



Wild & Sublime® Podcast, Season 2 Episode 38
"Everything's changed": Dating & relationships in the time of COVID
September 2, 2021

Many people are radically re-examining their relationship values — both in dating and with long-term partners — after a year and a half of pandemic living. Panelists discuss newfound pickiness on dating apps, being honest with yourself, and finding your center in a time of crisis.

Host: Karen Yates

Guests: Tazima Parris, Brandon Hunter-Haydon, Jera Brown

[Wild & Sublime theme music]

Tazima Parris

We're all putting our lives under a microscope. We're finding those gritty tension places because it's a point of discussion — because our whole society is talking about it. We're really considering, "What's important to me, and how does that mesh with what's important to my long-term, committed relationship?"

Brandon Hunter-Haydon

Think about the kind of person you want to be. What are your values? That's your answer.

Jera Brown

We try to go into new relationships to find grounding and find centering, before we find it in ourselves. Which is not a good way to approach a new person.

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. Today,

our panelists discuss how the pandemic has redefined both us and how we approach new romantic relationships, and the ones we're already in. Keep listening.

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Hey, folks. What you're about to hear was part of a Q&A we did on Patreon in June. And it was such an excellent and deep conversation that I wanted to put it in the podcast sooner rather than later — because it is so 'of the moment.' I know a lot of people right now who are really spinning in one way or another as the pandemic continues to shift, and we emerge, or we don't emerge. And for a lot of people, it's not even so much about relationships as it is the business of being alive in the world now, because of course everything is interconnected. We're not living in a vacuum. And even if you're living in, say, a stable, small town, there is resonance with the global, seismic shifts, because we are all organisms within this system, and we can't compartmentalize ourselves out of it. As much as we might like to.

What I love about this conversation is that it seemingly covers it all: the big picture as well as the very real issues with relating intimately to others. You'll be hearing from sex and relationship columnist for *Rebellious Magazine* and fetish provider Jera Brown; psychotherapist and intimacy coach Brandon Hunter-Haydon; and sex coach and pleasure mentor Tazima Parris. Enjoy.

[to panelists] So, here is the question from our Patreon member: "Everything is changing, now that the pandemic is ending. As things get on course, I'm putting dating under the microscope. What used to be okay doesn't seem to work now, like I'm setting a higher bar. Is this temporary, or typical? I don't want to filter everyone out."

Great question. I have heard of this phenomenon from other people. And I am really interested in, first, beginning the conversation about dating after massive change. Perhaps people have taken some time off from dating, you know, while they've been sort of riding out the pandemic; or maybe they've been dating all through, and

suddenly we're coming out and it's easier, and it's like, "Wait, now something is different..." So I would love to hear some thoughts. Tazima, why don't we start with you?

Tazima Parris

Yeah, thank you. One of the things that I really appreciate about the pandemic — I see it as a gift — is that there were different pandemic lifestyles. There were different things that different people were doing. Everyone determined what their own sense of risk might be, and sought to connect with people who had similar standards, in 'this is my quarantine lifestyle.' So, you didn't get as many people sort of crossing the lines. Similarly, in our dating situation, people generally tended to have a thing about, 'I like this kind of stuff,' or 'you like that kind of stuff, and let's get together.' But it wasn't as necessary — or, I think it was necessary. But people didn't find it as necessary to overtly discuss this. And so, I think, with the pandemic, the reason that the question is phrased as, "I'm putting dating under a microscope" — we're all putting our lives under a microscope. We're all putting our lifestyles under a microscope, and comparing with the people around us. And we're finding those gritty tension places, because it's a point of discussion, because our whole society is talking about it. And of course, you want someone who matches what you're interested — the kind of lifestyle that you're interested in pursuing. That's the most ideal situation. So we're at a place right now, where we're really considering, 'What's important to me, and how does that mesh with what's important to potential partners?' Or what's important to my partner who is existing? What's happening in my long-term, committed relationship, or what's happening with a partner that I see occasionally but we've been apart for whatever reason, or we've been quarantined together? Whatever the situation is, everything is under a microscope. And I've heard some talk about — especially inside of relationships — I've heard some talk about, 'our relationship has changed in the pandemic.' I don't actually think the relationship has changed. The pressure cooker of our situation has brought out what's been present the whole time. But there weren't conditions that would have shown us what was present. And now, we can see it a little better, because of that microscope — because of the additional factors that are in our lives. And I think it's a tremendous opportunity. And I think it's important to filter some people out! If it's so disparate from where you are, it is important to start to filter some people out. But just because you have filters, doesn't mean you're going to filter everyone out.

Karen Yates

Yeah, you're bringing up some really tremendous points. Jera, jump in?

Jera Brown

Well, I'll say that — I've been thinking about my role on this panel. I feel like I mostly use my own personal experiences when I come to the table. And I had two toxic relationships in a row — one right before the pandemic, one during the pandemic. And now I'm coming out of it thinking, "What does it mean now for me to finally be excited about being on my own again?" And because I'm nonmonogamous, I have these long-term partners around the country, but nobody that, you know, is in this anchor or primary position. So, I put dating completely off until I finally just started having sex dreams, and my body was like, "No. No, you just can't keep putting this off." So for me, I think what comes up about setting priorities, setting boundaries, putting things under the microscope, is figuring out how to balance all of my needs as an individual: my need for independence, my need to ground myself and stabilize myself, while still getting other needs met that I want to have met with other people. I have a 13-week-old puppy. And let me tell you, I have gone on dates with my 13-week-old puppy and my 140-pound teenage dog. We have gone on first dates together. I am learning how to make this thing work. Because this is my post-pandemic life as an adult. And two things have come up during this process. One is that I get to be where I am, and find the people for whom it's okay. And I think that, during the pandemic, when we were investigating our lives, I think we found some of the things that we want to stick around, or that are important to us, you know. And so, we bring that to the table now with dating, having a better sense of our priorities. The other thing I found is that I still have the same issues. Like, however long off of dating, or whatever I learned from my past relationships, I'm not magically a dating guru. I'm not magically perfect at learning how to be intimate with somebody again. And I'm learning how to have some grace with that — with, "This is still really hard!" But I'm still learning things, and I still have wisdom that I'm bringing to the table. So that's what I'm learning as a human being — learning how to go through these transitions and make it work.

Karen Yates

I love it. I love it. As someone with a dog that I got during the pandemic, it's like, "Love me, love my dog!" Dog's coming along, okay! I actually had someone write me a really nasty note on OkCupid about how that was so not okay. [laughs] I'm like, "Oh my gosh, really? That's what you're going to be pushing back on?" Brandon, do you have some thoughts?

Brandon Hunter-Haydon

Crisis can be looked at as a great breaking apart of things, a great revealing. And I think that the pandemic has served this in a number of ways. It's revealed a number of things to us in a really stark way — all the way from our social structures and our

institutions, all the way through to our relationships. And the crucibles of everything, the crucibles of crisis, have forced to the surface things that just wouldn't have come to the fore, or at least not for a long time, had these circumstances not come upon us. And I think that there is opportunity in that — not to be flippant about the suffering and the loss that has happened in the wake of it. But at the same time, what is also true is that there are new opportunities. And when it comes to the idea of filters and standards, I think it's really important to think about that most of us are looking for — if I can be presumptuous, most of us are looking for someone who has both the capacity to look around at everything and say, "Holy fuck, this is wild, this is a lot. Here we are." And at the same time, can meet you with a sense of aliveness, and still connect to joy, still connect to wonder, to sensuality, right? Because that's what adventure is, right? It's both of those things. It's facing both of those things. And I think that we are looking for people to be our adventuring mates, whether that's long-term or short-term. And what you need is somebody who is going to be able to meet you in the dark, and sit with you in the dark, and look around and say, "Holy fuck, it's dark, it's kind of scary in here. I don't know when or how we're going to get out of this." But who will then stand up with you, and, you know, you can dust each other off and hand each other the light when you need to, and make your way. And again, that can look like a play partner; that can look like something very casual; that can look like an anchor partner. The energy around that, the intimacy around that, is what's really vital. Literally vital.

Karen Yates

Beautiful words, beautiful words. Yeah. And all of you just brought such interesting elements to this initial inquiry into dating and the pandemic — that everyone's in the frying pan right now. So, this is just causing a complete overhaul of self, a completely new relationship with ourselves. And everyone is going through it. So I wonder: Do you have stories of change among clients, or friends? Or do you see this happening across your — yeah, in your social circles. What are people talking about?

Tazima Parris

One thing that is a conversation — both within my circle and, I suspect, in other people's circles — is about "the end of Covid." I'm using air quotes here. And there's a sense of urgency, to be done with this uncomfortable part. And so even in the question that was posed to us, there was a "now that the pandemic is ending." There's actually... It's not at the end. The 1918 pandemic lasted for four years. And there weren't as many people on the planet. And there weren't as many kind of complex issues at that time. And I don't think it's spread as fast — like, it probably spread pretty fast, but we have a different situation. So I'm not expecting that this is the end. And that is a framework — well, you mentioned being in the frying pan — that's part of the

frying pan that we're in. So, even as we think about dating, and as these conversations are happening around dating, what I'm hearing is, there's an urgency to see people, and there's also a reluctance to see people. There's a, "I really like how my life has shifted," because of what Jera was sharing — of like, "now I know what's important to me; these are my new priorities." And even responsibilities — with new puppies, or new activities, or whatever. We're in a place where there's a new condition for more people than just, like, a certain group. The planet is going through a new experience. And we have not yet experienced that. We're in uncharted territory. And when I hear people talking about it, what I find is that they're seeking security in trying to figure things out. But there's an underlying uncertainty that's beneath the conversation, that many people are not talking about. They'll talk about the political pieces, or the dating frustration, or will talk about the stuff on the surface. And on the deeper level, what I'm feeling and what I'm hearing is that there's this piece of, "I don't know when this is going to be over. This is really uncomfortable, and I'm really reaching for some normalcy, so that I can feel not crazy in this crazy situation." And so, what Brandon was saying — I really hear the "Hey, it's dark, and this is an adventure." And having the most resilient partner and being the most resilient person, I think, are the two pieces that I would take with me as I step into this new space of what's coming next — which, we do not know what it is.

Karen Yates

Yeah, I love what you're talking about here, because you're talking about control, and the desire for control — which is where people go to when they're afraid. And this conversation is very deep. And what you're saying is very deep — that, yes, it's not ending. And then when this is being recorded — tonight, as the Pacific Northwest is being hit with 115-degree heat wave, which is absolutely astonishing. And, so, climate change. And, you know, Chicago has had — where I'm at, on the lake, has had two tornado warnings in a week, in an area of Chicago that has never had tornado warnings. So, yeah... And then all of the other aspects that the pandemic has uprooted. Let's move into the idea of control. I would like to hear from Brandon and Jera, about control as we move forward, and how to divest from control.

Jera Brown

I just want to acknowledge that I don't think everybody does feel afraid, or may even recognize internalized fears. You know, I moved from Chicago to a small city in Indiana in February. And even though there's been a high number of COVID cases and COVID deaths, it is like life as normal here. There's just a — what do you want to call it? Non-recognition of going through a pandemic? In a lot of parts of the country, and in certain families, and maybe everyone's life hasn't been as uprooted as other people's.

So, for listeners, if you're feeling that way, and just thinking like, "I don't feel afraid," I... Well, first of all, let's take the pandemic seriously. But also, there's other ways of tapping into what you're feeling, if it's not just this direct sense of fear, right? That still has to do with control. And I had this thought and I'm losing it. I know from a lot of conversations I've had, especially with clients — my, like, fetish clients — that something that's happened is... Well, both with my fetish clients, I guess, and just with my friends groups, is that we've lost a lot of our coping mechanisms, or the things that have brought us independence, or brought us grounding. For a lot of my clients, it was traveling for work, or just having alone time in order to indulge in different things. For me, during the pandemic, especially during the shutdown, it was the ability to hike, or sit in coffee shops and write. And I've gotten more of that back — that's part of why I moved from... But as things, as the country is still shuffling, and as people are still finding their bearings, I think that a lot of things that brought us a sense of grounding are gone. And my fear is that we move into — we try to go into new relationships to find grounding and to find centering, before we find it in ourselves, which is not a good way to approach a new person.

Karen Yates

Great, great insights. Brandon?

Brandon Hunter-Haydon

That's key. And something that I want to be compassionate towards, because we all do that — having a level of projection. Having a fantasy that makes it more graspable, or tenable, or tangible, by putting it into and by infusing another person with it. It both is inevitable to some degree — it's part of our bonding process, I would say, in a pretty normal sense. I think just being aware of that, just being aware that that's a part of the things that we do. And right now, we might need to do that even more than we ever have before in our lives, because of what's happening around us, because of the circumstances that we're in. What I would encourage is not to drive oneself anxious about whether or not being too fanciful about a connection or a prospect, but rather just acknowledge that a part of me is going to need that, is going to do that. And maybe I can make that speakable with the person that I'm starting to connect with. Maybe they're doing the same thing, to another degree. And now, what do we have there? We've taken something I could have turned into an anxiety, could have turned into something maybe we made secret, that we didn't want to acknowledge, and now we've made it speakable. We made it shareable. And that's what we need. We are creating connection to one another. That's how we get through uncertainty — is by not being isolated, by having a sense of connection.

Karen Yates

Yeah, I totally agree. I mean, I think that's one thing that I'm really diving into more than ever, is the speakable; is the sharing and the exposing of self. As absolutely painful as it is, I'm like, "This is the only way out." [laughs] At least for me. And it's interesting, because I haven't even been associating it with a reaction to the pandemic. But it so is. It's so woven into — everything's woven into everything else, right? So, this impulse I have at first was to hide or shield, and then it was like, "Oh, no. The answer is like, ooopennn." And oh, my pecs hurt as I open my chest! You know, it's kind of like, aughhh. So yeah, I really appreciate that thought, Brandon.

[to podcast listener] You'll hear more from the panelists in a moment. Did you know we have transcripts for all episodes? You'll find the link within each individual episode, just under the audio player at wildandsublime.com.

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We'll now hear more from my conversation with Tazima Parris, Jera Brown, and Brandon Hunter-Haydon. In this half, we discuss authenticity, vulnerability, and being centered. We begin with me returning to the original question, about whether or not the higher bar that this person is setting now for others is typical, given the circumstances — and will it remain in place?

[to panelists] One of the things our Patreon person asked: "Is this temporary, or typical?" Or, is this temporary — will this pass? I mean, I can kind of anticipate what people will say, but does anyone feel the impulse to jump in off of that prompt?

Brandon Hunter-Haydon

I'll jump right back in with that.

Karen Yates

Sure. Right on.

Brandon Hunter-Haydon

It doesn't matter. [Karen laughs] It doesn't matter if it's typical, or temporary, or here to stay. Because what you do with it right now is what's important. How you treat yourself right now, and how you choose to relate to this experience right now — to relate to

your own uncertainty, to relate to your wonder about how things are going to be, how you're going to be. And again, make that more conscious with yourself; make it permissible for yourself to even hold that without having the burden of trying to know what it means, or how it's going to go. And then make that speakable with other people.

I don't know if this is related, but I want to share it, because I feel like this is really important. One concrete example of what I've noticed is, some people are 'pandemic isn't over,' but they're emerging into this new phase of the pandemic with a new love or derision for things that they used to do before. Like, for example, small talk. I fucking hate small talk. I hate it. But I used to do it a lot before. Now, I don't have time for it. I don't have time for it. It's not my bag, it doesn't make me feel the way that I want to feel, and it doesn't feel — 90% of the time, it does not feel genuine to the type of interaction I'm having. Now, at the same time, I know other people who have now fallen in love with small talk, because it represents something. Either a sense of what they're calling normalcy, or familiarity, or affinity, that is tenable. Right? It's within their grasp. They used to hate small talk, and now they love it. I think it's really beautiful. Because what it's done is, for someone like me, it's given me a place to say, "I don't have time for this anymore." And that's actually really great. Because now I'm having to own that part of me, and be super real about it, and find a new way to join with people in a way that is more authentic to me. Even if it's telling them straight up, "Hey, I fucking hate small talk. Like, I appreciate you asking me." You know, these questions, how do you feel about it? Now we have a conversation. But for other people, they've really, like — I love standing in the grocery store line and having the person next to them start up a totally mundane conversation. And that really soothes them. Right? It gives them a sense of like, well, we're still here together. And I have to honor both of those things. That's just, like, a concrete example of something that I've noticed.

Karen Yates

Mm, mmm.

Tazima Parris

I want to chime in on a couple things here. One is about the vulnerability, and making things speakable, and, like, opening up. One thing I share with my clients, which is always a reminder to myself — [laughs] — we know how that goes — is that the only way to the land of intimacy is through the valley of vulnerability. We can't access what that connection is, because for the people who love the small talk, as Brandon was sharing, it could literally be vulnerable. It was vulnerable to not be able to have that. So, even in this moment of what for some people might be not intimacy at all, there's a

certain level of connection that's happening for that person that wasn't available to them before. And as far as temporary, typical, that question, you know, my curiosity goes to: What is it for you? And it really is an opportunity for us to decide what's important for me now. I think it's an opportunity for self-awareness. I think whatever is happening right now is all this opportunity for self-awareness. How do I feel about what's going on right now? How do I feel about the choices I'm making? How do I feel about what has been happening, and the conditions that currently occur? Do I like that I'm reacting freakishly cautious? Is it serving me? Like, really ask yourself: Is it serving you? If it's not serving you, shift it, change it, try something new. I'm a forever scientist. I've always been a researcher my entire life, even from, like, a little person. I've always been like, "What's up with that? How does that work?" Especially around human beings. And it's always curious to me, no matter what relationship situation I'm going through, or I'm seeing in other people, I'm always noticing and taking notes. What is it about this piece of it that could serve me? What is it about my client's dynamic that could help me, one, be more authentic in my life; or, how can I use this as a teaching point for others who are in a similar situation? So it's all about the integration. I'm looking at it for myself. How am I speaking to the people around me? Am I bringing my most genuine self? And it can be literally from someone being really vulnerable, or someone completely withholding something from someone else. And then I can take that for myself and say, does that work for me? Or does it not? I feel like that's what adulting is. Adulting is, we get to choose. And if it's working for us, great; if it's not working for us, great — we get to choose again. And again, I want to acknowledge how much uncertainty we're experiencing, and how little we can predict what's going to happen next. We don't even know what temporary is. We thought — you know, the original projections for when this was gonna blow over, they were biased-ass projections. [laughs] But we're in triple, at least minimum triple-time what was originally discussed. And so, none of us fucking know. And that's okay. And I think — I know our society is not okay with not knowing. And just like that vulnerability piece, we don't know how people are going to react to what we share. We don't know what's going to happen if I say this thing. That's life. That is how life is presenting itself — not just in this moment, but as we move through the uncertainty, as we move through our dating experiences, as we move through life experiences, and groceries, and masks, and no masks, and "Am I gonna have sex with this person or not?" Or whatever. Whatever the thing is, it always comes back to, "Is this working for me, or is this not working for me?" What am I taking from my world that I can integrate? What am I letting go? It's always that conversation. And that is the self-awareness that I think is sort of emerging in more defined focus for us right now.

Jera Brown

I just had this thought when Tazima was talking, about the need for vulnerability right now — that for so many of us, there have been just such major life changes that it's going to force vulnerability. Where perhaps folks were going into dating with this small talk level, this safe, like, "I can slowly get to know somebody, because I've got my pat answers." Now, there's fewer pat answers, because there's so much change in all of our lives, that it forces us to maybe be more genuine than we're comfortable with. And acknowledging that, and acknowledging the need, as Brandon said, to voice things going on, and that voicing being uncomfortable, I think my advice would be, first of all, make sure that you're coming at this with a place of confidence that if you say something vulnerable and it's not taken well, it's not on you. You're doing your part. And that might be a sign of incompatibility, or it might be a sign that they're not ready for the level of vulnerability that even dating might require. And the other thing is that it's okay to take it slow. Take dating as slow as you need, as long as you're being honest in the process. Because if you're hiding things because you're not able to be vulnerable, then that's not fair to the other person. So I am curious what Brandon and Tazima have to say about that — this new level of required vulnerability.

Tazima Parris

That's a great question, Jera. [laughs] It's a great space. My camp — my sort of personal approach to it — and my personal approach may not match anyone else's, and so I'm speaking for myself. I am naturally sort of an edgy person. And I want to know the truth of what someone can handle. That being said, I'm not into doing shock factor kind of vulnerability, where it's like, "I do this, and what do you think about that?" It's not that. [laughs] It's more, "Hey, here's the thing that I want to share with you. And I feel strongly about this." And if I'm presenting that piece of information, it means that I'm ready to present that information. The other person may not be ready for that information, but I am ready. And I know that by expressing myself, I will feel expressed in the world, and in integrity with myself. And from that integrity with myself, then I can make any choice that comes to me. If I'm not in integrity with myself because I'm withholding something from someone, whether I am ready to say it and I'm punking out, or I am not ready to say it, or I literally do not want to share it, then that's also a choice, too. If my relationship with this person — and when I say relationship, my relating to the person — if this information is required to be an integrity for that person, and I'm not willing to share it, then that cannot proceed in a way that's peaceful. It won't work. However, if someone has a bad reaction from something that I've shared vulnerably — which has happened to me personally, which has happened to some of my clients... all of my clients. Which has happened for other people in my life. If you're in integrity, and you've told the truth to the best of your ability, you've been as clear as you can, and in as much integrity as you can with yourself, you'll take it from the place

of their uncomfortable reaction. And you can deal with their uncomfortable reaction. But my encouragement, for those making a choice to share something vulnerable, is make sure that this is the most truth that you can tell at the time. And that doesn't mean you have to go into all the juicy details, or the gory details, or the long, drawn-out story that made it so, that brought you to this point. You don't have to do all that. But there is a core seed of truth that if you shared that vulnerable thing, it would resonate. And then whatever else you could answer, or respond from a place of integrity with yourself. And that's the biggest piece for me.

Karen Yates

Yeah. And what I really am hearing in these threads that are coming at me here is, this — what we're talking about now — it does not matter if you're dating or in a long-term relationship. This is a truth. This is a way to be in relationship, period. So I'm listening to this on two levels, of, like, people who are dating and attempting to connect with new people. But I'm also listening to this as, you're in a long-term relationship, things have changed, your worldview may have changed. Are you still having a coherent relationship with your partner, or partners? Are you still simpatico? But it comes again, as we've been saying, from self, and speaking truth, and being aligned with yourself. Brandon, what do you have to say?

Brandon Hunter-Haydon

I really love how Tazima richly described the relationship of integrity to this. And one avenue to, I think, reconnecting, re-establishing a relationship with integrity, is to think about your values. Like, we are not separate from the systems in which we live. We are part of it, we're part of nature, we're part of the systems that we've created to deal with nature, and to sustain ourselves. And a crisis — which means to sift, right? It is a revealing of what is most vital. Another way of saying that is, it forces you to look at what is working and what is not working. And you have to face how things are not working. But the circumstances have put you face to face with what is no longer working in your life. A way to stand and that is to then drop back into your values. What kind of a person do you want to be? What would you call that? Going back to the filter question — you know, the idea of, like, what's that even about? How long should it last? What are the standards? Think about the kind of person you want to be. What are your values? That's your answer. Think about your core values — and this is a great time to really think about that. We have to think about that as a society, as an economy, as a structure, across the board. Right? We have to face this in a way that we should have faced a long time ago. But here we are. And I feel like a lot of people are there with that now too. So we have to decide what our values are. Those are our waypoints for actions, right? And the more in alignment your actions are to your values.

As Tazima said, then you have integrity. And that means that regardless of the outcome, you move through that committed to your own process, right? Process over outcome. I think that when you live in integrity — which is hard, and it requires both commitment and change. In order to do that, if you know what your values are, and are in touch with them, even the ones that need to grow and change, then you're living in integrity, it's going to guide you more moment to moment than any sort of attachment to a particular outcome, or a long-term plan. If that makes any sense.

Karen Yates

It does. And I want to ask, you know, in looking at moving this more to the long-term relationship area, as you move moment to moment, you're staying in integrity, you see your partner struggling, you've built a relationship together, maybe now there's a disparate way of viewing things in the midst of change. And it can be pandemic, it could be anything. It could be death, it could be relocation, it could be some sort of external thing. How does one sort of reach across and strengthen, while also remaining, like with self?

Brandon Hunter-Haydon

I think that one way that that is done is by being able to hold on to yourself. And I don't say that to reflect a staunch, individualistic perspective. I say that because being self-responsible — in the sense of, at least, if nothing else, being able to drop back to, in this moment, in this crisis, or in this relationship, in this very moment that I'm in, what value can I reach out to and hold on to for this moment, that's going to keep me in some kind of integrity to myself? Because maybe that's precisely what this other person needs. More than any other kind of service, any other kind of action, any kind of doing that could happen to support them, maybe what I need to be right now is the embodiment of a particular value. And that actually gives this other person something tangible to hold on to. Maybe when they feel at a loss for themselves.

Karen Yates

Hmmm. Yeah.

Tazima Parris

And I want to add here, that it can be particularly challenging when both people in this situation are triggered, or they're having a tough time. Often, I see, in clients and in relationships I've had, where one person wants to get closer when a challenge is happening, and the other person wants to go away when the challenge is happening. This is really difficult, because the person doing the opposite thing feels like not-love. It feels wrong. It feels terrible. It sets up a panic response. Like, the emotions are already

high, and it can spiral things into a really tough place really quickly. And to refer to what Brandon mentioned, about the holding on to the value, or that piece of oneself, can literally be the only thing you have in that moment, when you're freaking out and your partner is freaking out. Which happens frequently in a really tense situation of uncertainty and ongoing compound anxiety. So it's not about fixing it, necessarily. And I encourage people to back off of the fixing. Like, it's — we're fucked up right now. Everything's bad, we're in an argument, there's yelling, or there's stonewalling, or whatever the argument or disagreement condition is, or the disconnection. Whatever's happening. I hope that there's a space where it's a little less — there are lower stakes with the emotional scale, wherever people are. And you can have a discussion about what you need when those emotions are heightened. And even understanding that the other person may need some distance can give the person who needs the closeness a little extra, like, "Oh, the person is not detaching from me forever and abandoning me forever!" It's: they need five minutes, or they need to take a walk, or whatever it is. And also be able to communicate that piece of, like, what is it that you need? And if you don't know what you need, get into what would help you. So take the time. And this comes back to self. Happiness is an inside job. No partner can make you happy. You making you happy is the biggest job. And we have adventure partners. We have activity buddies. We have partners with whom we do sexy things, and not-so-sexy things, and, like, clean the toilet. So in those long-term, committed relationships, if you give a little space and you have more communication about what you need during those times — and it literally, for the person who — not to just speak to the person who needs the distance — but for the person who needs more contact, it may be as simple as: could we hold hands? Like, can we pause and just hold hands for a moment? The person may not be able to provide that for you right at that moment. But maybe you could sit closer, or maybe you could sit next to each other instead of facing each other. Maybe you can touch legs. There can be a negotiation. These are tips and examples that I'm giving. It's not going to work this smoothly in real life. But this is what you're aiming for. When it's lower stakes, you can have this kind of conversation, and understand what kind of person you are, and what you're needing. And the more specific you can be about what you need when emotions are heightened, the more likely it is that you may be able to get that. And at least things won't escalate as much or as quickly in those situations. And really, that's the thing that gets us to the place of distance, is that, "Aughh, we can't get out of this!" And then I'm out of here, whatever. If we slow it down, and we understand these things, and it doesn't mean what we're making it mean, and I take care of myself, and you take care of yourself, and we can come together and reconnect after the rupture, we can repair, we can reconnect. And when it happens the next time, we'll be a little more skilled at it, and we can try something new, or we can see how it goes a little differently with different skills.

Karen Yates

Jera, do you have something to say to wrap us up?

Jera Brown

Ohhhh, wrapping up! [sighs]

Karen Yates

You don't have to — now, you don't have to give a summation statement. You can just give us—

Jera Brown

That's your job! [laughter] What immediately came to mind is that when change is happening, it's so easy to let fear drive the car — in ourselves, in our actions, in our relationships. And acting on fear is what creates a lot of these behaviors that cause tension in relationships, but it also changes changing relationships. And I think that's okay. And I was thinking about this quote from the book "Radical Acceptance," by Tara Brock. She quotes somebody that she heard that she doesn't name, but the quote is, "The boundary to what we can accept is the boundary to our freedom." And I don't know, I think a lot about this, and I'm like, "Fuck that." Because, like, it's so open-ended that it's just terrifying. Thinking about our partners changing is terrifying. What can we accept about the ways that our partner is changing that allows new respect and love to flourish? What can we accept about the ways that our life is changing that allows for new vulnerability and opportunities, and just reframing it so that it's curiosity driving the car? Something else besides fear that's driving the car can make a huge difference.

Karen Yates

Mmm, I love that. Curiosity is driving the car. In summation, thank you. [laughter] I'll just go for the easy summation. Appreciation, in summation. Appreciate. [laughter] This has been an awesome conversation. I have really enjoyed this panel discussion. Mmm, I want it to go on and on and on, but instead, I shall simply thank you all. Tazima Parris, Brandon Hunter-Haydon, and Jera Brown, thanks.

For more information on Tazima Parris, Jera Brown, and Brandon Hunter-Haydon, go to our show notes. Healing with sound has been used as an effective treatment for thousands of years. I work remotely and in person as a Biofield Tuning practitioner. Biofield Tuning employs frequency to help the body release unneeded physical and emotional patterns. The nervous system then relaxes, which can bring about relief from

tension, pain, anxiety, insomnia, and more. If you're interested in working with me personally, check out my website, karen-yates.com. More info is in the show notes.

Well, that's it, folks. Have a very pleasurable week. Next week, we'll investigate the Erotic Art Museum in Miami. Don't miss it. 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.