, that you are the subject matters of the modules that you have affirming gender and sexual diversity, consent to sex positive, you know, sex positive worldview explaining sexual behaviors, Internet safety and pornography. I mean, we could talk about a lot of these things. And consent is a really big topic. Yeah, what, you know, what do you have to say about consent?

Jennifer Litner

Oh, I have so much to say about it. [laughs] You know, I think it starts with when kids are so young, and it's, it's every interaction we have, right, like, you know, I think a popular topic right now is touch with little children and bodily autonomy. And I just got asked to do a segment about that for someone and and I think, you know, people are really emphasizing children's right to say, you know, I'm not I'm not ready for a hug right now. No, you know, no, you, right. And that's a real — I know it feels like really different for maybe some of the listeners out there who, who maybe didn't grow up with with that in their home. But it's also really important to be able to foster that bodily autonomy and being able to say no, like, I'm gonna touch others when I am feeling ready to when I want to and, and, and being able to recognize that first and foremost their bodies are their own and they get to make those decisions. So I think it really starts when children are young. And you know, I think even if they if a child's nonverbal or if they are, you know, infant, even doing things like saying now I'm going to change your diaper, I'm gonna wipe your vulva, when I'm changing her diaper, or wipe your penis or whatever it is, like, even just telling a child what you're doing before you're doing it is a way of kind of conveying that consent before they are able to really understand what's going on.

Karen Yates

That's a great point. Yeah, I know. We We were talking on the show about this whole idea of like, "give grandma a hug." You know this, like, "you will do this now!" and like, and later in life, then how do you locate your yes and no if you've had people all your childhood telling you when you need to touch or you know, when you shouldn't be touching like, a kid has to learn their interior yes and their interior no.

Jennifer Litner

Yeah, and I think it's so helpful for when children become adults, right like, when we I work with a lot of people in my practice clinically who feel as though they don't really have a sense of kind of what is their internal yes or no and you know, they get really stuck in what they should be doing. And I think sometimes this comes from us being taught that we are supposed to be a certain way as opposed to just openly recognizing, okay, I'm feeling open for this kind of touch today and I'm not feeling open, you know, this point is patched today. So I think the that can be really important to reinforce that as children.

Karen Yates

You know, so, so often I hear, you know, parents, they want to be sex positive, they want to have a sex positive household, but they just don't know how to get free of their own scripts. And there is there is a lot of sex positivity in, you know, just kind of baked into this course. I want to get back to neuroatypical kids and I would like you to talk a little bit about how is that covered in the material and what are best practices around that?

Jennifer Litner

Yeah, so it's the beginning we have a question answer segment a common questions that caregivers have about talking to children about sexuality and one of them is like, what if my child's atypical or they're nonverbal or they have autism or something like that. And they're not quite sure, like are they going to get this material when I printed In this type of way. And so one of the things we emphasize are, being free to make the modifications you need to make — if you went to a workout class, and somebody, you know, the instructor is, is giving a demonstration of various modifications, we kind of offer the same thing. So, you know, we say, you know, you can repeat this over and over like that's a using repetition can be a helpful strategy. We talk about using more visual oriented cues versus audio lead in some of the extra activities and the exercises, we offer just various ways of practicing that. So there's a boundaries exercise, and we offer different different options that that caregivers can use depending on what makes sense for their child. So those are some of the things that we do.

Karen Yates

And then in households that are you know, don't fall along the lines of like, dominant culture. Types of households, like say a polyamorous household, or, you know, gay parents, how is that approached within the material?

Jennifer Litner

So we always talk about caregivers and parents and inviting other caregivers in the room or other, you know, potential co parent or a potential co caregiver. So we're really, really intentional about the language that we use because we want to be inclusive to a variety of parents and caregivers. There's no one family, that's exactly the same as another. And so that's something that we do and then we also, you know, we talk about very openly about the different types of identities that people hold. And we have a book called the Golden keys glossary, which is a ever evolving list of terms that are defined for caregivers to educate their children around so I think that That, that whether it's a gay parent or a polyamorous family, like I think that they would feel right at home with with the activities. So in terms of the additional support once someone or once a family finishes the course, what kind of additional support do folks have access to? So we have a building EAS library, which is like a list of recommended resources based on developmental stage. And we have ones for adults, as well as kiddos and then there's like books and podcasts and continuing learning education there. And then there's also the building ease online community, which is a forum that is attached to the same platform we use for the course. And it's free, it comes with the course. And that's where caregivers can introduce themselves. They can ask questions, they can provide stories about success stories or moments. They share. Something and talk about how when. And so that's the kind of support that we offer. If there's comments and things that they have about the course we also have a system for collecting feedback as well. So in this community support model, are you are you as a therapist interjecting ever? Or is it just a community of folks supporting each other in their journey? It's it's mostly me and my team will be interacting with the caregivers, if they have questions. The idea is that it's going to be a space for learning amongst one another. So you know what, there's no stupid questions there. You know, if somebody has a question, most likely another caregiver has or has had that same question. So we will respond and offer some insight in the group and that way others can see the response and learn from it and if someone has a private one on one question, we offer that to as well as one on one coaching support if they want.

Karen Yates

Thank you so much, Jennifer. I really enjoyed chatting with you. If you are interested in learning more about Jennifer Litner and "Building Ease Talking About the Birds and the Bees," you can go to our show notes. [Music under] And as a special bonus for all Wild & Sublime Patreon members, you can get this course until October 15 for 15% off, consider joining our membership program where members get discounts, bonus content and more. At the \$5 a month level, the course discount basically equals the first three months of membership. You can also consider gifting the course to a friend. I'm looking forward to giving our Patreon subscribers values such as these as a

heartfelt thanks for your support. You can find the link to Patreon also in our show notes. [music ends]

Today we have a new edition of "What's Up with That?" a recurring segment about sex terms that might need more explaining. We've chatted through cisgender, transgender, gender identity and more. Logan Pierce returns today to talk about "nonbinary." Logan is the program coordinator of TransMentor, the first mentorship program for trans youth in the United States, at Lurie Children's Hospital, here in Chicago. Through Lurie, Logan frequently teaches sexual health education, facilitating gender inclusivity trainings and leading groups for transgender nonbinary and gender expansive youth.

Karen Yates

Hey, Logan, welcome back.

Logan Pierce

Thank you for having me. Happy to be here.

Karen Yates

So glad to have you. Okay, nonbinary. Logan, what's up with that?

Logan Pierce

This is a great term that we're probably seeing more and more in media and TV shows, internet, maybe in the classroom. I've got tons of friends that identify as nonbinary.

Karen Yates

Absolutely, absolutely. So what is nonbinary? What is up with that?

Logan Pierce

Yeah, so nonbinary. Well, let me just say that nonbinary folks, people that identify as nonbinary, have been around since the beginning of time. And this is a term that we can typically see under the transgender umbrella. So last time I was on we talked about transgender being an umbrella word. Well, nonbinary is under that word. Okay. And I think the simplest definition I could give for nonbinary is, sometimes folks can see as being, you know, a man or woman on sort of a scale. And so someone can see that scale and say, Oh, I fall somewhere, maybe closer to the man side, maybe I fall somewhere in the middle, maybe I you know, wherever that might be. That is someone that could identify as non binary, right? Or it could be someone that sees that scale, and goes, I see your scale and I'm working over here, totally off that scale. I am a

human, I don't identify as a man, I do not identify as a woman. I am just a person, non binary.

Karen Yates

So if you would say it's, it gets back to our very first conversation about gender identity. So within yourself, you don't feel like you are you don't identify in your inner self as a man or a woman, you feel completely separate from those identities. Would that be non binary?

Logan Pierce

That could be nonbinary. I think that's one way that someone could identify as nonbinary. There are other people that feel like they may be leaning more towards one gender over another. Binary being that binary of man and woman. So maybe they feel that they are closer to one another or maybe not at all. And it's going to be it's going to be up to that individual person to describe how they feel,

Karen Yates

Do you feel sometimes this is a political statement? Or does it always come in your mind, in your experience as a deeply felt sense?

Logan Pierce

Can I say both? Because I think it very much is a deeply felt sense of self that you are going to be the expert on yourself. And I can't tell you who you are, right. So of course, this is going to be your deeply felt felt sense of self. And I think anything that we do that is beyond a binary is beyond what our social norms that we were taught, is going to be a political action as well. No while it is your deeply felt sense of self, even existing in the world that we live in, is going to be political. Absolutely.

Karen Yates

And so is it the rule that most non binary people like to be like to use they pronouns they/them, or is that you know, again, it's based on the individual person.

Logan Pierce

Yeah, I would say it's definitely based on the individual person. A lot of folks that identify as non binary will use they/them their pronouns. Um, but there are so many. We could even do another show on pronouns. There's so many pronouns out there.

Karen Yates

Maybe we will do another segment on pronouns, you just put that idea in my head. Let's do another let's do another segment on pronouns, for sure.

Logan Pierce

Anyway, I can get back. But we're, and you know, someone can still identify as non binary and maybe they say, you know, she/her/hers feels good to me right now because of where I am in my life and their own personal reasons. So your pronouns don't always have to align with how you see yourself on the inside. It's just whatever feels good for you.

Karen Yates

I was just online looking at a video of someone being interviewed who identified as nonbinary but used, I think she/her/hers pronouns. And that was a little confusing for me. And is it? Is it more do you see?

Logan Pierce

I'm not the one. Right.

Karen Yates

But I guess my thought is, Oh, is this a fluid decision? Is this something that this person, you know, changes? I mean, I had, I have one friend who does change pronouns actually, you know, based on, like, based on how they're feeling or phases that they're in. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Logan Pierce

For sure. Yeah. And I think, you know, it's kind of like what you said, it's up to that individual person. I know people that that identify as cisgender, like we spoke about in previous episodes, and so they align with what the doctor assigned them at birth, but they say you know what? Pronouns? I'll use them all. Because none of them feel bad to me, and I think it's, you know, we're in 2020, language is ever evolving. And also, we're always changing and evolving. I'm not the same person that I was yesterday, I'm definitely not the same person I was five years ago, and I'm not going to be the same person, you know, tomorrow.

Karen Yates

For some people who are cisgender, who don't question their cisgender-ness, and they're moving to the world and they're trying to make sense of, of gender — nonbinary is the most mysterious.

Logan Pierce

Yeah, something that trips people up. And it's almost like people are like, why can't you choose one or the other?

Karen Yates

Right, right. I mean, again, I go back to this, you know, exercise we had to do in school of just doing our gender journey. And it really helped me understand the non binary perspective a lot more because in seeing the fluidity of my internal identity, and understanding like, yeah, this isn't something you quote unquote make a decision about, you know, one way or the other that like, in life. We are, like you said, language is constantly evolving. We are always evolving.

Logan Pierce

Yeah. Yeah. And I think when we, you know, growing up in this society, we, you know, and in the world, in fact, we've been told here are two boxes. And there's not just two boxes for anything.

Karen Yates

Yeah, yeah. I would be awful if there's just two boxes for everything. Right, that'd suck?

Logan Pierce

Well, and you know, what, not only that, but like, even what you brought up before where you were saying, you know, we're seeing this term more and more, and we're seeing more people identify as non binary, and we're putting language to feelings. That's all that is.

Karen Yates

Yeah, you brought this up earlier language to feeling you know, when you first say it said it I was like, what's he talking about? And now like, Oh, that's, that's right. [laughs]

Logan Pierce

Yeah, I would, I would love to pull up a quote real quick. But it just reminds me of, you know, my own experience in school and my own experience of feeling different. Personally, this is not always every transgender person's experience, but feeling different and feeling like I didn't fit in, but not really having any words to describe how I felt. And so, as we go through this, and as we teach in our classroom settings with our parents, and outside organizations, and we have this really beautiful quote, it is by the poet Adrian rich. And the quote is, "When someone with the authority of a teacher, say,

describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium as if you were looking in a mirror and saw nothing."

Karen Yates

Huh. Say that again saying say the whole quote again, because it's really beautiful.

Logan Pierce

"When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, and there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing."

Karen Yates

Yeah.

Logan Pierce

So how am I supposed to know that I exist in the world if we never talk about nonbinary people, or transgender people? And you know, the first time myself, I heard the term transgender was in college.

Karen Yates

Whoa!

Logan Pierce

Yeah.

Karen Yates

And you're pretty young.

Logan Pierce

[laughs] Yeah, yeah. Mm hmm.

Karen Yates

Wow. Okay. So I mean, even even looking at today, you know, when we see all these terms, transgender nonbinary popping up, even 10 years ago, finding those resources, finding that language were not as easy to find. Thank you. Thank you. As we wrap this segment up, what are some key points about being nonbinary that you've we might not have covered yet?

Logan Pierce

Yeah, I think that's a great question. Um, I, myself am not nonbinary. I don't identify as nonbinary. But I would just say, you know, as we spoke about with the term transgender, we want that person to come out when they feel comfortable, and if they ever want to come out, and we want to respect their name and pronouns, and if we make a mistake, we have those four easy steps to practice.

Karen Yates
Right. Apologize.

Logan Pierce
Correct yourself,

Karen Yates
Correct yourself, and move on.

Logan Pierce
And practice

Karen Yates
And practice. Okay, thank you so much, Logan.

Logan Pierce
Thank you.

Karen Yates
You'll find information about Lurie Children's Hospital and their TransMentor Program in our show notes. Logan will return in a few weeks to continue answering my pressing questions about what's up with that. And if you are interested in the transcript of our episode, go to our website episode link. When we were doing live shows regularly, we would do our season preview shows in a very tiny, very cool cabaret space called The Boxcar in the Edgewater neighborhood in Chicago. Now, sadly, The Boxcar no longer exists because the building was sold, which is a major bummer. But while we were doing pop-up shows there, I liked to interview folks, because it was such an intimate space. I like to interview folks about their sex and relationship lives because sometimes when you're listening to experts or chat show conversations about sexual specialties, it's nice every so often just to listen to a regular conversation with someone about what their life looks like day to day, or what their sexual journey was like really. Because, you know, at the end of the day, we're all voyeurs, right? Or we just maybe kind of want to know that we're okay by listening to someone else's story. So I'm going to name this

segment, Putting It Out There, and maybe it will become a semi-regular segment on the podcast. We have right now like, three or four interviews from the live shows that we did, so you will definitely be hearing them. Today, you'll be hearing an interview I did in June 2019 with Jade, a friend of mine, who also happens to be polyamorous, gender nonconforming, and a parent. [applause] Thanks so much for coming.

Jade

I'm so happy to be here.

Karen Yates

Let's start the story with: you're married currently.

Jade

Yes.

Karen Yates

And you are polyamorous?

Jade

Yes.

Karen Yates

So, consensually nonmonogamous, both you and your husband. But you were married prior.

Jade

Yes.

Karen Yates

So talk about -- were you also in an open relationship?

Jade

Yes.

Karen Yates

So how did that start? How did you come to polyamory or open relationships?

Jade

Yeah. So in some ways, I've always been polyamorous, and when I actually met my first husband, I was just, I was also dating a woman. And there was this this question of like, Well, can I date both? You know, this, to me, this seemed like a, I should be able to, but I was still young. I was probably, you know, I was 20 years old. And I didn't have a lot of relationships. I didn't, I didn't enjoy dating, kind of the exploration. I like diving deeply into relationships. And he was like, Yeah, I don't know. I don't know how comfortable I feel with with that. I was like, that's fine. You know, we explore the traditional relationship we did get married. And, but somewhere throughout that, you know, I think we both kind of came to the conclusion that it'd be better if we if we had other partners.

Karen Yates

So did you stop seeing your girlfriend?

Jade

Yeah, the time.

Karen Yates

Okay,

Jade

That was like, you know, that was in college. Yeah, I moved on and, and had and just had a very traditional marriage. And then--

Karen Yates

Okay, what does that mean? [laughs]

Jade

Well, I'm gender nonconforming and so it wasn't like very traditional gender roles, you know this idea of experimenting of being open was always something he could get behind. And so when I did raise this open marriage opened relationship to him. He was like, yeah, thank god you said something because this is like, we really should.

Karen Yates

So when you say you, you are gender nonconforming.

Jade

Mmmhmm.

Karen Yates

How did that like, how did that come up in the marriage? Like what does that mean for you?

Jade

Just non-traditional roles for like for a couple years. I just dressed and looked like a boy or, you know, more male, masculine clothing like literally just wore all men's clothes and he was very fine with it, you know, when I cut my hair short, so just very you know, but just like in a just a very day to day life, it's a fine balance. Now, in college I had shaved my head, so just kind of like letting go of any feminine parts for a while, but then I discovered rediscovered my feminine in my 20s, like too late 20s. And so I've experimented with sort of gender expression, people react to it. It's really like where I live in, in general, like, how do people react to how you present yourself to the world?

Karen Yates

Yeah. So what are some of the things you've kind of discovered cool moments,

Jade

You know, like people, people who treat you differently in terms of how you present and somebody could be just alternative looking like when you have a hate shaped head or a more heart and you go to like Victoria's Secret, they treat you differently. But if you find the people who kind of can see past that they Really when you know if you can see that person who goes, Okay, like you're here and I'm going to treat you like a like a customer or a person, and they win, I'm like, Well, you know what, I have a pocketbook. So little, "Pretty Woman" moment [audience laughs] where you're like you it's an experimentation, it's challenging people to see past the surface, and to really see deeply within. And, and I love doing that I love doing that and now I have to balance it a little bit because I'm a I'm a parent, so I have to balance a little bit with like, how the normalcy of childhood for my children and how, how outside of the norms do I want to be and I think like, you know, I'm, I'm, you know, somewhat edgy but not not overly, and so that they can feel like I'm just the, you know, I'm a regular mom.

Karen Yates

So yeah, do you do you find that your kids come to you with maybe questions around gender and nonconformity.

Jade

Um, I think we try to, there's there's still a little bit young but they are already aware of gender, right. That's a very pervasive thing, but we have a very strong message in our household that that there's no such thing as gendered items or gender colors. And I have, I have a, you know, a daughter and a son and they're twins. And so, my son very strongly identifies as male, you can like tell it's like very bothersome for him to be associated with anything girl, but my daughter, I think is a bit more, you know, a bit more fluid. And then the other thing is, like I see the, the children that they play with, and I can I can recognize gender nonconformity in young children or, you know, whatever the ages. And I, I sort of, given the message of acceptance, you know, like, if someone chooses something that's not typical to to really enforce that reinforce it with them to say that's okay. And we're loving or accepting, and they can be who they who they are, right, so that's so that's where we are because that's where their developmental stages.

Karen Yates
Sure.

Jade
And so, but I think I'll continue doing that and, you know, they don't -- you know, it's kind of long hair, short hair, you know, we talked about that, but they're not as aware yet because it hasn't come up as an issue.

Karen Yates
So when you, you decided to open up your marriage, and you, you, you and your husband agreed to do that. So I think you mentioned to me that you were open in your office where you had an open as a worker, you were open.

Jade
Yeah, I think I mean, I was open sort of, by default, because I was having relationships with the various co workers. And so... [audience laughs]

Karen
Okay, let's let's get into that!

Jade
I highly recommend that. It is, in some ways easier because I was traveling as a consultant, so I traveled and so when it's something I share with with people who may be more naive, I'm like, when people travel, there's like, you know, opportunity and connection and what do you expect? And so, but I did that, and that was part of the

opening of a marriage. My first marriage was being on the road being with you know, being that with that word, spouse, and I just took the work spouse part a little more, you know, little. And, and it's like and it was very much like it didn't take away from anything because you're already gone. You know, you're not like -- Oh honey, like I'm going to be going on on Tuesday for somebody you've already removed from your household. So it was an easy transition for them. And I was at the sort of the, the the premise of, you know, oh, I'm having a connection with someone I want to be able to have have it in the context of my marriage. So I'm going to have a discussion, the hard conversation, which was a supported conversation. Because I had a I had besides my coworker I developed a relation with a therapist. And, and he was like, well, we can't really have a relationship until you will call your husband so it's not it's not it was easy. It was really hard, but I made like the call to my husband, it was very well received to first Okay, so he was okay with opening the relations. He was like, more than okay.

Karen Yates
Okay,

Jade
Thank God.

Karen Yates
All right. So there was agreement. And so with your now husband, you, he was someone that you had been seeing?

Jade
Yeah. So like, I was married to my first husband, and my current husband was a coworker, and he knew I was married like that, that was never something. I was like, oh, let's pretend I'm not married. I'm like, No, I'm married. And we're doing this. And, but that's not that's not something that's common.

Karen Yates
MMhmm.

Jade
So it is something that you have to kind of walk people through and, and sort of explain to them, you know, how does it work? And, you know, my very, my very, very important part is the meeting of the partners. Right,

Karen Yates

Right. Yes.

Jade

I made a really big impression on my current husband when he first met my ex husband. And you know, it was like, just something like, you know, just out there. But it went so well, right. Because again, like I just have very supportive very open relationships. So--

Karen Yates

So eventually you left your first husband for--

Jade

I did not leave.

Karen Yates

Okay. He left.

Jade

Yes. My my e- husband decided to move back to Philadelphia and he wanted to develop and a sustain a relationship with a friend of mine who was in Philadelphia with two children. And so the way he took the route was he said, You know, I want a divorce and I was not thrilled about it but I said like I I totally I respect your your path. And we had a very amenable divorce.

Karen Yates

Do you think that being polyamorous consensually, non monogamous? Do you think that helps? The -- I'm not gonna say the ending of relationships. But do you think it eases? it eases bitterness?

Jade

Well, I'm of the belief that there is no ending. There's just transitions. [small audience clapping] So we transition from one type of relationship to another. And I've never ended a relationship like To me, the door's always open. We can we can have a conversation whatever closure you need, however, want to re establish that relationship. So Though I to me, there is no ending, right? There's no bitterness

Karen Yates

We were talking about intimacy and what intimacy means to you. And why don't you talk a little bit about intimacy and and the fullness of relationships.

Jade

Yeah and to me the beauty of polyamory, you know, a lot of people think polyamory they think, you know, a lot of sexual partners. I think of it as a lot of intimacy partners, the emotional intimacy and the way you can support people through their lives. And so to me, the intimacy is is the knowing of someone at the deeper level, you know, whether you're getting into the stuff, right the stuff of life, and we are so guarded with that stuff most of the time. And I thrive in that like in the depth of being and you can't have that without intimacy. And sometimes it does have to be physical because you have to reassure the people when they're sharing so openly. And a lot of times the connection is sexual, right. So the intimacy, just, it has to be there and you have to be space for it.

Karen Yates

One of the things I'm interested in is just your take on what the polyamorous open lifestyle has given you. I mean, you've talked a bit about intimacy and yeah, lifeforce.

Jade

Yes,

Karen Yates

But what would like -- How would you sum it up?

Jade

I mean, I think to me, it's the fuel. It's the fuel of, we all bring energy into our relationships. And for me the the ability to explore and discover and I know we talked about rediscovering people you're with for a long time, but the the process of discovery and the energy that it creates, I like bringing that back into my relationship and it refuels it, and I talk openly with my husband about it, it's like, this is the I can bring the fuel but I cannot generate it, you know, I can bring it back. And he's experienced it, you know, and he so he, and he's like, I you know, at times he was like, Yeah, I've no, you know, I like I know you've been out with, you know, with our friend, and I come back from that I feel energized, you know, from out with anybody on a date. And I can bring that back and I can bring it back into our relationship and I can refuel it. And so for me that there is a, there's a certain satisfaction of life like that it is who I am. And so it is an important part of me. And when I'm not able to identity, exercise it, I'm not able to live it. I do like weather a little bit. So it's like it's the, it's the life, life force, fuel, water, whatever you may call it, to, to be able to be a better version of myself.

Karen Yates

So, thank you so much, Jade, yes!

Jade

You're very welcome, Karen.

Karen Yates

Yes. [applause] Wild & Sublime is also sponsored in part by our Sublime Supporter, Chicago-based Full Color Life Therapy, therapy for all of you, at fullcolorlifetherapy.com. If you would like to be a Sublime Supporter, showcasing you and your business and supporting us at the same time, contact us at info at [wildandsublime dot com](http://wildandsublime.com). And now it's time for my Sermon on the Pubic Mound. [music up then ends]

I want to take a moment to recognize the great Betty Dodson, a sex pioneer who at this recording is in ill health and may have transitioned by the time this episode goes live. Betty brought masturbation single handedly -- and that pun is intended, and I think one that she would enjoy -- into awareness and destigmatization. Her major work is the book *Sex for One*, and it's been reprinted numerous times since it was written decades ago. She's taught for close to 50 years that self pleasuring is a type of sex. Not some closeted thing that we can't talk about. Self pleasuring is sex, and her work has been foundational and built upon by many sex educators. As a tribute, I ask all of you, the next time you masturbate, have an orgasm for Betty. Better than flowers. [music]

Next week we're back with an interview with Heather Corinna, the charismatic founder of Scarleteen, the sex education site for teens and young adults, as they chat about Scarleteen and their recent books. Thank you for listening. If you know someone who might be interested in this episode, send it to them. And please, if you like what you heard, give us a nice review on your podcast app. I'd like to thank Wild & Sublime associate producer Julia Williams and design guru Jean-Francois Gervais. The music is by David Ben-Porat, our media sponsor is Rebellious Magazine, feminist media at [rebelliousmagazine dot com](http://rebelliousmagazine.com). Follow us on social media @wildandsublime and sign up for newsletters at [wildandsublime dot com](http://wildandsublime.com).

[Music ends]