

Hey, Jessica, welcome to the show. We are so excited to have you join us on therapists, Uncensored. Thank you, Sue. It's great to be here. So why don't you give us a really quick overview of your, where you're coming from your perspective, and then we can dive right into this very exciting new content around attachment with non-monogamous couples and really opening up this, this conversation from the tradition that attachment has brought.

Yes. Yeah. So I am a psychotherapist. I'm a relationship coach. I'm a certified trauma professional, and of course I've been trained in many modalities, but you know, for the purpose of today, right, there's a lot of like trauma-informed attachment informs, you know, narrative informed, like, you know, modalities that will be.

In the world. I just moved to Asheville, North Carolina. I love Asheville. Yeah. Are you here? We were living in Costa Rica for a year before that in Colorado for many years. Yeah. That's great. All right. So you published a book, poly secure. There are not many like it, the minute that I heard about the book, I was very interested and I'll be honest with you.

I was thinking this is either going to be really great really, right? Or like, oh no. You know, so I was really, really happy to say our community. We have an online community. That's awesome. And poly secure. The book is in the queue for a study group. So it, it definitely passed all the sniff tests that we have on our end around that it's very solid.

Very persuasive without feeling like you're selling something, you know what I mean? Balanced. And so in that sense, trustworthy. So love it. How's the book been received? Oh, it's been tremendous. It's really been an overwhelming, of course it's not perfect, but an overwhelming positive response. It feels like it really fits, fills a gap for so many of us that would really, you know, are welcoming of, you know, refreshing reframes.

Yeah. And that's what I continually hear. Is it sort of filled a gap, especially in the non-monogamy literature that people were needing. Like I keep saying like, oh, I think I was just the cook. Like assembled the meal. People were hungry for it. Oh, that's lovely. Yeah. People were needing, you know, as an attachment lens on what's happening for their non-monogamous challenges, easy for us to unconsciously project, what we think we know about attachment.

And then that colors, how we see something that we're, we might not be familiar with and it's easy to pathologize. So the book, the title of the book is poly secure attachment trauma and consensual non-monogamy. And again, our guest today is Jessica Fern. So, how did you see, so you were saying you're kind of the cook.

How did you end up writing something like this? How, what, what's your story here? Yeah. Sort of, you know, several phase stories. So I mean, and we can get into this as you want to, but you know, there's my own process of opening up a monogamous marriage to polyamory, but then as a psychotherapist, practicing in Colorado you know, I've put it on out there.

I'm working with nonmonogamous people and that was a gap, you know, there's just, you know, especially however many years ago there weren't as many professionals. So that niche took off

and just hours and hours and hours of listening to how and why people were struggling. And me wanting to make sense.

And before my therapy career, I was I'm a researcher and was really trained in grounded theory. I don't know if you're familiar with that, right. Instead of imposing the theory onto the data, it's really like, what is the data telling me? What are the patterns that are emerging from these stories that I'm listening to?

So I did the same thing with my clients and I came up with a talk on couples, transitioning from monogamy to non-monogamy and there were several points in that of when couples come in and they're struggling, they might say, oh, we're dealing with agreement challenges, or we're fighting more. Or one of us can't get over our jealousy.

But we go further and it's like, oh, those aren't root issues. Those are symptoms of deeper issues. And one of those happens to be attachment ruptures. So attachment came up and sort of one of the five, six things that I saw as more of the deeper root issues. And I



met Eve record at a conference in 2019, and she was let people pitch book ideas.

And so as I was pitching a few, she was like, we need a book on attachment yesterday. And that was sort of became a book all in of itself. Yeah. Oh, wow. That's wonderful. Yeah. I definitely do want to get into it. I would like you know, people will be listening from all over the world. Some more familiar with this than others, so maybe we just start.

Briefly the good news is before we got on, Jessica asked me, you know, how familiar our audience was with attachment. And I was able to say, oh, they know this stuff. And if they do, and if you guys don't, if you're new to this, you know, this is the first episode you, anything you want to know about attachment we've got in this podcast, we've got an incredible library with the direct people who did the research.

So you're in the right place. So I think instead of just focusing on attachment per se, we're going to be talking about what the new information around the perspective, the biases that might be there. And then also, yeah, what, because what I thought was this, isn't this book isn't just for couples interested in opening up or, or folks in non-monogamous You know, what are you?

Pairs? Quadruples.

Pods. I don't know. Oh, what are they called? Polycules Okay. I say I love learning this stuff, right? A poly molecule. That's wonderful. Yeah. So, so from the, you know, just let's do a really

quick basics around non-monogamy rather than starting with attachment and then we can just go from, yeah.

So non-monogamy is an umbrella term that can mean and look like, and be expressed in many different ways, but, and we're talking about consensual non-monogamy so that's the first important distinction, right? Cheating would be non consensual. Non-monogamy someone doesn't know. Right. And there's deception going on, whereas consensual or ethical non-monogamy is everyone involved knows that there are either multiple love romantic partners and, or multiple sexual partners.

And those are kind of the two different spectrums right. Of how open and closed you are emotionally romantically. Right. And how open and close you are sexually. Right. And, and you can fit. Anywhere in sort of that, right? So some people are more emotionally close there with, you know, Hey, where are the couple where the primary, but maybe we sexually play with other people together, or we have some, you know, sex on the side sort of situation.

The other end could be like, polyamory would be I'm falling in love and creating like partner-based relationships with more than one person. Right. So there's many ways people do it. And then there's everything in between that, everything in between that right. Open marriage hierarchical, poly non-hierarchical poly solo, polyamory swinging, right.

Monogamish people have probably heard of these terms, so, no. Okay. That's good. And you said something and I hadn't thought of this before, but we think of it typically related to sexuality, but you said. You said kind of on the plain of emotional openness, is there such a thing of kind of polyamory that's nonsexual?



That's more of an emotional, yeah. People who feel more poly, romantic, poly, romantic, yeah. Poly romantic. So they might have like a few really not traditional at all. These aren't friends, there is romance, there is a different quality of that connection that they are with somebody else, right. Or people who are sort of identify as asexual, but they still might have more than one romantic partner in many ways.

This can look. Yeah. Oh, this is so refreshing too. I appreciate you taking the time to kind of bring us up to speed because I'm also aware of this idea of labor and the labor of teaching

people, whether it be, you know, the put on folks that are gender binary. What, what is that, you know, bring us along and the offense that that can bring.

Right. And that's one of the challenges that so many of the clients that have come to me have said, they're like, I had a great therapist. It wasn't even that they had a bad experience. They're like, I loved my therapist, but I was spending too much time educating them on who I was and what I was doing.

And all the monogamous, you know, bias kept coming in. And it's like, yeah, that's a lot of labor to do when you're paying one. So that's the favor that you're doing us as you're, you know, we're getting to ask these questions and learn. And, and again, the book does it really, really well, so. Okay. So that's kind of the umbrella of the w w how, how often is this, like, how does, how much does this occur?

Is it different in different cultures and, yeah, I don't know about cultural studies as much. You know, most of it is done. We can say within the us. I mean within the last 10 years, there was a study that showed about four to 5% of the population was identifying as non-monogamous. I think it's much, much more actually, you know because many people how you're defining non-monogamy for one.

You know, is, is a question, people admitting it. And then also I think we're seeing with millennials and now younger, they're just starting out this way. So that's what I was going to say is that's gotta be low. Cause those most folks wouldn't be right. They wouldn't have been captured yet, you know, or even just in my own family who everyone, the generation above me, everyone would have identified as monogamous.

But when my first husband and I came on as poly, you know, two or three aunts at the family party came forward and were like, yeah, it wasn't a triad in college. We did swimming for a few years and usually like traditional folks. So there's also just that, you know, it's yeah, well, but that speaks to like parts of our identity that we've had to yeah, exactly.

Right. Yeah, right. And some of us, and it's interesting to even think of sexuality as an identity. Right. Cause for some of us it's, it is very much an identity. And for some folks it feels very private and they don't want to wear it as an identity. And some people don't feel like they even have that choice to conceal it.

So it's yeah. It's complicated passing and not passing something you said in the book that I think would be helpful also to sort out is that there's a difference between poly orientation. And lifestyle. So can you say a little bit more about, yeah. And so this is what, again, through sort of the grounded theory approach, just listening to, you know, thousands of hours of people describing themselves and their experience.

And then once I put this out there, getting the feedback from people that they did sort of, you know, feel this way. And so some people really describe polyamory or non-monogamy whether it's sexual or romantic as an orientation, they say, this is how I'm wired. This is who I am. I don't even feel like I'm choosing this.

Like, it's just me. Right. I'm not going to argue with that. Right. Why would I write. Then there's other folks that are like, yeah, you know, I could go either way, right? I could, I'm happy to play for a while in this direction or experiment there. I was non-monogamous for a few years now I'm monogamous. It feels like a choice that they can sort of move in and out of, depending on life situations or partners.

And then on the other end, you hear people who are monogamous. They just, and it's, it's not just the cultural, societal conditioning. They're like, this is who I am. I could not be with more than one person. Like it's just not possible. So yeah, I see it as a spectrum. And some people, it is more of a choice or more of a philosophy that they align with and that's why they do it.

And other people it's definitely feels like their orientation and. I knew a woman though. I love how she said it. She said years before she was solo polyamorous. And so solo polyamorous means so solo polyamory is when you don't usually couple up and have like, I have a primary partner and we live together, we share finances.

You know, it's more living like you're your own primary partner. You know, you're identified first as a solo, autonomous being who then has partners. And those people though, the misconception is that solo poly folks are like avoidant. Non-committal, that's not the case at all. They might be very involved and invested with folks, but they don't do the assumption that we're going to live together.

We're going to have finances together. We're going to do family together. All of that is negotiated. Yeah, I love that. And you know, my experience with it has been the boundary work that has to happen to be able to, to be able to navigate this again. I don't think there's a couple out there in any former individual, even that couldn't benefit from some of the work that happens in this area of boundary.

Yeah. There's so much work around communication, knowing myself, knowing my needs and my preferences, being able to negotiate that in non triggered, reactive, defensive ways, like these are all capacities and skills, you know, and then being able to do boundary work. Yeah. So there's a whole skill set. And I talk, I'm talking about this in my next book that people open up and they don't realize, oh no, this skill sets I use to be healthy or functional and monogamy, aren't actually sufficient.

And I have to Uplevel my skills, you know, even when it's a joke calendaring, like how to manage multiple dates and relationships, like you have to know how to, how to do your calendar. You're going to get into trouble fast. Oh my gosh. That is so true. And the S with the, with the boundary work again, I think.

So one of the points that you make in the book is around that we can have, you know, we talk a lot about secure functioning and what does secure functioning. And I think the point that you made that if it's systematic, if it's because that you're married and you have a shared bank account, and so then you don't have to worry and you really believe your partner's never going to leave you.

And we call that security. Yeah. So then in that, in that sort of more protected space, we don't have to develop these muscles, these skills. And so we end up, I think in the absence of that. Then that then is exposed all the things that we don't know how to do exactly. Right. And I talk, I make that distinction of a lot of people in monogamy, they rely on the structure for secure attachment.

And it's not that you can't, we do get some security or a lot of security from structural aspects of our relationship, you know, but I want people to really be creating their secure attachment through their emotional experience together, their relational experience, not the shared bank account, the fact of legal marriage or owning a home together.

So I think every bet there's many people right now cringing a little bit. It's like, oh wait, there's more, you know especially right now during the stress that is, we've been under for a couple of years, I think couples are really stressed. And we, we all are, the kids are, the teachers are everybody is.

And, you know, my hope would be bringing in some of these skills to learn and really focusing less on the structure and more on that, your personal experience. And it does go right then to trauma and attachment in my mind. Why am I okay with not having that experience? Maybe I think that's all that I am supposed to have, or those sorts of things.

And you mentioned the avoidant people thinking if you're your own partner that you're avoiding or, or, you know, those things what does, let's talk about the research related to attachment and yeah. What was actually true versus what we might think is true. Right? So there's sort of a parallel. I think it was in the eighties, there was a study around cholesterol that came out and it was like, cholesterol is bad.

And then you look at the study and it was, they fed rabbits like me that don't eat meat. It was like something like that. And you're like, we can't conclude this for humans that therefore cholesterol cholesterol is bad. Right. So there's a similar problem. That's occurred that initial studies ask around attachment, asked, monogamous people.

If they were open to the idea of non-monogamy. And it just so happened that the people who have the more dismissive attachment style were the ones that were more likely to say I would consider non-monogamy. So what do you think the takeaway was? Absolutely. Well, therefore before and people who practice non-monogamy are dismissive or, or basically, or insecurely attached.

Yeah, exactly. And that is not the case at all. So there's only been like a handful of actual studies though, and they're all survey data, but they've done, you know, several thousand folks and they've looked at people who were non-monogamous and polyamorous or swinging. And it's great. They show that in many cases, there's absolutely no difference in the attachment styles of people practicing monogamy or non-monogamy.

And in some cases, the people practicing polyamory were actually a little bit more securely attached, which makes perfect sense in the summer, just talking about right, exactly. Like to

really do this on an ongoing basis, you do need to be more secure in yourself and your relationships. Yeah. So, so far the data does not confirm that non-monogamous folks practicing it are any more or less, you know, insecurely attached, which is great.

And in some cases a little bit more secure. Well, it makes me think of the research around When you don't come by security naturally with your family, but you do a ton of work on yourself that there, that you really can function securely. And in some cases, your reflective function, functioning your capacity, those skills are higher if you didn't come by it naturally because you've worked your tail off for it.

Exactly. Right. The earned security. So this is somewhat similar that you really work on your balance, you really skill up. So you're gonna that there's a benefit of that around how you feel in the world and your closeness that you can have with your partner. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Like there are studies that show the best predictor of your attachment style with your child.

Wasn't your previous attachment style as. Did you start to work on your attachment yet? Right. Oh, interesting. So people who had, you know, more of a disorganized experience, you know, as adults if they had done attachment work then, and like created coherent narratives, they were, you know, more likely to have a secure bond with their own children.

Right? Yeah. So where we are in our own personal development work is what makes the difference. That's that's wonderful. So what can we glean? What can we learn around? You had said that you had given these talks around moving. And so what, again, whether people are interested in actually opening the really ships up or not, it's still really useful to kind of learn kind of cross-culturally.

Yeah. So what, what can you bring us as far as what you've noticed or what the research says? Yeah. In terms of attachment and non-mental yes. And the, and the The skills, the skills basically to, you know, that, that you, we get the benefit of if we were, if we have to work out those boundaries. Yeah. Yeah.

So I think I mean, it's important to name that often to help people realize that potentially what's going on, you know, you have a non-monogamy. Couple or client, you know, in your office and they're struggling and to start inquiring about what's going on in the attachment based relationships. So the transition, especially for a couple, it's been monogamous, it's a huge deal to open up and that where there was structural security and now there isn't anymore.

So even if they all felt secure before, they're going to have show these new signs of feeling insecure because non-monogamy is the less secure in some, in some ways, right. Then monogamy, because it doesn't have that structural aspect. Right. So a lot of people, they open up and they just start to really feel wobbly or completely shaken to their core, right.

The degree that it's happening. And one of the things I mentioned in the book. Primal attachment panic starts to show up. You know, so people who have never felt a lot of anxiety potentially, right. They might've even been more on the dismissive end of the spectrum. Right. And now their partner is in their consenting.

Great. I'm wanting to do this, go out and have fun on your date and their partner's gone and they're completely melting. How do they make sense of this? Right. So explaining what attachment panic, primal panic is, right? Your brain might know your partner's going to come home, but some aspect of your nervous system says attachment, figure away danger, threat.

I might die and we've fine. Right. We're terrified, right. To have our partner out of reach. And now. You know, our partners are in constant reach with the phone. I mean, it's incredible. It's, it's actually not healthy in many ways. Right. We don't get a response within minutes and we're offended or we're worried that they're dead, you know, like it goes to either extreme, right?

So the leash that we have in our relationships to each other, you know, so that's a lot of, even the differentiation that's needed. And this is a process that many partners didn't differentiate before they open up there's aspects of codependency of identity, fusion of can you just have a night not together.

And you're good. Like, do you know how to be with yourself? And you're okay. Right. When I call the secure attachments itself. So that's a huge skill that's really needed in this. But again, it's not just non-monogamous folks who benefit from that skill set, like. We all, you know, could use probably an upgrade in our secure attachment with self.

Right. So could you say a little more than like the difference between enmeshment yeah. And closeness. Yeah. Right. So I see that on a spectrum too, right. That we have closeness, you know, and it would be a spectrum of independence and connection at the two poles. And then in connection, we can go too far and it becomes fusion.

Right. It becomes and measurement, it's not me as an individual connecting with you as an individual. It's I am losing myself within you. Right. And of course, moments of that in sexual union or intimate union, I'm not talking about those peak experiences. Right. I'm talking about the loss of self right. On a day-to-day level.

And how does that look? Like? What would somebody. What does that sound like? How does that look? How, how does that feel versus right. Good question. Yeah. So it can, it can be so subtle, you know, like, are any of like, like, are all your passwords, your you and your partners anniversary or names smashed, right.

Or all your photos on social media, you and your partner, like, you know, just the autumn, where is the autonomous self? Right. It can be like that. Right. It can be like, Yes. We want to be considerate and check in with our partners, but can we actually make decisions for ourselves based on what do I actually want?

You know, I'm thinking of my grandmother was very in meshed with her family and like, we'd go out to eat and she couldn't order for herself. It was always like, well, what do you want? You know, or, or we'd be like, do you want dessert, grandma? She's like, well, do you want dessert? No, I don't want dessert. You get it if you want it, you know, it just be that kind of like little dance that we'd have to do.



Right. So I think those are some of the ways that can show up, right. Or if a partner just doesn't feel okay, you know, or they're threatened if their partner wants to make appropriate independent decisions, You know, or, or the boundaries that someone might set that are actually healthy or feel really hurtful, you know?

Well, I like kind of doing this in a little more detail because it's much, this is really important because then I can feel right under that it gets to the panic, it gets to this. It will, it will, can look like controlling behavior. I can imagine like not understanding those, those, you know, those deep pits and then attributing this bad feeling to the partner.

Right. You're doing these things to me. You're making me crazy. And then all, you know, all sorts of bad things happen. So I can, I can feel like why someone would. Be very re re resistant and reluctant to go into that kind of terror and those kinds of fears. Totally. Right. And you're naming something huge.

Actually, when we hold everyone else outside of us, responsible for our own experience, threaten you made me feel this way. And it's like, absolutely, we are interdependent. You know, we can trigger things and do things to hurt others. However, we also are responsible for our own



feelings and reactions, you know?

So yeah. It's getting to this route of taking responsibility for ourselves, which that's hard, it's hard and it's so attractive and it's so both attractive when someone else is doing it. And it feels really good when we're doing it. But I think that, so that's kind of approaching what the fee, the experience of security that you were talking about that that's so not so that we're not just talking about the investment, we're talking about like what it feels like when you have yourself and you have your.

Since of yourself. And, you know, we talk about it on the show is you know, in the green zone basically where we're integrated, our thoughts and feelings are clear. We don't, it's not confusing. Yeah. We want more of it. Yeah. Yeah. I like to think of it. As sort of feeling like you're the mountain and the weather that is maybe beautiful or stormy comes and goes, you know, and the beautiful flowers come and then the snow is there.

And like, you know, there's the ebbs and flows of life. But there can be an inner stability. That's like I'm here and having equanimity right. Love that. I love that. So that's a beautiful metaphor. I know people will enjoy. Yeah, I'll do it as a visualization with clients too, you know, like imagining yourself as an, even like imagining the seasons come and go and just there's this inner stability that people can access and then they can return to as a resource.

Oh, I can totally play with that metaphor too, because the mountain can support, you know, people exploring and they just don't want to pull dozer over there or something, you know?

Totally right. Expanding on it. Yeah. That's wonderful. So trauma, if you don't mind. So this all sounds great, and this is, we're talking about secure people doing this work or people that are working on their sense of security and doing this work with integrity and but it's not all that, right.

I'm not talking about polyamory, but people. Yeah. So can we sort out a little bit Just where that things can go wrong related to whether it be, I mean, just how you see that, but as far as not pathologizing individuals, but kind of the way we're describing, acting out. The fierce and the feelings of people are having trouble.

Yeah. Right. There's many. And that's part of the book too, is like there's places where things go wrong with our attachment and non-monogamy right. And some of it is that when we people transition that shift lifting up of that structure of monogamy, it exposes a lot. So I think we touched on that already, but what it exposes is either, oh, we've actually, haven't had secure functioning in a relational way.

Right. Oops. Now we have to figure that out while we're also trying to date other people. That's a lot. I also see just on an individual level. And whether you're in a partner or you're not, you know, just going into non-monogamy starts to go, oh, I didn't realize this insecure past. I actually had an all their past trauma and stuff starts to get activated.

Right. And different insecure experiences start to bubble up. Also the, sometimes the situation, the circumstances of non-monogamy can mimic the insecure environment that we talk about from people's childhood, right. Where you have like thinking of the. What you call the red, right? The preoperative chest, right.

That came from, well, there is love, but it's inconsistent. It's here and then it's not, you know? And, and are you there sometimes? Yes. Sometimes. No. Right. So this can happen when you've got a partner and then someone new comes into their life. Right. And you were used to a certain amount of frequency of communication, frequency of seeing them, you know, how quickly they respond and suddenly they're less available and it's not because they love.

Or want you less, but time is limited. Right? And so what I see a lot of is like, oh, that person is like, whoa, what's happening. Why do I, why do I now feel all this jealousy or all this anxiety? And it's like, yeah, because your attachment system is it actually, it's the attachment protests that is saying, wait a minute.

I'm not getting what I'm used to here. You know? And that becomes an opportunity either for the person that has a new person in their life to say, oops, I am neglecting you a little bit. Let me. Recourse, you know, or I actually can offer you less now. And we, after we evaluate whether that is enough for you or readjust to a new level, you know, so that's something that happens right.

Readjust to a new level. What does that mean? New level of weather, like a new frequency, you know, sometimes it's like, yeah, we're used to four nights a week and now we have to go down to three nights a week or two, you know or use that kind of, you know, frequency or sometimes it is, you know, okay. Maybe we're not as much as we thought we were, right.

That that's usually not the case. I see partners who want to, you know, keep the frequency, but they just have to figure out how to manage it. All the other attachment challenges. It can mimic the disorganized experience. Right. And this particularly happens when partners have opened up together and in their monogamous life.

You're each, other's everything. I tell you everything from the profound to the mundane, you're my confident. And you're my go to, like, there isn't anything that I don't share with you. Right. And you're my safe person, right? You're the person, you're my comfort in this world. And now, even though we're consenting to this, it's your actions of being with someone else that feels threatening and is, you know, triggering my nervous system.

So the, so that disorganized experience of the one I want comfort from is also the threat. That's really hard to manage in a partnership, right? Like, whoa, this is strange. Or even just the healthy autonomy that like, oh, now there's things I'm not going to tell you. I'm not going to divulge every detail of this other partner's life or my time with them, because I need to respect their privacy.

You know, whereas previously you might've hung out with a friend and you go home and you tell your partner every gossipy piece about it. Those boundaries are now in place that didn't exist before. And that's a, a learning curve. I think that's an understatement.

It's a massive challenge. I imagine.

That's great. Well, what else in the research you said that, you know, with the grounded research, was there any surprises that you found something you weren't expecting. Good question something I wasn't expecting. I'll have to think like that we'll maybe come up. The other things I have come to where like, not about attachment and there were sort of what my next book will be about as these other points.

And, and those are you know, Non-monogamy we'll expose the cracks in your relationship. So a lot of these deep surface, sometimes even invisible issues, all get shown, power dynamics issues around money. Wait, we're not actually sexually compatible at all. And we've just been tolerating that for a long time.

One of us has been emotionally disengaged for 10 years, but I've been just living with it. Like all of that, that people are sort of, you know, just tolerating becomes intolerable well. And is that what you know what we said earlier about like, look, you're causing me to have these feelings. One could easily say.

Everything was fine. It's the talking about opening it up this right. And that's what I say. It's not the opening up itself. Right. It's it's what happens in that process. Right? So it's that non-monogamy itself, that's causing these things. Right? Cause a lot of times it's like, no, these issues were actually there.

We just weren't looking at them. Right. Or, or non-monogamy puts you in a pressure cooker or a spotlight, whatever metaphor we want to use. Right. That now I can't not see this and pay

attention to this. Right. And sometimes it's developmental too. We just weren't ready. You know, like for, for many women, especially non-monogamy is a sexual liberation, you know, in many levels, you know, that women start to say, wait a minute, I'm allowed to be a sexual being.

And I'm even allowed to want more than one thing, you know, not just more than one person, you know? And so the impact that sort of patriarchy has had on women starts to really shift and that's huge, right? So then people start to claim themselves and their desires. That's one of the other things that is on the list is there can be this awakening of the self and many things in our life can catalyze an awakening of the self.

And maybe that was a surprise, but I was like, whoa, there's all of these people who transitioned to non-monogamy and they have this. Complete spiritual awakening of the self, you know, like a co a developmental shift that's happening. So people will have this entire awakening of the self, right. And sometimes it's described in spiritual language or the way, if you look at how people describe their spiritual awakenings I also see it as a developmental shift, right.

If you know, Kegan's developmental stages, right. From the like conformist self to the self-authoring self, you know, and that's a huge wake up, right? Yeah, no, I can totally see that. It's not, yeah. Not just sexuality, but once you begin to open up to all the things that you haven't let yourself want that you've the makes me think of Glennon Doyle's work and you know, the traps that we unconsciously have around ourselves.

Yeah. That. So just one thing I could see it catalyzing changes in work, you know, even this is a weird example, but it makes me think of COVID and how we were all just in our automation and doing it. And then when we were forced to shift all of a sudden there's like career changes and all sorts of things that happen because of the feeling, the sudden awareness of a freedom that we are actually already had, but we didn't know that we had.

Exactly. And that's a great parallel to, because you, oh, the pandemic, like that was, the people really felt condensed and pressured and you literally are confined to home. Right. And yet what that pressure then kind of can expose and liberate, right? Yeah. So is there. And I'm thinking of, in particular of folks that I've worked with where they're a monogamous pair and are trying to open up and there's been the scenario of of them being able to successfully do it, but also because not everybody can do it.

Like you said, sometimes you're just monogamous. That's just who you are. And the grief that comes around, both becoming more and more aware of themselves. And then this distance that happens. And at some point about, you know, this just heartfelt boundary of like, I'm so sorry, I can't do this with you. Yeah.

I only want to mention that because some of the other folks I've worked with, they can't envision it. I think sometimes it feels like you have to do that, whether that's your orientation or not, because you want to hold on to your. Exactly. It becomes a really huge dilemma for both people. Right. We have the one that wants this and then the reluctant partner and the one that wants it,

they wind up in this dilemma of, okay, this feels like the authentic expression of me is polyamory, but I might have to lose the love of my life or my marriage.

Right. And my family, the way that it's been, you know? And then the other person is like, yeah, I don't want to lose this relationship, but you're asking me to do something I just can't do, don't want to do. And I think, you know, in terms of working with people, I usually ask the reluctant partner though, as long it's this tight fist, it's a hard line.

Can you give this a, try a full effort, right? In a way that doesn't feel traumatic for you though. Right? So you two have been doing your version of relationship for 10 or 20 years. Would you give your partners version of relationship a year? Can you do that? And it's okay. But some people are just like, I literally can't do that and we have to honor that, you know, but I've seen people go, okay, I'll try.

And then they become people who surprising. I've been surprised in that. Suddenly they find someone cause it's like so many people. They can't believe it until they experience it in this scenario. They just are like, I can't imagine I'd ever find anyone else I'm attracted to. Oh. And they have all the negative stories and I get it.

Who wants to actually be dating and being on apps. But then they meet someone and they go, oh, it's possible. There's a lot of this driven by communities through like apps and things like that. A lot of it is even before the pandemic. Yeah. Like, you know, there's different dating apps and some are more monogamous based.

Some allow you to be more explicitly non-monogamous. So that's, you know, and then there's forums, there's Facebook groups, all of that, you know When I was in Colorado, a lot of people would meet each other through meetups, things like that, whether they're support group meetups or social meetups that are sort of, you know, catered more towards socializing, potentially dating.

Yeah. So that's, so there's, there's some worlds out there there's a whole communities and worlds. Yeah. And of course cities are going to have more of it. But I mean, I see people successfully with multiple partners in rural areas. It's like, it's amazing, like the, what you're talking about related to the systematic change.

And because like you're saying that Even, even within this relationship, being able to get that systematic assumption and automation off is also enlivening and exciting. And, but, and then, but also the system stuff is, can be so repressive. And this is part of going back to attachment research.

And the way that it's been talked about is been, you know, initially it was used to keep mothers at home. Yeah. And then of course it's always, it's been heterosexist and very much monogamous, you know, that's the panic, that's the pinnacle. So in many of the therapists will be familiar with the couple bubble and things like that.

Can you speak to the, yeah, yeah. So the majority, and I talk about this in the book, the majority of their research on attachment is highly mono normative, right. That it's done with monogamous couples exploring their dynamics. Right. And then what happens naturally, it's like implicit so much throughout it, but then when they tell you how to become secure, yes.

What they basically tell you to be monogamous. Some people or research explicitly says be monogamous and that, and they even demonize non-monogamy as a form of, you know, insecure attachment. And acting out. Yeah. And it's like, oh, does that happen? Of course. Does that happen in monogamy too? Of course happens in both ways.

Right. But you know, when things like when they do a study, this would be another good example that, you know, people who are more dismissive style of attachment are more likely to have casual sex. Right. Then you take people who are having casual sex and guess what the takeaway is, right. That they're dismissive style.

That's not necessarily the case. Right. So or that, you know? Yeah. So that happens a lot when they explore monogamous you know, folks and their insecure attachment styles and how that expresses sexually, like there was even a study that said like sexting was an expression of an insecure attachment style.

Right. And you're like for a lot of folks that might be their only way of connecting initially in there with their partner, because they're a long distance relationship, like sexting can be a complete expression of healthy sexuality and attachment. Absolutely. So, yeah, so there's, there's that challenge, right?

Is looking at non insecure attachment styles and then taking those behaviors and projecting them on to others as insecure expressions. But then, you know, if it's not explicit, there's just implicit things like telling you how to create secure functioning and you have to have rituals at bedtime.

Well, what if I don't live with my partner? You know, or what if I can't create the couple bubble, you know? So a lot of the ways that specific behaviors that are told. You know, are highly mono normative and not everyone who's polyamorous nonmonogamous can even do. Yeah.

So just like with parents, how the child has a different attachment style with different parents. I imagine it's not just that people in non-monogamous polycules have all secure relationships, right? That it's, it's made up of individuals that have their own histories and so that they have different attachment styles with.

Relationships. Yeah. And that's often a surprise to people, right? Is they had identify, maybe they knew about attachment and identified as having one style or they just read about it and go, oh, I've always been that way. And then they're like, oh my goodness, why am I feeling three different styles with each different person?

Right. And there was a study that did show that you could have a secure attachment with one partner and it was like, didn't make it like you could then have any kind of other style with

someone else, you know? And that is so powerful because it also, it really taught that that emphasizes the didactic, the relational part of attachment.

It's not just inside of you exactly. Right? Exactly. I mean, even with friendships, you could notice like, oh, Hey, like if someone's coming too much at me, I wound up withdrawing a little bit. If someone's a little far away, I leave. Yeah. Become a crazy texter. Why haven't you responded?

Right. That like, in so many ways. And that's the kind of, I introduced that in the introduction. I say like, yeah, there's a wealth of knowledge here about human connection and bonding that, like, I don't want to throw that out. And yet we need to be critical and say, wow, it's also highly mano normative, you know?

And it makes me think of, you know, most of us, when we're you asked like, oh, how do a sperm and an egg, how does conception of a human happen? Right? Most of us would say the sperm penetrates the egg, right. And people looked under the microscope and that's what they saw. Guess what? That's not how it happens.

That is a highly like gender role binary, you know, masculine, feminine interpretation that the masculine penetrates the feminine, right. That was like a patriarchy paradigm that literally informed perception. Right. They then found, oh, no, there's this whole conversation that the egg and the, and there's like cells early in, around the cervix that sort of sort through the sperm and push, they escort other sperm forward.

And then the egg, like con there's certain ones that like do things around and then, you know, the egg opens and sort of picks with the sperm. Right. So it's just like, oh, how interesting. That's so fascinating. Right. Just so right. Like, and yet there's, it's not that there weren't some truths, but like it's not a complete story, right.

These paradigms that are ancient. Mm. I love that example. I love that example. And, you know, if we can before we wrap up, go back to trauma for just a minute. Cause I was thinking about. Another sort of subset that I've had some experience with that have been really difficult to sort through our folks that are highly traumatized, that it is a little confusing if it's acting out, if it's if like the BDSM is an extension of their trauma or if it is part of their self-expression and, you know, so I just wondered what your thoughts were around kind of on the more extreme end of trauma and how that interplays with some of these.

This is a tricky one too, because it's, it can be. Right. And same thing. Monogamy can be actually an expression of someone's trauma too, right. Or shutting down of their sexuality. Right. Anorexia right. Can also be an expression of their trauma or very vanilla sex can also be, you know, so, but yes. I think those points are really good.

Actually. I get that right. Exactly. So to not take the BDSM and go up, that's just a traumatic expression. Right. But yes. Are there people who go towards BDSM and they have a trauma history? Absolutely. You know, and when I work with those clients, what we see sometimes is it can be quite amazing is that it's the BDSM that helps them heal their trauma.

Because the situation that they were in non consensually, right. They now get to consensually, engage with and take back their power. Even if they're the one that's in the submissive role. Right. And there, and there's a voice and there's always a no right. That's allowed there. So a lot of people find.

Peeling of their trauma through these modalities, exclude that from the equation, you know? And then sometimes yes, I've seen people who we work through their trauma and they're just, they love they're just kinky. Right? If you know the erotic blueprints, she has that as one of the erotic blueprints is, is kinky.

Right. That, that's just what our sexual expression is. We like to play in certain dynamics, you know? That's real. It can be really healthy. And then I've also seen some people go, oh yeah, maybe I don't need some of these things in the way I used to anymore. Cause it was a healing experience for them or healing period of time.

But what you're saying through all of that is that it's not the behavior, it's the intention. Right. And the person being able to be, to tolerate the feelings, to be able to sort out, does this feel good to me? Am I doing this because my partner wants me to do it and I'm just submitting. Out of an old system or where's my pleasure.

And where's my voice in this exactly. Right. If it's truly your pleasure and your voice, great. How, who am I to judge what that looks like. Right. But if you're doing some of these BDSM things and you're feel more traumatized, we need to have like, okay, what's going on here? I don't see that. It's usually the case.

Yeah, no, that's so good to hear. It's really nice to, and I really do see this conversation as disruptive and it's intentionally disruptive. And the folks that are brave enough to find these spaces to express themselves in this full way, or there they're disrupting a system that has been really toxic to many people.

And, and so I'm excited about that. And I think that there, like you said, the freedom that comes with it on a number of levels, not just sexuality or romance there's a wholeness that can come through it. So I, I thought maybe we could end with you saying a little bit about some of the benefits considering it, yeah.

There's so many benefits. I mean yeah. To quote Esther Perel she says, you know, we now expect one person to meet the needs that an entire village used to meet. Right. So just a mat. So, so many people, they open up and they find more partners. Yes, there is increased sexual satisfaction, not just with those other partners, but often if it was from opening a relationship that relationship really reaps the benefits.

It can like rekindle and revivify that sexuality right? Where we find a better groove together. Right. Because we're being more honest, we're having conversations we weren't allowed to have, or, oh, good. I can go get this kinky expression here. I'm not pressuring you for that. We can have the sex we have and I can just really value it.



Right. So there often is like an upleveling, you know, that what is that? The tide rises all the boats of sexuality for folks more, you know, need fulfilling. On many levels, emotional needs, intellectual needs. A lot of people have just more positive, like novel experiences like, oh, good. I can go play racquetball with this partner.

I really love racquetball. And with this partner, I have other things that we do that are meaningful. For parenting, it can be incredible, you know, like I have a three adult household and we joke that we're almost at the right ratio with one child, almost three to one, maybe does it. So a lot of people feel more support in their lives through child do family financially, if you are actually, you know, in twining lives with more people that can also be a benefit.

Yeah. So there's a lot of things that people benefit from of just having more, love, more support, more folks that are involved. That's wonderful. And it's, and it's not for everybody. So nobody hear this as pressure, but you need to spend some time opening around it because unconsciously. You know, there's that push away of anything new or different.

So that's wonderful. So if people wanted to know more, how would they respond? How would they find you or what are other resources that they should. Yeah. So my website is Jessica fern.com. Right now I'm not taking new clients, but if anyone reaches out to me through my website, I will do like case consultations for therapists.

That's something that is still open. Right. I love doing that. So valuable. Yeah. Yeah, exactly. So that's an option for folks. Right now I'm in the process of writing the second book that sort of goes along with this. So there are some resources on my website, but I'm not offering any fresh trainings at the moment.

Yeah. I'm focusing on the next. Oh, that's exciting. Well, I can't wait to, you know, let us know when it goes out. We're happy to give it a little boost there. And for those listening that wanna, you know commune around this book, we will be doing a some level. I don't know exactly what it's gonna look like yet of a we, we have basically reading pods, we call them with our community.

Yeah, where the small groups get together and read a book and discuss it over a period of time. We also do a book club where that I'll go through the book slowly kind of, and then we meet live and talk about it or who knows what we're going to do, but we're for sure going to follow up and do deeper work with this book.

So thank you for that. And anybody listening, the way that you get access to that, you just it's as little as \$5 a month, you can join our community. It is [therapistuncensored.com/join](https://therapistuncensored.com/join) and you get extra episodes and some of these deep dives and all kinds of things like that. So we welcome you there.

Okay. Great. All right. Well, thank you so much. Thank you so much valuable and yeah. And yeah. Keep us posted related to the next book. I would love to get you back on and, and talk about it. Update it. Talk more with you. Yes. Thank you so much. Bye.