



**Wild & Sublime® Podcast, Season 2 Episode 41**  
**“Easy Sex with Friends + ‘Topless’”**  
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**“Do I enjoy sex with friends, and risk losing the friendship? Or do I find strangers, and keep my friends separate?” Panelists weigh in on mixing sex into established platonic relationships, and a storyteller remembers the terror and thrill of going topless onstage.**

**Host: Karen Yates**

**Guests: Matthew Amador, Brandon Hunter-Haydon, Elmo Painter, Jane deLaubenfels**

[Wild & Sublime theme music]

Matthew Amador

Knowing how much we can do can makes us freer, because we no longer hold ourselves to a certain expectation that is just unreasonable.

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. You'll hear meaningful conversation, dialogues that go deeper, and information that can help you become more free in your sexual expression. I'm sex educator Karen Yates. This week, our panel answers a question about sex with friends, and a storyteller relates the horror of going topless on stage. Keep listening.

This probably isn't your first listen to the Wild & Sublime podcast. And if that's the case, I will assume you enjoy our sex-positive content, as it dismantles shame and encourages sexual freedom and expression, one episode at a time. Have you heard something here that has stayed in your mind for a while? I'm glad to hear that. And that's one of the reasons I began doing the show. But here's some real talk: Putting out this podcast takes money. You might not realize that. The skilled people listed at the end of this episode are paid every month, and are not volunteers. I would love it if you considered keeping the mojo of this podcast alive by contributing monthly on our

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Hey, folks. You know, when I am putting together an episode, I'm looking at what has come before in the episode schedule and what will be following, in terms of the lineup. And I thought today's segments fit together well, and also offered a nice change of pace. The question you'll hear today that was posed to our Patreon panel back in February, about a person shifting into middle age and coming to grips with what they want, then followed by a story of an actor grappling with a performance requirement, remind me that our perspectives on sex, sensation and the body our interior experiences. It's about what's going on inside our heads, a place no one else can see, and that the shifts we make there can be seen eventually on the outside, but that they all began in the inner landscape of self. You'll be hearing today from recurring panelists Matthew Amador, psychotherapist for love, sex, and gender rebels; psychotherapist and intimacy coach Brandon Hunter-Haydon; and somatic psychotherapist Elmo Painter. Enjoy.

Elmo: "I'm noticing, as I hit middle age and enjoy my own company more than ever, that I'm not really attracted to others anymore. However, I do long for sexual experiences, and I'm wondering who to edit these with? I have lots of amazing friends. Do I enjoy sex with them, and risk possibly losing the friendship? Or do I find strangers, and keep my friends separate? My attachment style is avoidant, so I find connecting with strangers easier. At the end of the day, I want a deep and nourishing, drama-free life" Signed, Coming Out of Quarantine.

Elmo Painter

Okay, Coming Out. It actually sounds like you've got some pretty good ideas about what works for you. If connecting with strangers works for you, that's great. It sounds like you have a number of options. I've experienced a number of really successful — what Brandon and I were talking about recently, naming 'erotic friendships.' Playful friendships, romantic friendships — that are, if you have people who you know, who you can connect with like that, in a way that is comfortable for each of you — and bonus points if you can find another person who has more of an avoidant attachment style, and it works for both of you to just come together and then be like, "All right, bye!" Chef's kiss. You know, that can really work. So yeah, I mean, if connecting with

strangers is working for you, and that feels easy, it sounds like that's what you want, is something easy and something fun. And yeah, I think you've got your answers.

Karen Yates

Elmo, can you explain for listeners, in case they don't know, what an avoidant attachment style is? What does that mean?

Elmo Painter

Yeah, so, elevator pitch: avoidant style. There are a couple of different attachment styles. Depending on who you ask, there are either four or five. But an avoidant attachment style is somebody who is more comfortable being kind of distant, keeping to themselves, sometimes a little bit less. If there's more anxiety, then it can be, like, just stay away from me, I don't want anybody close to me. If there's less anxiety, then it's like, I'm good being by myself; I don't really need to be in a relationship, I don't need to connect or be close with others. Sometimes that's just how folks are wired. Sometimes it's from attachment wounds. Sometimes it just kind of comes from all over the place. And no matter what your attachment style is, you can find ways of making it work. Like, I think a lot of people think that, "Oh, I have this attachment style, so I'm doomed." Or, I'm doomed for unhealthy relationships. But that's just not true. You can find, if you have two avoidant folks, that you can give each other a lot of space. That can work really well. If you've got two folks who are preoccupied — meaning preoccupied folks, or folks who have more of a preoccupied attachment style — because, again, we are not our attachment styles. That's not an identity. It just is something that bubbles up when conflict arises, essentially. But you know, if you can find different attachment styles that work well together, it's possible, and it's out there. And if you have a preoccupied person and an avoidant person, then sometimes you're gonna have to really, really negotiate, and sometimes go to couples therapy to learn how to be together in a way that feels safe for both of you. But yeah, it's really all about finding ways and making it work.

Karen Yates

Awesome. Brandon and Matthew, what do you have to say to this person?

Matthew Amador

I would say, I give them mad props for recognizing that they have an avoidant style of attachment, and just recognizing that that speaks of what they have to offer. That speaks of the resources that they can offer, and their — and I'm gonna say 'personal limitations,' and by limitations, I really mean that in knowing how much we can do, can make us freer. Because we no longer hold ourselves to a certain expectation that is just

unreasonable. So I'm really glad that this person can recognize that. I also really love the fact that they're like, "Oh, do I want to risk my friendships by trying to introduce sex here?" And even the way that they kind of phrase that, it sounds like no, you don't want to? Cool, okay. Sometimes sexual play can be very healing. And it sounds like, you know what, you don't want your friends to be your therapist right now. Cool. Great. Thank you for recognizing that, because you're actually doing a great service to the relationships that you already have in your life by saying, again, the limitations. "I'm not going to do this here. This is not for that. I would like to do this over here, with these people."

Karen Yates

Awesome. Brandon.

Brandon Hunter-Haydon

Yeah, I think I would just zero in on this person's ability to articulate their own self-awareness, and also what they're interested in. And that goes a long way. If they're considering opening up a sexual component, if they feel that there's a mutual flicker in one of their current friendships, as far as I'm concerned, they've already demonstrated their ability to articulate that as a question. It's like an area of exploration. Like, "Hey, this is what comes up for me. I'm wondering if you've ever thought of it, or this comes up for you too? And if so, like, how would we talk about that?" They've already demonstrated an ability to talk about that. And then also, to be able to articulate that with strangers in a clear way. Because again, like, it doesn't really matter what the parameters of the erotic are, as long as they're expressed, and they exist in a sense of mutuality. And so, if you really enjoy it better with strangers, or with folks who are maybe more dedicated play partners, or just super-casual friends with benefits, that's totally legit. It's just a matter of being able to be on the same page with them. And some friends might be open to that, too. Some closer friends. I also like that they said, "share sex." That's the really important — like, when somebody says, "I want to share sex with this person," that says a lot about how they're even approaching the dynamic.

Karen Yates

Mm. Yeah, very good noticing.

Matthew Amador

Yeah, they're not doing it "at" someone. "I'm going to do the sex at you!"

Brandon Hunter-Haydon

Or "get it from," right? There's neutrality already sort of latent in the language they're using.

Karen Yates

For more info on Matthew, Elmo and Brandon, go to our show notes. Wild & Sublime is sponsored in part by our Sublime Supporter, Chicago-based Full Color Life Therapy. Therapy for all of you at [fullcolorlifetherapy.com](http://fullcolorlifetherapy.com). And when I'm not producing Wild & Sublime, I work with clients, helping them to shift energetic and emotional patterns in their bioelectric field through the application of frequency, a modality known as "biofield tuning." Similar to acupuncture, except with sound, biofield tuning gently restores energetic flow to the body, and can be done remotely. Go to [karen-yates.com](http://karen-yates.com), or the show notes to book a session, or to learn more. You'll now hear performer and storyteller Jane deLaubenfels recount her experiences with a typical actor's nightmare. This piece was developed and first performed at Second Story in Chicago.

Jane deLaubenfels

It's July of 2011, and I'm in New York City with my best friend Theresa. We're in the bookstore at the Neue Galerie, a Museum of Austrian and German art. The current exhibit is Vienna 1900: Style and Identity. I'm looking through a book of nude drawings: Gustav Klimt's erotic sketches. Theresa asks if I'm going to buy the book. I normally wouldn't, but something has shifted the last few months. So, let's go back to March. It's a cold, rainy spring day in Chicago. I'm sitting in my car on Kenmore Avenue in Edgewater. In 15 minutes, I'm due at a dress rehearsal for the play I'm in, "Man from Nebraska." At the moment, I have serious doubts about whether I will find the courage to follow through with what is expected of me. Today is the first day I will do a portion of a scene topless. Nothing on from the waist up. I've known this day was coming for a long time. I knew when I auditioned for this play five months ago that it required nudity. When I was offered the role, I almost said no. I wasn't sure when it came down to it that I could actually do it. I'm a modest person when it comes to my body. Cleavage makes me uneasy. I've been acting for 30 years, and I've never been asked to bare my breasts. I guess I assumed at this point it wasn't ever going to be an issue. I didn't come to the decision easily, but in the end, I didn't want to pass up the chance to work on this play. So I said yes, trusting I would find the courage to go topless when the time came. This is a beautiful play, about a middle-aged man who lives in Nebraska and is going through a crisis of faith. He leaves his wife and job, and heads to London to find himself. On the plane ride over, he meets my character, a divorced woman who loves sex — rough sex — and is convinced this inexperienced and naive man will be better off after a night in the sack with her. The sex scene isn't some romantically lit, gentle scene when things are only suggested. In addition to some sexually graphic language,

we make out pretty heavily, I throw him on the bed and straddle him, take off my shirt and bra, wrap a leather strap around my breasts, and, grasping the straps with my hands over my head, I ask him to pinch my nipples.

Back when I was first cast in this play, I did some serious assessing in front of my full-length mirror. I have a nicely defined waist, no back fat... Not bad. My stomach isn't as toned as I would like. If I'm standing straight and holding my breath, it's fine. But if I'm slouching or bending at all, there is definitely flab. My breasts look smaller in the mirror than I thought they were. And I have these wiry black hairs around my nipples. I lift up my arms. No matter how often I shave, I can never get all the stubble. These things matter, since the theater is the size of a shoe box. The audience will only be a few feet away from me. The nipple hairs I can pluck. My friend who owns a spa says waxing is the only way to get all the underarm hair. But first, I have to grow out the hair. So for the next three months, I grow it out, which both fascinates and disgusts me. The scene has been a blast to rehearse. My scene partner Chuck is kind and easygoing, and a terrific actor. Once we got past the awkwardness of kissing and groping each other, we've been having a ball. The director wants to wait until dress rehearsal for the nudity. So I haven't had to worry about that yet. Just lots of kissing, and talking dirty, and having fun. So, here I am, in my car on this gloomy spring day. Everything is in place for the nudity. Ideal scene partner, wiry black nipple hairs plucked, underarms waxed, slacks that hit me in just the right spot around my waist, a bra that hooks in front so I can get in and out of it easily. The plan today is for me to go over the scene with Shauna, our stage manager, first. It will be a closed rehearsal, just Shauna and me, until I feel comfortable.

The past few days, I've been doing the scene in my bra, hoping that would make the transition to bare breasts a little easier. But now the thought of taking off my bra is terrifying. When I get inside, everyone is acting perfectly normal, drinking coffee and eating donuts. It's just another dress rehearsal for them. Shauna is bustling around. "Hi, Jane. I'll meet you on stage in five minutes." Five minutes later, I'm on stage in my costume. Shauna doesn't get on the bed and make out with me, but she stays close and reads Chuck's lines. The first time I take off my bra, the theater feels huge and bright and cold. It isn't the warm, intimate space I've grown to love. Shauna offers suggestions about getting the bra off and on gracefully, and maneuvering the leather strap so that my nipples are exposed and my arms are in a V over my head. We do that part of the scene so many times my arms ache.

Just when I'm starting to feel less weird about my bare breasts flopping around, Shauna says, "Okay, should we do the scene with Chuck?" Damnit. I realize this is

what I've been most afraid of: a man other than my husband seeing my breasts up close. I felt okay in my bra. It's the nipples, I guess — that's really what the issue is. The first time Chuck and I do the scene, I bungle the leather straps and I'm left with my breasts hanging out in an odd way, and my arms are tangled. I'm completely flustered, and I can't get my bra back on. The straps are twisted, and my hands are shaking. I can't hook it. Chuck and Shauna are patient and professional about everything. Chuck's character is embarrassed by the nudity, so he tries not to look at my breasts. His reactions are hilarious and lovely. I heard the word "liberating" a lot throughout this process. People told me the nudity would be liberating, and that there would come a point where I wouldn't think twice about it. But every time I unhook my bra, I feel a lurch in my stomach. And just for a moment, I think, am I really doing this? And I do it. That feeling never goes away. It gets easier, but it's never effortless. I mourn to the end of this show in a profound way. I loved the camaraderie backstage, and I missed frolicking around on stage with Chuck and saying things like, "I want you to fuck me, baby. Pinch my nipples." And I have to admit, it was gratifying to hear nice things about my body. Like when my wonderfully brazen friend Cheryl came to see the play and yelled across the lobby afterwards, "Your tits looked great!" Also, I missed taking my bra off. Not in an exhibitionist way, but because every single time it made my stomach lurch and I still did it.

So now it's July, and I'm at this Museum in New York with Theresa. The exhibit explores the redefinition of individual identity in the modern age. I'm bowled over by the drawings and paintings, especially by Gustav Klimt. I'm familiar with his work, but I'm seeing paintings and sketches that are a revelation to me. In one of the galleries, there's a series of sketches of women masturbating. I can't stop looking at them. In the book, there are drawings of women and men making love, women with other women, and women masturbating. Most of them are in pencil or charcoal, some with colored crayons. They are gorgeous and explicit. I decide to buy the book. At home, I keep it in a drawer in my bedside table. I see something new every time I look through it. The way a spine curves, the position of a hand, a use of color I hadn't noticed before. I study the models' faces. They are shameless. Filled with ecstasy and longing. We get the opportunity to redefine ourselves throughout our lives, by uncovering a part of our identity that has been dormant; by meeting the right people at the right time. And finding joy and courage in unexpected places.

Karen Yates

Well, that's it folks. Have a very pleasurable week. Thank you for listening. If you know someone who might be interested in this episode, send it to them. Do you like what you heard? Then give us a nice review on your podcast app. You can follow us on

social media @wildandsublime and sign up for newsletters at wildandsublime.com. I'd like to thank associate producer Julia Williams and design guru Jean-Francois Gervais. Theme Music by David Ben-Porat. This episode was edited by The Creative Imposter studios. Our media sponsor is Rebellious Magazine, feminist media, at rebelliousmagazine.com.