

Interviewee: **Jonathan [JO] and Daniel [DA]; Sara [S]**
 Interviewer: Andy Horning [AH] and Kim [K]

Transcription:

Speaker	Dialogue
AH	<p>Today, in episode 29, we look at the millennial experience of being gay and transgender.</p> <p>First, in another conversation from the road... Jonathan and Daniel, together two and a half years, talk about their experience of coming out and finding each other in Texas.</p> <p>In our second conversation, our producer, Kim Poletti, talks with transgender rights advocate, Sara Connell. Their discussion spans the transgender experience from early discovery of dysphoria to the practical ways a person transitions to another gender.</p>
AH	MY NAME IS ANDY HORNING, AND THIS IS ELEPHANT TALK. IT'S ABOUT ALL THINGS RELATIONSHIP - THE SOULFUL, THE SILLY AND THE SEXY.
DA	My name is Daniel and I'm 22 years old turning 23 in a couple of months and I'm from San Antonio, Texas.
JO	My name is Jonathan and I am 22 turning 23 in a couple of weeks and we're here in Wichita Falls, little tiny town in Texas.
JO	The real story or the one we tell everyone?
F1	The real one. The real one.
JO	The real one is fun. The real one is very millennial. I don't know.
DA	It is.
JO	All of the gay listeners and homosexuals will know what Grindr is.
DA	Yeah.
DA	We've talked on and off a couple of months and then tried to meet up.
JO	It was a month until we actually met.
DA	We met on January 1st, 2015.
JO	Yeah, that's the easy part, January 1st.
DA	You lived at MSU and you're like, "Come over to my apartment." I drove over and you told me that you needed to run an errand so I just stayed in the car. A song was playing.
JO	The Flawless Nicki Minaj, Beyonce Remix.
DA	Yeah.

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JO	That's how we knew it was real.
DA	Yeah. That's like the first one. He got in and was like, "I love this song." And I was like, "Well, good." There's a ding. There's a yup.
JO	A plus rating by the way.
DA	I gave him five stars on Grindr.
JO	Well, I wasn't out yet. I was still closeted, like straight in air quotes, get the [inaudible 00:02:40] because... like everyone knew and I even knew, but it was kind of one of those like I just haven't... I don't know. I wasn't ready to be out unless I had a reason and like that night, I really fell for you.
JO	It is ridiculous, but I don't know. We instantly had a connection.
DA	We just clicked so quick.
JO	I was the person that would like message people, message people, trade pictures and then ghost. I would delete the account, I would delete the app because I didn't want anyone to open my phone and find out that way. It was kind of ridiculous. I was like in this little like shell in a way
JO	I never felt comfortable with it. It all felt sheltered. It was crazy. I couldn't tell anybody ... the moment I met you, I don't know. It was just different. It was like this person matters. There were a lot of butterflies at first.
DA	It's funny.
JO	It was. It was like, "Oh my gosh! This really cute tall, blonde boy." Because I had seen him on Grindr and because we had messaged, I was like, "This is like the cutest real guy that I've ever seen Wichita Falls ever,"
DA	We had somehow gone to the same school for like a year.
JO	Well, you knew like the gay community because you hang out with the theater kids. And you knew that crowd so like you got to know a lot of the people and I hung out with my older brother who was part of the fraternity. So I came in, I moved here when I was like about to turn 18 and hang out with all of these sorority girls and like all I knew was I need to flirt with these sorority girls and I need to like date them. As ridiculous as that sounds. I don't know.
DA	It's that real fear of that discovery on people finding out. What do you do after that especially when you're 20 years old then you haven't told anyone. That's two decades of existence.
JO	I don't know why I never expected my family to be as accepting as they were.
JO	Yeah. That's what love is, right? Yeah. I've been in a couple. It's so funny that you came out so later and I was the...

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DA	He's my first boyfriend.
JO	And, I'm the one who was raised Mormon. Yeah, I'm the first for him and I'm the one that is on number three now.
DA	First long-term relationship.
JO	We met January 1st and I think the date we officially decided was January 18th that we got together.
DA	Fifteen yeah.
JO	That's about to a little over two and a half years, exactly. Well, yeah.
DA	Two and a half years last Tuesday.
DA	I was born obviously in San Antonio like a little hospital there and we live on the very like county line, like city limits, [inaudible 00:09:14] San Antonio.
JO	Texas Highway 281 like in the country and it's beautiful.
DA	I didn't grow up in like in apartment or like a suburb. It was very like if we were going to go to Walmart seems to be the theme. It would be at least like a half hour drive, 25 minutes, which is inconvenient at best.
DA	That was definitely one of those towns that you know at the time I wouldn't have been able to like recognize that like if I had been gay there, "Oh, yes, it's the gay boy. We don't talk to him."
DA	I left when I was 17. It was me, my sister, and my mom. It's been the three of us forever. So we decided as a triangle to live the structure of the church. It's been cool since then, but it's like you can really see the differences like the way that your world opens up and the way that it was closed before.
DA	I just think it's almost disheartening when you so many people that are willing to not pursue aspects of their creativity or their passion because of something that someone told them whether it's your parents telling you not to do it, your teacher not telling you to do, your pastor or your bishop or your prophet.
DA	I would say that I was the final nail in the coffin though in like this general story, the two of us. Her son being gay and she found journals of mine after I'd moved out. And she said that she would just read the stuff in it and it would just break her heart because she's like, "You would write this stuff on a paper journal and stuff it under your bed, but you wouldn't talk to me about it."
JO	As a parent, I think that that probably broke her heart because I remember when she told me the story the first time and like her eye, I mean my eyes are watering right now, but she was just like... well, I don't want to speak for your mom either, but I remember your mom just saying like that. She like read those and cried.
JO	I felt really connected to you after I met your family.

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DA	Thanksgiving 2015.
JO	Eleven months after. I was so nervous because Mormon family.
DA	Yeah.
JO	And I knew nothing about the Mormon faith like literally.
JO	I was just so, so nervous about your family and even with you and your mom like saying don't worry, it's fine, and then I got there and it was like the most welcoming.
DA	Exactly.
JO	I was not a homosexual. I was not just like your boyfriend. I was Jonathan already. Everybody knew me. They were like 20 nieces and nephews of his, well, cousins.
DA	I'm from South Texas and I have 32 cousins.
DA	My entire extended family is still currently Mormon.
JO	It was the most welcoming thing like to be welcomed in this family with a ton of children and it wasn't like they were like, "Oh, you're Daniel's boyfriend." But it was like, "Hey, Jonathan, so nice to meet you," and then all I'm thinking of is my sister telling me, "I just really don't want to tell my little ones," they're teenagers, but I don't want to tell my little ones that you're gay because they just don't understand it yet. And I'm like, "What's there to understand about a man loving a man?" You don't have to tell them any other thing.
DA	We're not asking to talk about a penis on penis action.
JO	Nothing. Nothing is sexual. Nothing inappropriate. It's just like if you don't teach them about this now, they're not going to be comfortable with it and then they're not going to be comfortable with it even if they're not of LGBT community, they're going to move somewhere and feel weird against them.
DA	Well, I think religion is like a way to justify like your morals and I think that that's a wonderful thing that religion has because there are really good standpoints, but they're also really ancient things about it like...
JO	I would say that...
DA	Your family drinks Monster Energy drinks and they're not supposed to. You pick and choose your battles I guess.
JO	Yes. Mine was homosexuality. Not drinking coffee.
JO	The fact that officially, the Mormon Church, they don't say that they're homosexuals. They would say that there are people that are sexually confused. They don't even acknowledge the existence of a gay person.
JO	My dad sold vacuum cleaners when I was little. He started selling windows and so he traveled Monday through Friday. So I was only with my mom and my brother. My brother is seven and a half years older. So he was like in his teen years and it was like I'm

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	<p>having fun. I always want to go with Kenny, but I was 10 years old and my mom is like, "Hey, your brother is like in his junior year of high school. You got to leave him alone."</p> <p>I mean I don't know how they didn't really see it because I literally... they bought me Barbie Dolls. I played with Barbies. I had a Britney Spears' Barbie Doll and it was my favorite one. I would put a sweatshirt on my head and use our family webcam to make videos of me singing to music as Mariah Carey, as Jennifer Lopez.</p> <p>I never really felt like I was gay and I think that's something that every gay individual goes through where it's like I don't feel like I'm gay. It's just the way I am and this is a label that everyone else decided to put on me.</p> <p>So I just remember the first time I actually started feeling that was like, I don't know, like 10 to 12-ish. That's when we got computer. I was just looking at this stuff and I found gay porn, I found straight porn. I looked at it all. I think I started realizing that I was into it when I was in like 13, 14. But I would like masturbate to gay porn and then immediately after I close the app or the tab or whatever, I would pray to God. I would literally like close whatever and be like, "I am sorry for what I just did."</p>
DA	Really?
JO	Yes. And I would like pray for forgiveness and tell him I'm so sorry. And I wasn't even in a religious... we did not go to church every Sunday, but I just knew it was wrong. The reasons that I picked up on it was like shows like Grey's Anatomy that had a lesbian character and my mom of all people when I would watch it every single Thursday with her would be like, "I just don't know why they have this on TV." And that's where I was like, "This is wrong."
JO	My mom and dad were so upset whenever I came out because I didn't tell them sooner and all I could think of was like, "What basis did you give me that I would feel comfortable as a young individual?"
JO	My family was so... that's the thing is they were so like supportive of me. They've never been anything but like my dad, my whole life has always been like, "Jonathan, I'm so proud of you," for anything I do. I could literally just go to work on Monday and he's like, "I'm proud of you for going to work." He's wonderful.
DA	He sent you a seven paragraph text all about how good you are.
JO	I never thought that my parents are bad. I never thought that my family was bad. It's just I was scared. I don't think they understood that. It wasn't like I didn't trust them or I didn't want to tell them. It was that I was afraid of losing them and they never understood that.
DA	Yeah. There's that fear for sure.
JO	Yeah, because all you hear is like... someone said like my family disowned me, like when you see stuff online or whatever.
JO	<p>I came out to this friend and she was like, "Oh my God! I knew. I wanted to like wait for you. Everybody kind of knows in a way. They can get the gist." And it was so welcoming. A lot of people I feel like get that as a negative vibe, like you don't know me. But I kind of took it as, "If it wasn't an issue, then yeah. I'm really gay."</p> <p>So I come out to my brother the night of his now wife's 20 something birthday. And I never expected my brother to be so, so, so welcoming. And he was just like, "It's totally</p>

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	fine. I love you no matter what.”
JO	My dad only reacted in a way of like, “What did I do wrong?”
DA	Yeah, that was a little awkward.
DA	There was a lot of that. I should have been home more. I shouldn’t have been a traveling salesman.
JO	Because he was a traveling salesman. He thought there wasn’t a masculine force in the house and it’s my fault and I’m a dad and I did something wrong.
JO	I’m like, “It’s not a character flaw.” That was the first thing that I had to really like get out of the way is like this isn’t a problem.
DA	Gay does not equal character flaw.
JO	But it is to some people. So it’s like really hard. I would say for about a solid six months, I didn’t really talk to my parents as much as I did before.
JO	My mom’s reaction to me coming out was mainly disbelief and I think she probably had an inclination but did not want to believe it at first and then once it came to like being a true statement, it was like, “What do I do with this?” And then we’ve always been close and we didn’t talk a whole lot and I say that as in like once a month instead of like once a week probably and it was like just distance than I wasn’t used to.
JO	I think it took them time to figure that out and to figure out that I’m still the same person. I never ever was different obviously.
JO	I think it was time. Time is very healing.
JO	It’s been over two years.
JO	My mom loves Daniel.
DA	I think it’s evolved healthily.
JO	I can strongly say that like Daniel is my best friend. You are.
DA	Yeah, you too.
JO	I mean really like it started from like this point of, like I said earlier, like it started from this point of butterflies. I can’t believe that I found this beautiful man that I really like and he likes me too and it turned into... we moved in together six months after. So we got really close really quick, but I already really knew.
DA	Or we’re just saving money.
JO	Yeah, really. Honestly over the last two and a half years, I’ve got to know you more than any human than I’ve ever known.
DA	Maybe too much.

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JO	Maybe too much. But I've never like really gotten as close to someone on a fundamental level where we...
DA	Yeah. Everyone say it's like not hard, but I mean it's just like, you know...
JO	I think we've been through like a lot where they have been definitely lows and high points.
DA	Absolutely. But like... I mean I we're still here, I guess.
JO	No doubt. Yeah. I'm just never evolved so much with someone. It was the first time.
DA	I mean you're saying that, but I don't think you expected to date a boy with eye shadow two years down the line and that's been really cool.
JO	Well, I never... and that was something like you were saying past boyfriends would have trouble with.
DA	Oh my goodness! Yeah.
DA	It wasn't that I wearing it at the time. It was literally things like dying my hair a color that wasn't natural, that was too feminine, and that's the kind of nonsense that kind of will ruin the mentality in your head later on where it's like, "I can't wear anything else. I can't demasculinize myself or anything because that makes me unwanted in the gay community."
JO	The overall gay community problem is like mask for mask.
DA	Only masculine men. I'm like, "What is wrong with femininity at all? Women run the fucking world literally."
JO	I think you're in the process of doing a lot of self discovery and I don't know want to say, "Oh, I'm so self discovered. I know everything." No one knows one hundred percent about themselves ever. But I love all the support we've gotten for any kind of the changes we've been making.
DA	It'd be a little counterproductive to like put on make-up at home and then just get like, "Ew, you're seriously wearing that." I mean it's one thing if it's like a gross color on my eyes and I appreciate the criticism.
JO	Some criticism.
DA	But there's a difference between just being like, "Girl, you know that color doesn't work on you and you're a man. Take that off your face." And I love not having to deal with that because it's not about boy-boy, girl-girl, girl-boy, boy-girl. It's just two people and that's been my... I love it. I love that freeness of it where it doesn't matter. Do whatever you want. Pay your taxes. Do that and don't kill people, but work on that contour because you can do magic with that.
JO	What is that? I'm American. All I have to do is pay my taxes and die.

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DA	Exactly. Literally. You'll be fine.
DA	I have never had a really, really bad experience where someone called me any kind of like really bad name or anything like that. No one has ever scream something at me in the drive-through and then peeled off into the sunset. No one has ever done that. But I love the idea that if they did, it would just be water off the duck's back. It's fine. It doesn't even matter. I got to go home to Jonathan later.
JO	You weren't doing make-up until this year really, right?
DA	Yeah, I just didn't really have an interest in it back then. It just really picked my interest lately.
DA	I didn't ask you, like beg you for permission.
JO	Well, you were just sitting at home and you were like, "What would you...?"
DA	What would you think if I wear that on my shadow? No.
JO	And I was like, "Well, I mean you just need to be aware of where you're doing this," because I haven't gotten like angry, like you fucking faggot. I haven't gotten angry things, but I've gotten judgment.
JO	No one is going to come up to you and be like, "I do not think that you should be allowed to be gay." It's not like that. It's like a dirty little stare. Ew, why are you with that guy?
DA	Because I'm normal. I'm fine.
JO	I was [inaudible 00:48:51] like I'm just home and I get to just like lay with you or whatever we end up doing.
DA	I'm just excited to finally get dinner cooking.
JO	I'm the most romantic in the relationship.
DA	And I'm hungry. Nice to meet you.
JO	You're the funny gal.
DA	The stories never get old. I love sharing them with other people even if it's your story.
JO	I love seeing Daniel.
JO	Blush, because he never does.
JO	Not blush because you can't see through your make-up.
DA	That's the point.
JO	No emotion. No, but it's like the little stories that I've been saying of like, you know, when I met and I had butterflies, it was like you never heard of that before in a way. I don't

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	know.
DA	It's nice to be reminded.
JO	I guess. No. I love it. I love talking about us. It's fun. We have stories.
END FILE	

Speaker	Dialogue
AH	Sara Connell is a transgender sexual health advocate and self-identified polyamorous transgender woman who enjoys the kink community. Our producer, Kim Poletti, talked with her about her experience coming out as gay and then as a trans person.
S	<p>So I came out in October 2013. And at that point, I said that I'm going to use the name Sara and she, her pronouns, but I wasn't doing any sort of physical transition and not all trans people do any sort of physical transition. I was mostly just exploring sort of what it meant for me to be a woman and to really step into a role that I had and let myself be and before...</p> <p>And I was really weighing like, "Do I want this or do I not want this?" Not because I was trying to decide if I was transgender or not. But it was just whether I wanted to be on hormones or not. And I'm happy to say it's the best decision I've ever made in my life. I'm really happy with my body and the way that I feel.</p>
S	I've been on hormones for a little over a year now. And it's been a really fascinating process to really see the changes that have happened and really just more than I ever imagined would happen.
K	Can you talk about some of those changes?
S	<p>So there are sort of two pieces for transgender women. You have to have testosterone blocker, which is called spironolactone and then you have an estrogen, a synthetic estrogen supplement that your body just absorbs and converts into estrogen.</p> <p>One of the things that's really happened in a sexual realm that I've been really excited about is my body is much more sensitive sort of all across my body and it really feels like all of my skin is an erogenous zone in some way. And so a lot of my sort sexual activity before, it felt really unfulfilling and it was very sort of genital focus. I didn't know at the time that it's because I was a woman and nobody was seeing me as a woman. I would sort of not really be very embodied for my own experience of pleasure. Versus now, I really am getting better at sort of enjoying pleasure and enjoying sort of somebody or some people being focused on my pleasure.</p> <p>I really do feel much more emotionally sensitive. So really sort of deep emotion for better or worse, right? It's like you want to see how the higher highs, you also feel the lower lows of loss and sadness.</p>

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	<p>So I feel like my emotional register is much more open.</p>
K	<p>Would you be open to talking about your current or most current relationship and just telling us about that?</p>
S	<p>So I am a polyamorous person. I'm a non-monogamous person. And I also sort of identify myself as solo poly, I guess, is really the best way to put it.</p>
K	<p>Can you explain what that means?</p>
S	<p>It's different for each person, so I don't want to speak for everybody who sees themselves as solo poly. My experience of being solo poly is that first and foremost, my focus and my attention is on cultivating a relationship with myself and really embodying sort of self love and care for myself.</p> <p>And part of that means really listening to my boundaries, really listening to my needs of my body, really sort of exploring relationships as they feel natural or comfortable and not feeling like I have to sort of build dams or something around the way that a relationship flows.</p> <p>I think there's a lot of ways that monogamous culture can still sort of find its way into poly communities around hierarchies or some other things, which is not to say that all monogamy is bad.</p> <p>I think that even people who practice polyamory can still get trapped into some of those social assumptions about ownership of a partner or about sort of privileging the relationship over the people in the relationship and really not listening to their own needs or their own desires but really kind of sacrificing. We're taught that sacrifice is love in a lot of cases and that jealousy is how you express love and a lot of other things that I found not to be true in my life.</p> <p>I really try to sit in the place that every relationship I'm in, I want to be an active choice and I want to be continually consenting to being in that relationship at all moments and I want my partners to also be doing that as well. And I think if somebody doesn't feel the freedom to leave a relationship when it's not meeting their needs anymore, then I think that's how you end up with sort of toxic dynamics or things that get really harmful to people where you're continuing to make choices based on what you think the other person wants you to be doing not based on your own authentic needs and desires.</p> <p>For me the way my solo polyness has shown up has been a lot of intimate friends, a lot of asexual partnerships with people that I feel really connected to and also some sexual partners as well. I'm not really a person who engages in a lot of casual sex necessarily. Part of that is just being trans, right?</p> <p>So in order to be with somebody sexually, I really have to trust that they're going to see me as a woman and that they're going to really understand my body as a woman's body. And so there's some vetting that goes along with that sometimes. I have to be really careful about chasers for example. People who really fetishize very specific things and really chase after that thing but don't really see those folks as like full people.</p> <p>On top of that, it's hard for me to connect sometimes for people because even the way I experience my body as a transgender person is really different. I don't want have to bottom surgery. So I really enjoy the genitals that I have especially being on hormones. It's really changed my sexual response.</p>

	<p>And I'll go in educator mode for just a second because I think this is fascinating to share that all bodies when they're in the womb start as what we would call biologically female and then what happens in the process of development is that for some of those bodies testosterone gets introduced and the ovaries descend and then becomes the testis and the clitoris fuses with the urethra and becomes the penis. The vaginal opening closes up and the labia become the scrotal sack. So all of that anatomy really comes from the same bud, the same place.</p>
K	<p>I didn't know that.</p>
S	<p>Yeah. It's really fascinating and we really like to think of sort of women and men as these really different camps that are on like either sides of a canyon and it's just like there's a big open chasm in between them but the reality is that we actually have a lot more similarities than differences in how our bodies are constructed.</p> <p>The words that I use to describe my genitals with partners are like clit or clitoris or lady cock, you know, all sorts of different things that are really fun. I don't feel sort of deep sense of dysphoria with that, but that's not to take away from transgender people who do. There are people who really do experience extreme dysphoria about their genitals or about other parts of themselves.</p> <p>Dysphoria is a really specific experience for transgender people of feeling like extreme feelings of disgust about your body or sort of like anger at the body that you have or extreme discomfort about the body that you're in.</p> <p>A lot of my dysphoria and part of the reason I went on hormones was that my dysphoria really came from my chest. When I was wearing clothes, I felt very feminine but as soon as I was naked, I felt very masculine and immediately really dysphoric about my chest and the way that I looked.</p>
K	<p>So did you know from a very young age that you...? I'm assuming that you had some kind of inkling or feelings of... I don't know if it was dysphoria or just confusion.</p>
S	<p>I think there's this sort of media narrative that people really expect out of transgender people where it's like, "Oh, I always knew that I was a woman trapped in a man's body," That wasn't really my experience necessarily. I didn't really know it was possible for me to be a woman I suppose.</p> <p>I was always really feminine when I was younger. When my sisters and I would play house, I'd always be the mom because I enjoyed taking care of people.</p> <p>I was always picked on and bullied a lot when I was a lot younger for having the backpack that was a little too girly or that kind of stuff. That's what makes me sad when people don't think it's valuable to talk to really young children about gender and gender norms and what kind of having acceptance for all people and that type of stuff because that stuff all starts young.</p> <p>I think one of the reasons that you're seeing a lot more transgender youth now isn't that there are more transgender youth necessarily, but that parents are getting a lot better at being able to sort of tell those signs and ask the questions of like, "Do you feel like a girl? What do you like? What do you want to do? What do you want to wear?"</p> <p>So for most of like sort of my childhood and then preschool and kindergarten, I was very feminine and really didn't get along with many people. I really felt like a loner like an outsider and really experienced a lot of shame from people in my life who I trusted who felt really shameful about my femininity as a male-assigned-at-birth person. And</p>

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	<p>so I really learned how to hide it really well.</p> <p>I came out as bisexual in high school, which I still identify myself as sort pansexual, bisexual sort of like interested in all genders. Then when I was in college, I started meeting other transgender people for the first time.</p> <p>And it really just sort of was this moment of like putting language to something that I had never been able to speak before. And a lot of it was coming out to myself, you know, was really the hardest thing to do. It wasn't coming out to anybody else.</p> <p>Once I knew who I was, then I knew what I had to do, but it was really that process of sort of unpacking all those boxes that I had really closed up tight that this sort of started my process of coming out as trans both to myself and then to other people.</p> <p>And then once that Pandora's Box was opened, it was like, "Oh! And I'm really polyamorous and I'm also kinky." Coming out as trans first really helped me explore my queer identity, my attraction to women as a woman, which is very different than how I was exploring relationships before.</p> <p>I think there's something that's really, really magical about transgender bodies falling in love, and about transgender people who can really see each other in a way that I think it's hard to be seen by cisgender people sometimes.</p>
K	<p>That's beautiful. So the relationship that you're in currently is...</p>
S	<p>I don't really date cisgender men. I date a lot of transgender people a lot of non-binary transgender people. I don't really like using language like primaries or anything like that. But probably the partner that I'm sort of the most intimately bonded to right now is a non-binary trans person who is a gender queer and really isn't a man or a woman is kind of...</p>
K	<p>And that's why you say non-binary?</p>
S	<p>Right. So there are sort of binary transgender people, which are people who are assigned female at birth and transitioned to express themselves as men and then people who are assigned male at birth and transitioned to express themselves as women. So that's sort of staying within the gender binary that already exist.</p> <p>And then there's a whole another group of trans people sort of under that umbrella of non-binary people who are sort of gender queer, gender fluid, agender, sort of people who either are not a man or a woman at all or who are both a man and a woman at the same time.</p>
K	<p>So in your polyamorous practice, it sounds like you don't have these more rigid structures, rules...</p>
S	<p>I definitely have structure, but the structure comes as a result of us exploring where the relationship feels natural first and then saying like, "Well, I really feel like we kind of are fulfilling this sort of role for each other. How would you feel about me calling you my partner or my girlfriend or my boyfriend or that sort of thing?"</p>
S	<p>Oftentimes I think what people do is they find the label first and then they try to fit what they're doing into the box that that label sort of predicts. And so you sort of try to find a girlfriend first and then you assume that they're going to like do all the things that you think a girlfriend should do.</p> <p>For me, it's more that I really just want to build authentic connections with people in</p>

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	<p>lots of different ways. And I see sort of sexual relationships as a part of that potentially, but there are friends that I have sex with and there are partners that I don't have sex with because they're asexual or whatever type of configuration is happening.</p> <p>And so it's really more about sort of freeing myself from feeling like I have to give something a specific name in order for it to be meaningful to me and really that each relationship sort of comes with its own uniqueness. It's really about voicing my desires and really authentically being able to communicate and consent in each interaction and not feeling like, "Well, we had sex last time and so the assumption is that we're just going to keep continuing to have sex all the time and what does sex even mean."</p>
S	<p>Sex for us might be a really intimate kissing session. It might be a sort of BDSM session, spanking or flogging or something like that. And that can be really deeply sexual for me that doesn't really involve any sort of penetrative sex. And so I've really sort of had to expand my view of what I see as sex and intimacy.</p> <p>And part of what's helped me sort of challenge that is I'm a sexual person, but I've had partners who are asexual, which means... not people who are like choosing to be celibate but people who just don't feel sexual desire. And those relationships have been really challenging for me in some ways but also have really helped me grow in the way that I see intimacy and really sort of... once sex is off the table completely, you can really sort of dive into some of the activities that we think of as sort of just like precursors to sex or stepping stones to sex, right?</p> <p>And I think that idea that there's like a real sex and not real sex is really harmful to people. For me, it's sort of been about reclaiming intimacy in all forms and really allowing myself. I fall in love a lot. And I've really tried to find people who can sort of shamelessly hear that I love them and know that doesn't come with any assumptions or obligations.</p> <p>It's really about my relationships always being an active choice, both for myself and for the other person. Some of that is a practice being a survivor. It's very hard for me as a survivor of sexual assault and it's very hard for me to draw a boundary sometimes. In the past, it's been very easy for me to sort of be what I thought my partner wanted me to be instead of what I authentically wanted to show up as.</p> <p>And then over the process of being in a relationship, you start to sort of take off those pieces and you just have to show up more as yourself and then the person is like, "Well, this isn't what I signed up for. This isn't what I really wanted."</p> <p>And there can be a lot of resentment and anger and frustration that happens there. And I was really confused about why that kept happening to me. And I realized that it wasn't about the other person. It was about me. It was that I wasn't showing up as I wanted to be showing up.</p> <p>And so as I have become a lot more authentic with myself and able to really voice my desires, I felt a lot more comfortable setting boundaries and trusting other people to respect those boundaries.</p>
K	<p>I love that you do sex positive education. That seems like such a really necessary thing today.</p>
K	<p>But that's not something that our culture sells us or tells us. It's not something that we learn.</p>

S	<p>I think there's this way that sex positivity get sort of twisted a little bit within sex positive or sex educator circles that it just means like you have to gung-ho about sex all the time and if you're not having fivesomes and you're not like getting your ass beat at the dungeon and you're not doing whatever, then you're not sex positive and it's all the sort of like competitive.</p> <p>The way that I see sex positivity is all activities are a buffet, right? They should just be like on an equal plane. If you want to get triple penetrated, go for it, like that's great. But also if all you want to do... even in that language, it's saying all you want to do is sort of minimalizing, right? If the activity that you want to do is cuddling or a really intimate kissing session or something, that shouldn't be any less or more valuable than any other sexual intimacy.</p> <p>And I find that the true sex positivity is allowing people to make all possible choices and really letting people listen to their authentic desires and be able to voice those desires shamelessly.</p>
S	<p>That's why I think polyamory is also really great because it allows me to say like, "Hey, I'm having this desire," and then my partner say like, "Thank you for trusting me with that and also, it's not something that I want to do, but I want to help support you to find somebody who can explore that with you," right? I think there's a lot of pressure in monogamy.</p> <p>At least the way we construct it now that you have to be your partner's complete emotional sort of half and you have to be your partner's sexual half you have to fulfill all of their intimacy needs and you have to fulfill all of these other sort of things that gets really hard to do for people.</p>
K	<p>Describe some of the things that you might say to support a young person who's questioning their own gender identity.</p>
S	<p>I would say the first thing is that there's nothing wrong with you. Even in sort of a world of tolerance around LGBT identities, they're still sort of this tacit agreement though that it's like kind of wrong or weird or outside of the bounds of what's normal or okay.</p> <p>I really feel that what we're seeing when we see LGBT identities is just really natural human variation and that what we've done over time is really like moralized and stigmatized and medicalized those differences and really turned them into something that's seen as shameful or negative or bad.</p> <p>We sort of have this false shared history that the world has always been sort of anti gay and anti transgender all of these things that like we just sort of take as natural or just as things that have always been there are just as constructed as anything else.</p> <p>There were indigenous tribes in North America who had three, four, or five or more gender categories and really sort of saw gender as a more sort of complex spectrum of people or sort of more complicated ways than just the way we see it now.</p> <p>But we lost a lot of that. And I really, I feel like my whole mission in life is to free people to be shameless and to really sort of embody their really natural desires, whatever that is.</p> <p>Another thing that I tell young people a lot who are LGBT or questioning or kind of trying to find their identity. It's okay to not know. It's okay to explore, to try different things out, to try expressing your gender different ways, wearing different types of</p>

	<p>clothing.</p> <p>It's okay to just say you're queer and then whatever that means you'll figure it out later.</p> <p>So go outside of your comfort zone and find other people, certainly within your age range still and within consensual agreements, but sort of really free yourself from feeling like you have to explore love or relationships in the same way that all your peers are.</p> <p>Another thing too is embrace the awkward. That's like good advice for anybody. It's made me much better at polyamory. It's made me much better at group sex or kink or any of that stuff and be okay with just being yourself.</p> <p>Find out who you are first and then take that full self into the relationships that you want. Don't try and be who you think other people want you to be, whether that's like, "Oh, I'm a lesbian. So I now I got to get this side-shaved haircut. I've got to like really like Ani DiFranco," or something. It's okay if you don't like Ani DiFranco. Don't worry about it.</p>
K	<p>What went through my mind when you're talking about that was just the obvious question of jealousy. So can you talk a little bit about that?</p>
S	<p>I tell people that really my deepest, like most authentic core kink like more than anything else that's like hotter to me than anything else in the world is like deep authentic communication.</p> <p>I think one of the things about authentic communication is again knowing yourself first. There's sort of this myth that like polyamorous people don't get jealous and that's what makes you polyamorous, which I'm here to say is completely not true. Jealousy is a very real thing. You don't choose the emotions that you have. You just choose how you react to them.</p> <p>Jealousy is what I call a second order emotion where something like anger or sadness, like it might be coming from a source but it's usually its own unique sort of emotion that's happening on its own. But jealousy is usually something that's caused by something else.</p> <p>So jealousy doesn't really exist on its own very often. It's usually an expression of inadequacy or feelings of loss or feelings of like unfairness of like, "Well, this isn't very fair," and I feel jealous that this other person is getting to experience my partner in a way that I don't, right?</p> <p>By sort of reverse engineering the jealousy and being like, "Oh, where is this coming from and what is it telling me about myself and about my own fears and my own needs from a partner?"</p> <p>One of the things I learned is I need partners who can see my genitals as feminine and who can really enjoy pleasuring my body. So it's not that poly people don't feel jealousy, but I think we just maybe have more tools to assess that jealousy and figure out where it's coming from.</p> <p>I really enjoy doing workshops around what cisgender people can learn from being transgender, what straight people can learn from being queer, what vanilla people can learn from being kinky, and what monogamous people can learn from being polyamorous.</p> <p>A lot of times I think people in sort of cisgender, heterosexual, monogamous relationships just sort of are able to follow the scripts that exist out there and they're</p>

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	<p>good enough to sort of get you through and you sort of know what to expect.</p> <p>And so people I think don't challenge those very much or are afraid of challenging them because they feel like they won't be able to find partners who want to have those sort of deep authentic communications about sex, which is why I think something like this podcast is really great because I think people need models of sex positive conversation so that we can destigmatize conversations about sex and sexuality.</p>
K	<p>And it takes a lot of self-awareness.</p>
S	<p>And it's also a muscle, right? It's like something you have to work out. One of the other things I say when I do workshops a lot is consent is a language and the more you use it, the better you get at it. We just think of sex is like this natural thing that's supposed to happen and it's not. It's awkward and uncomfortable and weird and like funny sounds happened. You just have to like roll with it. You want to have sex with people that can laugh with you when your body makes a weird sound or something or who can sort of sit with you if you get triggered in the middle of something and you need to cry and instead of have sex, instead of somebody who's going to get resentful and angry that you had to stop.</p>
AH	<p>This interview is important because it underscores the need for normalizing human sexuality in all it's forms. Sara's work is sorely needed in a culture predicated on puritanical values that don't always serve us in our search for healthy sexual relationships.</p> <p>Also, the timeliness of this conversation around consent and how all relationships can benefit from clear and honest discussion when it comes to respecting individual needs.</p> <p>THANK YOU TO JONATHAN AND DANIEL, AND SARA CONNELL FOR SHARING THEIR STORIES WITH US!</p> <p>FIND THE SHOW NOTES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON OUR WEBSITE, ELEPHANTTALK.ORG, WHERE YOU CAN ALSO COMMENT ON THE SHOW.</p> <p>ELEPHANT TALK IS PRODUCED BY LISA GRAY AND KIM POLETTI. OUR THEME MUSIC IS BY ROB BURGER.</p> <p>AUDIO PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY LESLIE GASTON-BIRD AND JOSH KERN.</p> <p>YOU'RE LISTENING, SO YOU KNOW HOW TO FIND YOUR PODCASTS...BUT, IF YOU COULD PLEASE REVIEW THE SHOW ON ITUNES, WE WOULD GREATLY APPRECIATE IT!</p> <p>THANK YOU FOR LISTENING. I'M YOUR HOST ANDY HORNING. THIS IS REAL LOVE. THIS IS ELEPHANT TALK.</p>
	<p>END FILE</p>