

Let's Get Philosophical About Sex

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Agnes: Alright. Hey, welcome to hang out. I'm so excited to see all of you here, thank you for coming. Just a few preliminary notes. So 1 is this is our last night out of this quarter, but we have two exciting events coming next quarter. The ethics of artificial intelligence with James Evans, the sociology department and. To move in OK. And does science leave room for philosophy that's going to be on above us? And David and Tom pashby. OK, that's next quarter for the first one, the ethics of artificial intelligence, we're going to have a study group. If you don't know what the study groups are, we have one for this event. It's basically we have. And like evening meetings to sort of prepare us, especially me for the event. So if you're interested in being part of that study group, send me an e-mail. OK. And I'll put you on the list. But we will also send out emails. About the study group so. And OK, few other notes. So Rebecca and I heard a talk for maybe 40-50 minutes and then we'll open up to questions. The rest of the time is still questions and we're going to go till mid. Night. That doesn't mean you have to stay till midnight. You can stay as long as you want. This isn't a class. OK, you can leave whenever you feel like you can leave and come back. You can get up whenever you want. Go get some. Well, there isn't much left. You can walk over to where the cookies were. Come back. Bathroom OK. Anything you like, though? Don't don't feel in on it. Like even if you're in the middle of a row or whatever, I mean, just people will get up and let you out. So just stay as long as you feel. And there's just a few people I want to thank. William. Who's right there? My Co conspirator. Night owls. Andy. Who's our videographer? Maggie. Who's out front? Doing names. Thank you, Maggie. And one other person who I didn't tell him I was going to do this, but Tyler could. You just come up for one second. OK so. I want you to know who Tyler is. Tyler Zimmer is our new ad. Us in philosophy. I didn't say who I was. Hi, I'm Agnes callard. I teach in the philosophy department. Many of you, I hope, know that. And I was the director of Undergraduate studies, but not this year. I'm on leave sort of. As you can see. And umm, but Tyler is the AUS, so if he has, if you have like questions about philosophy, philosophy major. Sure. You know what, it's philosophy all about, etcetera. He has office hours. He's a great person to talk to. So there he is. OK. Thank you. Thanks for coming, Tyler. OK. And one more thing. I. Want to say? When I thought about having this event like, it was very exciting to me because I have all these philosophical questions about sex that I want to talk to someone about. But I was also like. This is going to be kind of embarrassing and I just want to, you know, first session of our study group. I said this and I thought I would just come clean. Being like. It it kind of embarrassing for me to talk about sex with you guys. The way that I think about it is. It's kind of embarrassing, but Opto it's super interesting. So then I have to weigh those things against each other and in my calculus, like interesting easily outweighs embarrassing.

But if you're embarrassed, just know. Well, so am I. But you know, we move on. OK. All right. So Becca Kukla is a professor of philosophy at Georgetown and she works on a ton of stuff. OK, epistemology, philosophy of language, bioethics, but and sexuality. Feminism. Stuff that we're talking about. But also she works on all this stuff in a really special way, like in a way where she kind of sees new questions that other people haven't asked before and she kind of goes after them sort of fearlessly and boldly. So she's like the perfect person to talk to. I'm so excited that she's here. So thank you.

OK. Now I'm going to start. Yeah, you can turn on. Oh, let me say one very last thing. You can still turn on. So we're going to try to talk about sexuality in ways that are inclusive of the massive variety of expressions of sexuality that are out there. But just speaking for myself on the basis of the study group, I'm going to fail, which is to say, there's just stuff I leave out, right? And so like in the Q&A please like add correct supply your experiences, tell us what we've left out that's you know. Yeah, that would be great. OK. OK. Now I'm going to start.

OK, my first question is; what is sex and why are we interested in having it?

Rebecca Kukla: Before I start talking, I just want to say fun thing to have been asked to do so thank you so much, Agnes, and thanks to all of you guys for coming. And I'd like Agnes. I'm unembarrassed able on this topic so I can observe everybody else's embarrassment.

Agnes asked me in advance if this was too big of an opening question and I decided it wasn't because it enables me to tell. Tell what I think is an adorable story about my son's sex. No, it's not as bad. As you think. I mean so first before I tell the story, I'll just say I think any philosophically interesting concept, any socially interesting concept is going to be too rich to lend itself to a quick definition that actually just. And they actually, if this cuts out, tell me. I feel like it's cutting in and out are. We OK so far, OK. There's no way that I could give you a satisfactory answer to the question of what is sex, because it's just too interesting of a concept to lend itself to any single definition. However, my favorite definition I've ever heard was from my son when he was 8, which is now 10 years ago. So 10 years ago. I used to have a weekly Sunday night get together where friends would come over and we would watch the show. True Blood, which probably most of you are too young to remember, but it really lent itself to sitting around with a lot of wine and friends and watching it. And it had a very catchy opening song and I would always let my son, who was very young at the time. Stay for the catchy opening song and then he had to leave and every week he would beg to stay for the entire show and hang out with us. And sometimes he would, like peek through the door to see. And so one week, finally, he was infuriated that I wouldn't let him watch the show. And he said, look, mom, is it the *****? Because here's the thing. It's not that I'm frightened by them. It's not that I like them. It's not that I don't like them. It's not that I'm interested in them. It's not that I want them. I just don't care. And I thought this was an interesting reaction. So I said to him, well, I mean, do you even know what sex is like, what would you say that sex is? And you said, I'm sorry, it really does keep going in and. Out it's killing. My joke, he said.

Well, as I understand it, sex is when two people who like each other want to play with each other's bodies to have fun. And then he said, and that's all I know, and it's all I want to know. And it would be highly inappropriate for you to bring the gun with me before I turn 18. But I actually thought that it was an incredibly lovely definition of sex. Like I said, no definition is going to be perfect. It's over inclusive, and it's under inclusive. But I love that it was not heterocentric and it was not penetration. Oriented in any essential way and it got in the playfulness of sex and the embodied Ness of sex. And I just thought it was, you know, as close as we can get to at least an aspirational definition of. Next on to the question.

Agnes: Just one second, I think Andy might have a.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah, yeah, that one's flickering in and out. Is this better? Worse. The same. It's not worse, though, right? OK, good as to why we're interested in sex.

Agnes: I think we'll find. Out.

Rebecca Kukla: I mean obviously that too is a super complicated question. I'm sure to some extent, if anything is biologically hardwired, then our interest in sex is surely biologically hardwired. Also sex. When it goes well is just extremely pleasurable. And we tend to be interested in pleasurable. Things. But I also think that over the centuries and the millennia we have. Embedded sex so deeply and complexly into so many different layers of social ritual and meaning that we're interested in it for all kinds of reasons that are not directly connected to how good it feels or to any biological urges we feel at this point. Sex is bound up with. How attractive and socially worthy we feel it's a way that we initiate and make clear that we're involved in a romance. It's one of our prime ways of forging intimate connections. It's bound up and complicated ways with family, making both real, family making and. Fantasies of family making it's richly connected to how we negotiate the aesthetics of the self and design and aesthetics for ourself and perform a certain kind of aesthetic identity. It's richly bound up with our social identity, both in the sense that our sexuality is part of our social identity and in the sense that the kind of sex we have is likely to determine what groups of people we hang out with to some extent, and vice versa. So I think at this point it's. Taking on such rich social meaning that we're interested in it for pretty much every reason that we're interested in social interactions at all and in our self identity at all. That being said, and this goes back to your point about inclusiveness at the start, it's also important to remember that not everybody is interested in it, right, so it's not required. It's not a required part of the human condition that we'd be interested in it. Most of us are, and most of us are interested in it enough that it's hard to remember and understand that some people aren't. But there's no imperative that we'd be interested in it, so that's an important feature. Too.

Agnes: Cool. Thanks. So what strikes me about your son's definition is that the sort of operative word was like, when two people who like each other want to play with one. OK, so. So he actually defines sex as a form of desire. And so I'm interested in. Just I think you're right. We're not going to get to the bottom of a full definition of sex. But just like, what sort of thing is it like? What kind of animal like is it? Is it

a desire? Is it an act? Is it an activity? Is it a thing? Is it a kind of exchange? Like what? What is the thing that we're talking about or what kind of thing are we talking about?

Rebecca Kukla: OK, so my answer is not going to be.

Agnes: How well can you hear us? We don't. OK, OK, we got these.

Rebecca Kukla: OK, we'll try. No, I think it really close to me doesn't really help. I'm not sure what makes it work or not. Help. Sorry. This is, I'm just buying time to come up with a good answer to this difficult question. All right, he's fussy. Oh, that whatever you just did helped, OK. My answer isn't going to be everybody's answer. I would say it's definitely not. Either in part or whole, a form of desire, because it's clear that we can have sex without desire. One thing that was charming and innocent about my son's definition is that he just built consent right into the definition of sex. Right described it as a participatory. Activity that both people want and both people are enjoying, and unfortunately we know that's not how all sex goes so. Clearly, the idea of desire is essentially bound up with our idea of sex, but I don't think it's an essential part of sex. I think that what do I think sex is? I was going to say it's a kind of collaborative activity when it's going well, but I'm not even sure about that because you can have sex with yourself too. So I do think that sex is inherently embodied. I think that sex is a form of bodily play. I don't know how to mark it off from other forms of bodily play because of course, like sports could be a form of bodily play also, and so can dancing, and so not everything that is bodily play is sex. Although I think that we should probably admit that a lot of those activities also often have ***** dimensions, and that's not a bad thing, but I wouldn't want to. Equate them with sex. So it's some form of bodily play and it's some form of bodily play that is in one way or another, riffing off of the kinds of into Macy's that we think of as most paradigmatic of sex, right. So touching parts of the body that you wouldn't normally touch, playing with the body. In ways that you wouldn't normally play. I don't think any of those bits are essential, right, but I think that to get the idea of what makes something sexual rather than just fun, it has to be that combination of embodiment and play and intimacy. And there has to be at least the ideal of desire. I think even though. There isn't always there. Does that make?

Agnes: Sense yes. So there's a sentence in one of your papers. You say we generally don't want people to agree to sex as a favor to us.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Agnes: Why not?

Rebecca Kukla: So OK, so first of all, the word generally there is important because I don't want to say that there's something inherently wrong with agreeing to sex as a favor or accepting sex as a favor. I think there are contexts in which that's fine. I think for that not to be hurtful, it requires an enormous amount of like. Background trust so you know if you're in a long term relationship and you've had sex with somebody tons of times out of mutual desire and not as a favor, I think it's OK for it to be. A favor once. In a while, but I think in. General, we want sex to be a

mutually desired collaborative activity, and so if somebody is just doing it as a favor for us, it feels partial. But I actually think that this is not special to sex like I think that when you invite somebody over for dinner, you also don't want them to. Just. Come as a favor and then again every once in a while you do right. Sometimes you're like, oh, my God, my aunt is coming over. She's impossible. I don't know how to talk to her. Please come also so that you can like, be a buffer and then we don't mind if they're coming as a favor. But so these things have exceptions. But in general, like when we invite somebody to do. Something collaborative and playful with us, where part of the point is mutual enjoyment. We don't want them to just do it as a favor usually. And that's not just sex. It's also, like I said, dinner invitations. But it's it's going to the movies, it's. Almost all of these things that we do as acts of shared desire and you know, friendship or whatever it may be, that kind of relationship, but I don't think that there's something inherently terrible about either giving or accepting sex as a favor, but I think it would be sad for it to be the norm in any relationship.

Agnes: Why do you think that it becomes more acceptable or appropriate or whatever in the context of a committed relationship?

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. So I'm not sure this is a philosophical point. I think this might just be a psychological point. I think that once we feel really secure that somebody is sexually attracted and sexually interested in us.

Agnes: It seems OK.

Rebecca Kukla: Now we'll see if the problem is the MIC. Or me. I think that once we feel secure that somebody is attracted to us, this is starting to be comical. And we know that in general, having sex with us is a thing that they enjoy doing, that the occasional sex is a favor, doesn't bother us so. Lunch. Right. I mean it's the same with the friend coming over for dinner again, right. If the only time this friend ever came over for dinner was out of a sense of duty, then we would probably start feeling bad about that friendship. But if you have somebody who spends time with you voluntarily and out of pleasure over and over again and one time you just need them to call in a favor, that's OK. So I'm this is complicated, right? Because there's an interesting issue that I don't know if you want to talk about this now or just shelve it in the back of our minds. But there's also the issue of, like, paid sexual therapists for, often for very disabled people who are not really in a position to find sexual partners on their own or or. Have special complicated physical needs to get through physical act, and there's an interesting debate around. What we should think of the ethics of hiring like specially trained sex workers to provide sex for those people. And in that case, it's not exactly a favor. Like it's an exchange of services for money, but it has some of the same structure where there's no pretense that the person is doing it just because they want to out of mutual pleasure. And I think I'm in favor of that. And I want to tread very carefully here because I don't want to undermine anyone, but I guess I think that while I'm in favor of that, there's still something missing that most of us want and enjoy out of sex. That doesn't make it worthless. It doesn't make it not worth doing. But there is an incompleteness to it because what almost all of us

want out of sex. Is some sort of mutuality and mutual recognition that involves each person. Expressing their desire for an enjoyment of the other person, and I mean I keep mentioning the word play. I think that play is essential to sex in some sense and play kind of has to be reciprocal. Like you can play with your little kids and do it as a favor. But it's not quite real play. It's like you're. Playing at playing in a way, if you're just doing it to make them happy, you know, like when you play little kid games to keep them satisfied you. Know. What I mean, yeah.

Agnes: Yeah. Good. I mean, so one. You know, one model you might have of sex is that sex is kind of like a commodity that's desired by one party and the other party gets something else in exchange, right? So it would be like a financial exchange. Almost model of sex, right? And usually when people are putting forward such a model almost always to critique it. But the assumption is something like the man wants sex and the woman in giving him sex. Would be sacrificing something, so she wants something in exchange. Maybe, like promises of marriage or something like that. Right. They'll be one kind of model of sex as a kind of exchange and. One of the readings that we did in the study group sort of associated that model of sex in some way with rape culture.

Rebecca Kukla: Right.

Agnes: And I've been thinking about that. And so here's an alternative model of sex might be 1, where instead of thinking of people as engaging in some kind of commercial exchange, you might think of them as it's more like a gift exchange. Right. Which is it? It resembles a commercial exchange. Like gift exchanges are reciprocal, but they're actually quite different from commercial exchanges in that like if you get me a birthday present and I get you a birthday present, I'm not paying you for the birthday present you gave me, right. Something that I've been wondering about is. Is it really true that the commercial model encourages the kind of rape valorization of rape or making possible of rape more than the gift Model 1, where you might have is like if you have the commercial model, then you think that you shouldn't get sex unless you pay for it, right? So commercial things in general. I don't think it's OK for me to just take something from a store. I think I have to pay to get it right. That's the nature of a commercial transaction. But you might think with a gift like you might, for instance, mistake. You think someone's giving you a gift when they're not or whatever. And you think it's fine to just take it and not give them anything in exchange. So I wonder, like, if you could sort of say something about why about those two models? And like what is sort of intrinsically pernicious, if anything, about the kind of more commodification model?

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah, that's what really complicated questions. So I'm going to break it into a bunch of parts. If that's OK so. First, let me just break it off the gift thing and talk about the commodity model. What I take the essence of the commodity model to be, and this is consistent with what you said, but it's just maybe filling it in or slightly different. I take the essence to be that you see sex as a kind of a thing that can be lost taken given. UM. Sometimes sold, but the the fact that it can sometimes literally be sold for money is less crucial than the fact that it's the kind of thing that

can be traded, lost owed, right, that it has that whole economic character to it. And I think that. I mean the the commodity model is embedded into all sorts of like common everyday idioms and metaphors that we have, like. So the whole idea of losing your virginity right where it's a thing that you had, and you'll hear people like. Girl that hopefully this is dying off, but I think some people still hear this, like girls or women will be told not to give it away to eat or not to. Give it away too. Soon, right. And there's this idea that women are supposed to like, try to get as high of a price for it as it were as possible. Maybe not in terms of literal money, though, sometimes. Sometimes it's almost literal right, like you're supposed to find a rich husband who will provide for you. So it's like almost literal. But even if it's not quite monetizable, the idea is like you're supposed to get as much goods back for your. Thing as you can, and that's a deeply sort of not just an economic model, but a kind of a free market economic model sex. And so I think that the connection to rape culture. Is at least twofold. 1 is. If you have that model, then people usually men, just because have how we've set. Up. Can feel like they paid for it, and they're owed it, right? Even if that's not how it's interpreted on the other end, right. So you get these narratives of ohh I've been a nice guy and I've been nice to women for years and so on. And so by now I'm owed sex. I've I've paid what I need to pay or you'll get the model of like, I don't get it. You know, I I have a good job and I'm a good provider and I'm willing to be a good provider. And so at this point I'm owed. So I think that part of the rape culture Ness of it is this idea that you're owed something or can be owed something, and then, you know, you said normally with a commodity, you don't just take it, you pay for it. There's also within commodity capitalism, a long standing tradition of people feeling like if they've suffered enough deprivation. And injustice. Damn it, they get to take it. I don't know if I'm. Allowed to say damn.

Speaker 4: It here, I'll try to keep it to no. Harsher than that?

Rebecca Kukla: But right, I mean and This is why we get people at certain points rioting or looting or doing whatever feeling like, yes, you're supposed to be able. To pay for. It. But if you're going to deprive me enough, then I'm just going to take what's coming for me. So I think there's part of that logic too that goes on OK, but all of that, what's the first way it's connected to rape culture? The other way it's connected to rape culture is, I think, subtler, which is I think, that we've spent a lot of time socially talking about the objectification and sexualization of women and how women are set up in Society of sexually desirable objects. I think we've spent much less time. Talking about the converse of that, which is that we've set up an as inherently. Physically undesirable and there's a strong cultural idea that the only way that men can get sex because women don't desire them in their own right is either by paying enough for it. And again, that doesn't have to be literal payment, right? But putting out putting in enough that now they're owed it. Or taking it by force. Because, I mean, if you think about it, think about in how many movies and TV shows and sitcoms we just, without any criticism or reflection, make jokes about how like seeing men's bodies is gross. And, you know, if if a man shows up and you can see his chest, everybody's like, oh, I don't

want to see that. Or if they're revealing clothes, it's it's a completely standard trope that we don't even reflect on to talk about how men's bodies are disgusting, which I mean, I don't think they are, but if we were to talk about women's bodies like that, people would be shocked. So we've set up men as the ones who desire sex. Women is the ones who own the sex, whatever that means. Men is undesirable. So now women need some motive to give that sex away other than desire because they're not positioned as desirable or, you know, men aren't positioned desirable. Women aren't positioned as desiring. And so the men have to earn that sex somehow. And there's really only two ways. They can either like socially pay for it through commitments to marriage or financial stuff or whatever, or they can just take it. And so I think that that's another way in which it contributes to rape culture. Getting back to the gift question, so I've written about sex as gift exchange. As you know. So I do think that this is an interesting way of thinking about sex. I think. What do I want to say? Oh, God. Your question is so complicated. I have so many things to say. OK, I guess I want to say two things about gifts of sex. 1 is, so there's lots of really cool sociology and anthropology on the logic of gift exchange. It's super fascinating, and it turns out that it's like cross culturally variable in terms of exactly what the norms of gift exchange are. It's an incredibly cross culturally robust. Practice pretty much every culture has some version of gift exchange, and even though the details change, the basic logic of it is the same. So there's certain rules of gift exchange that are culturally, almost inviolable. So, for example, if I give you a gift. Then in some sense you have a normative responsibility to at some point give me a gift back. But. Not only does it not to be not need to be in the form of a direct exchange, but it can't be. It would be insulting if it were right. So like if I'm like, oh, I bought this book, I thought of you here, have it. And you're like, oh, that book looks like it's worth about \$20 here. Have it. Then you've undermined my attempt to give you a gift, right. Or if you like, give me back the same book the next day. You're like, but it's exactly equally good gift. That's not how gifting works, right, so gifts put. Pressure on the recipient of the gift for reciprocity, but it's an open-ended reciprocity with very implicit rules. It can't come too soon. It can't be too similar and kind. There are complicated codes around it, and it turns out anthropologically that the whole gift exchange network is a thing. That nits and holds social groups together in really essential ways in almost every circumstance. Now, money exchange does too, but it turns out that these are just not the same exchange networks. They coexist in the same cultures, and they do different work. So so far, that's to say, I really agree with you that it's a really different way of. Thinking about it. On the other hand, I think if you think of sex entirely in terms of gift exchanges, we're going to distort it in at least two really important ways. One is you're still going to be thinking of sex as a thing to give, right? So now we're not trading it. We're giving it generously, and that seems nicer, but it's still a.

Unknown Speaker: And.

Rebecca Kukla: And I prefer to think of sex not as a thing that you can. Like lose or. Owe somebody or take, but as an activity that takes place collaboratively over time,

it's just like the the the metaphysics of objects is the wrong metaphysics to use for sex. We should be thinking of it more like dancing. Or, like a sports competition, right, these are not objects. These are activities that we engage in and that are designed structurally from the get go to be collaborative activities. And so the thing logic is a bit distorting to me. I do think that there is a place for sexual gifts, but that that. Isn't and shouldn't be the main way in which we have sex. So I think that against the background of sex, that is not sort of given away like that. Again, if we can talk about what I think the right model should be, but against the background of a more collaborative model. I think there are times, especially in the context of a long term relationship, where it makes sense to generously give a gift of sex. Somebody, but I think that that shouldn't be the primary way in which sex happens, partly because of the favor reason that we were talking about earlier. If you give it as a gift, then it seems like you're doing a favor to the person. So I think it needs to be an exception to the rule, although it can be a really important and and sometimes very healthy exception to the rule, but it can't be the only way. In which we have sex also. Just last thing to point about point out about that is sex. Once we acknowledge that sex, sex can be a gift that we give. You need to be careful because it can be. A really inappropriate gift.

Speaker 4: A lot of subtle codes around when and how it's OK to give sex as a gift and you don't want to be giving it to the wrong person or.

Agnes: In the wrong way. Good. Well, actually that kind of these the question I want to ask. You, which is sort of. You know, one thing that you've talked about is the way in which sex, either as a gift or as an invitation, right? It's sort of predicated on a kind of cultural background of like, when is it appropriate? Right. Right. And just as it can be inappropriate to invite you to a party if it's like my friend's party. Right there can be circumstance under which a sexual invitation could be inappropriate. So there's this kind of rich, like cultural background, sort of unspoken set of rules that govern like invitations and stuff that I have to respect in offering either a sexual gift or a sexual invitation. So that's like 1. Bit of like. Sort of how you think about sex. But here's another bit, and I'm hoping you'll connect them for me. So the other bit that I find really interesting is uhm. You know in your work you've almost taken kind of **** sexual practices is offering us a kind of model for openness and sexual discourse, and the idea is like, you know, there can be something like setting up of a conversation about sex where you're, like, defining the terms. And you're you're you're. You know, you're defining, like, safe words and things like that. And you're having a conversation about what you're comfortable with, what you're not comfortable with. Right. So there's this, like, very explicit sexual negotiation in which you're not taking anything for granted and you're not leaving it implicit to background norms, etcetera. Because you know you don't want to. First of all, I think I think for maybe 2 reasons, one of them is you don't want to like leave it to background norms that you might not share. And then the other is you kind of want the freedom to invent it for yourself, right? And so I'm wondering, how do these two aspects of sexuality? Put together for you, that is the the dependence on background norms insofar as the invitation and

stuff requires that, and then the kind of freedom from them that the sexual discourse suggests. Here.

Rebecca Kukla: Why is it that anyone that?

Agnes: This this one's. Fine.

Rebecca Kukla: I don't know what's happening. OK, that threw me off. All right, that's a wonderful question. So yeah, I think that your characterization of why I find the **** case as sort of a helpfully clear model case was right on the money, so maybe I can go from that and then work my way back to the everyday norms. I think that you're exactly right. That part of what's important. About that explicit negotiation. You're not taking background norms for granted and you are giving yourself the freedom to make up new ones, and once you're making up new ones, you don't know, you can't make assumptions going in about what the other person feels OK with doesn't feel OK with things is normal things, is weird, wants to try, doesn't want to try, right. So I mean, one thing to say is. I've had several people respond to my work on this by saying oh, but isn't it a problem if there's so much talking? Aren't you, like, taking the spontaneity away by doing all of this, talking about sex? And I kind of think it's exactly the opposite for the reason that you just named, right? What that talking is doing is enabling you to create a safe space of spontaneity. If you are engaged in like. For lack of a better phrase, regular vanilla, heterosexual mono sex right? And you're not talking about it. There's a background assumption that the reason it's going to go OK is because you're going to do the sort of normal routine stuff that we all think of as what goes on during that kind of sex. And there's 2 problems. With that right one is there isn't any room for trying anything else without just like springing it on the. Person non consensually, that's one problem. So it really limits your freedom and the other problem is a lot of that sex is actually awful, right? And because people haven't talked about in, in advance and haven't actually checked in with one another about what they enjoy or don't enjoy, what they're in the mood for, how they're going to signal. That they want to stop. They end up having, like really icky, uncomfortable sex that they wish would hurry up and end. And my. Experience of talking to a lot of people about this and traveling in a lot of different communities is that there's just a lot less bad sex that happens in explicit kink communities. So first point is I think it increases freedom by saying, OK, it increases freedom in two ways. One is you're not making those background assumptions that you're just going to do the same old boring stuff, and so you can talk about what else you want to do, but the other is. If you have clear and this is something I always come back to over and over again whenever I write about sex, one of the things that people do in kink communities that I think is and especially ****, but everywhere in kink communities, I think it's just incredibly important is they establish exit conditions or safe words, right. They decide in advance how they're going to make clear to one another without big. Drama or arguing or a big, you know, need to have a huge conversation in the moment. How they're going to indicate that they want something to stop or how they're going to indicate that they want the whole thing to stop or they want something to back off,

right? And once you have clear exit conditions set up and you trust one another, that if one of you wants out, they can communicate that effectively and without a big fight and the other person will both understand it and respect it, then you can try new stuff like at the moment too, that you didn't even talk about in advance. Right. You can just try something out. If the person doesn't need to exit, then they won't exit, and if they need to exit they will. So all of that pre conversation. Is enabling a whole kind of space of safe freedom to happen, like where while you're in the middle of the sexual event, somebody can just, you know, throw a monkey wrench into it and try something new. And they've established already indicate to one another whether that is working for them or not. I mean, the problem is. You can't just use literal. But you can't be just like, no, I prefer you not do that because frankly, now even I'm going to get a little embarrassed. But frankly, a lot of times. And sex. It's kind of normal to be like, oh, no, no, no. And you don't actually mean no, right. You just mean, oh, this is edgy or exciting, right? And. So you can't. You can't count on normal communication to just easily indicate, especially for trying something new and daring and maybe something that's intentionally a little bit. Painful or scary? Sorry or but even if not right, you can't count on normal everyday communication practices to keep people safe. So I'm rambling a little bit, but the basic point there is I think this kind of speech creates spaces of freedom, and I think that even if you're having monogamous, vanilla, heterosexual sex. It would be awesome if you established with your partner safe words. So that you could indicate to. Heather, OK, this is not quite working for me or this is in a way that isn't so disruptive, right? Because the problem is if you don't have that and in the middle of sex, you say to your partner, oh, this is. Awful. Stop. It's it's a real. Mood killer and it's hard to not hear that is insulting and hurtful. Right. Whereas if you just say yellow, which means, you know, back off, slow down or red, which means stop, it's already established in advance that those are not personal insults, right. And they don't have all that loaded stuff in them. OK. I wanted to make a completely different point. Let me think about what it was. There was another component to.

Agnes: What you said it was the invitation part does depend on implicit norms. So how? Do you fit those things together?

Rebecca Kukla: Right, right. So in terms of the background norms that. Are still in place, like not all of the norms that were.

Speaker 6: They're.

Rebecca Kukla: Embedded in our sexual norms, right? So I think that there are certain norms that we have to take for granted as shared common background, that move through the social world together. And some of those are the norms about when and how it is or isn't OK to flirt with somebody or invite sex or offer. Next and those norms are sort of prior to not exceptionally prior to literally temporally prior to the norms that we're talking about now, which are about what happens after you've pretty much established that the two of you are sexually interested in one another, probably something's going to happen, right. So I think that.

Speaker 4: Right.

Rebecca Kukla: In order to just sort of coordinate as a society, we all ought to have certain shifts. Like you don't just randomly ask the person sitting next to you on the bus if they want to.

Speaker 4: Norms.

Rebecca Kukla: Have sex with you.

Speaker 2: Right.

Rebecca Kukla: Right. And that's not just about sex, like that's invitations in general. So one point I made in my paper is you also don't randomly ask the person sitting next to you on the bus if they want to come to your wedding. The fact that somebody can turn down an invitation doesn't make it the case that all invitations are appropriate. We have all kinds of elaborate social codes about when it is and it's appropriate to invite people to do things. And so part of what's wrong with like the guy in the bar who walks up to every woman and says, hey baby, you want to come home with me is, you know, if you ask him why. Why are you doing this icky thing? He's likely to say? Well, you know I don't mean any harm. They can say no if they want to say no. Right, because that's the nature of invitations is you can turn them down. That's one of the things that matters about them. But the fact that people can say no to. Them doesn't undo the fact that this is just an inappropriately intimate invitation to it's the wrong way to initiate an invitation. So I think that we can separate the norms that have to do with how we interact with one another out in the world and how we sort of get to know one another. And those include sexual norms, but they also include all of these other kinds of social norms. What and norms, friendship norms, whatever it may be. And then we have a separate set of norms. For once, we're in an actual sexual situation, right? And before we get to the whole like, let's explicitly talk about what we want to do and how we're going to act. There's all kinds of sexual speech that people forget to pay attention to, right? Like there's the whole flirting stage. And there's the whole talking to one another, hypothetically about what you might or might not like and what your tastes. And all of that can happen prior to any actual. Negotiation of an encounter. So there's a long path between being out there in the world and sharing basic norms of social propriety. And what happens when we get to that space where we're like, OK, the ropes are out the.

Speaker 4: Handcuffs are out. Let's talk about it.

Agnes: Yeah. OK. So I want to ask you about like, so you've drawn a number of analogies between, say, like, you know, inviting someone to your wedding ring, someone to dinner, inviting them to sex. And like, you know what? Earlier, when I asked you about. You know, we we don't like why we wouldn't want someone to give us sex as a favor some of the time. You say also, it's true about coming to your house for dinner. And like, I appreciate those analogies. But I also feel like sex is really different from all those cases. So let me like, say something about that. And maybe it's like a difference between us because I am embarrassed and. So like, I feel like there's something. Embarrassing about sex? Yes. And like it's embarrassing to talk about.

It's a little embarrassing to think about and I feel like it's being embarrassing is for me connected to it's being fun. Like it's like a little bit forbidden. It's and like, one thing you said was like it relates we play with parts of your body.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Agnes: That we don't normally play with that is that aren't normally like in. The public space. Yeah. And you could even imagine like in different cultures, different parts of the body might get sexualized in just that way. Right? And so there it looks like in order for there to be such a part of the body, there has to be the part that you don't like that that, that prohibition, right seems to be like part of the it's being sexual.

Rebecca Kukla: Absolutely yes.

Speaker 4: Yes.

Agnes: So that's just an argument in support of my embarrassment view.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. Embarrassment, serious sense.

Agnes: Yeah, yeah.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. So I I don't exactly. I'm not embarrassed by talking about sex, but I think you're absolutely right that it's sort of bound up with the kind of pleasure it is that it always plays on the edge of shame to some extent, right? That would be my way of recasting your point that you are letting yourself be vulnerable. With somebody else.

Speaker 4: Else.

Rebecca Kukla: By doing something with them that they could shame you for, or could let you feel shamed for right if it goes badly. And so you're always taking on that risk of shame. And in fact that happens a lot in bad sex that we end up feeling shamed by our partner or just. Feeling ashamed for whatever reason and.

Agnes: Why? Like why in sex is it like it's much less likely in a dinner party, even if the food wasn't that good for it to end in shame.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah, I mean, let's not underestimate how shamed there. Is in the world. But but I agree with you that there's something different about it and. So this is connected to a question that we talked about over e-mail that maybe we can bring in in a few minutes, not quite yet about well, let me stick to one thing at a time. I love your point about different parts of the body, right? So I'm going to say something first. You're going to be annoyed because you want me to focus on what's different about sex. I'm going to say something that's not about sex, but it. Was. Really helpful for. Me for thinking about this point so. I feel like up until a few years ago I had some fairly naive flat footed. What I guess we can call second wave feminist ideas about religious headdress for women and his jobs and that. Kind of thing.

Agnes: I just I I just couldn't hear what you said.

Rebecca Kukla: Oh religious headdresses for right most paradigmatically hijab, but any sort of tradition that asks that women cover their heads. And there was, you know, there's been a discourse about this for years.

Unknown Speaker: Uh-huh.

Rebecca Kukla: That there's a sort of a what I now think is very simplistic feminist line that says that there's something inherently anti feminist about those norms because you're telling women that their bodies are shameful and they they. Have to cover them and these women would be so much more liberated if they didn't have to cover these parts of their body. And I guess I hadn't thought of it very deeply. But I I guess I had implicit not critical. Sympathies with something like that. And then I spent a bunch of time in the Middle East and in different parts of the Middle East, which were very different from one another. Including for example in like trendy hip parts of Cairo where women wear the hijab and their his jobs are incredibly fashionable and they have, like, sports hijabs that they use for roller blading down the street, and so on. And like there's lot lots and lots of different, there's no uniformity to this tradition. And I had this sudden. Realization that. If they were suddenly to have those taken off, I mean, I don't want to speak for every single woman, but this is clearly true for at least many women who have grown up with head coverings, right? If they were to suddenly have those taken off, they wouldn't feel liberated and feminist and empowered, they would feel. Naked and that nakedness goes with shame. And that's absolutely no weirder or more or different from or worse than the fact that I would not feel liberated if somebody suddenly took my shirt off in public and my. Boots were hanging out. Right. I would not feel like, oh, my God now. On this free woman who you know is not being shackled. By the prudishness of society, I would just feel naked. Why? Because our bodies grow up with very specific habituation into ways of moving through the world. And part of that habituation, you know, like as we grow up, our bodies learn in deep muscle memory how to sit, how to move. How to talk? How to just your all those things are, you know, partly innate but partly socially shaped. But by the time we're, you know, past early childhood, those things are deep in our body. They're just part of who we are. And one of the things that we all and every culture I know about that we do is our bodies internalize these codes of which parts of them are private and which parts of them are public, right. There are no societies where people just walk around completely naked all the time. So we all every single one of us, regardless of what culture we're from. Have internalized these kinds of complicated maps of our bodies in terms of publicity and privacy. And there's nothing different about your head being a space of privacy than your ***** being a space of privacy, and that's completely shifted how I saw all these dress codes. I was like, this isn't about who's more liberated or less liberate. This is just about contingencies of how we develop different. Apps of privacy and publicity and. The body. So it was a real changer. Now the reason I think that's relevant to your question is because if that's true, then that means that there is always that possibility for the revealing of something private on the body, right? And that is always attached to at least the possibility of embarrassment. Vulnerability, shame, exploitation by the person who we've revealed it to. And so there's always a kind of a risk involved in sexuality because you're making the private public in this way. And so this is a part of the definition of sex that my 8 year old had not tweaked on to yet. Right. Which is, it's not just playing with people's

bodies in any old way. It's playing with people's bodies. The way that it would not normally pop up. So. So yeah, so I think you're deeply right. So like different people are going to have different embarrassment tolerances and it's going to be easier or harder for them to feel shamed. But I do think that the whole pleasure of sex is wrapped up with. Trusting somebody and offer to join somebody enough that you're willing to make that private public with them. I shouldn't say public, but that you're willing to share that private with them and that always can go wrong. And so there's always the threat of shame that it's always going to be at least somewhat transgressive. And that's going to be part of its pleasure and part of its thrill.

Agnes: It's almost like if you were a psychological analog, might be telling someone a secret.

Rebecca Kukla: Right, right. Yeah, right.

Agnes: And we all have different things that we consider secret, right? And telling someone a secret can go terribly wrong, right, based on how they respond.

Rebecca Kukla: To it, and it's also probably why a lot of like long term monogamous couples might have trouble sustaining sexual interest and excitement with one another because there's only so long. But the way somebody's body looks can be a big surprise every day for for year after year, it's hard to maintain that sort of body map of privacy and publicity. You know, once your partner has, like, seen you giving birth or whatever. Like, there's there's things that happen that. Disrupt that map and make it difficult to maintain, I think.

Speaker 2: Hmm.

Agnes: OK. That's that's super interesting. I wanna we we've already gone an hour. So I have tons more questions for you, but I might try to like squeeze them in. Among. The student questions, but now open it up to you guys. So questions, yeah.

Unknown Speaker: Early. And like.

Speaker 7: Both of them.

Unknown Speaker: That category.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. Well, first of all. I'm not sure that monogamy is as universal of a norm as you make it sound like. It. Is for two reasons. One is it's not quite as cross cultural as you're making it sound. There have been lots of cultures that have incorporated in one way or another, non monogamy, but also because I think our culture. Gives a lot of lip service to monogamy as an official form of relationship, and I'm not sure that that's the reality. Like, not only is there tons of cheating, but there's a long, long, long tradition of valorizing cheating, especially when men do it right. I mean, it's actually treated as a kind of an accomplishment. I don't know how we could ever get statistics about how many relationships are actually successfully monogamous because people lie or don't know if they're in a in a monogamous relationship, but I have a strong sense that monogamy is something that. Is essential to our social norms of decorum, but maybe not to the reality, but that doesn't really answer your question. It seems like we still want to explain why we care about monogamy. I'm tempted to give overly simplistic answers, right? I mean, I feel like if you look at the history of

patriarchy in which families were treated as. Ownership units right centers of property and wealth, and also centers of lineage for how the wealth would be passed down to the next generation or not, just the wealth even like the family business or whatever it is that there was this strong idea that you had to sharply carve family. And it's off from one another, right? Yet to know exactly where their boundaries are and monogamy helps that along. Also, may be completely separately and maybe in some deep genealogical sense, not completely separately, I don't know, but starting a few 100 years ago we have this very well developed idea of romantic love that got honed and sharpened through art and literature and discussions of all sort. And part of that vision of romantic love that we developed was this kind of desperate exclusivity, right? Like it couldn't even be real. If the person was interested in anybody else but you like what proper romance looks like is total complete absorption and honor uninterrupted desire for the other person. Maybe we developed that because of the patriarchy household thing. I don't know, that's that's speculative. But I feel like that. Ideal of romantic love. It's very pervasive. It pervades like so much of our media. It pervades so much of our like high school mythology. When we're first starting to date, it bears almost no relationship to reality, right? I mean that and when you do get that kind of all consuming blinded focused. I can't see anybody but you love it. Either burns itself out quickly or it becomes really creepy. So my sense is that the the desire to at least proclaim monos. For me, whether or not it's real is to sort of. Hold our relationships up to that standard, whether or not they're actually living up to it. And I don't think it's a healthy standard. So why do we have that for SACS as opposed to like going to the movies or whatever? I mean, I think it's bound up with this idea that sex is supposed to go to go with romance, and romance is supposed to be that. I mean, you know, if you read stuff from, like the 18th century. And romance, where they were really getting going on the idea, which is why we call it the romantic era, right? The the metaphors are so creepy. It's like, you know, if you if you're in love with somebody, it's supposed to erase the boundaries between you completely and you become like one person and you're totally absorbed into one another. I find all those metaphors terrifying. But they govern a lot of our imagination and they it's not hard to see why they would help instantiate A monogamy norm. OK.

Agnes: Yeah. So let me just add something I basically completely agree with everything you just said. And I do find this kind of myth that like if you know you love A and then you fall in love with B, that means you didn't love A like. It's a kind of, it's kind of syllogism almost that a lot of us have. But if you actually if you go online. If you Google like what you know what does it mean if I'm married and I fall in love with someone else, it's oh, it means you didn't love the first person. Like, like psychology. Today articles will say that to you, right? So right. Exactly right. OK. So I think that's right. But I do think that there's something. Like, there's clearly a really deep pressure or push towards monogamy, and I wonder whether some of it isn't something like just a desire for some kind of social stability. Because if you think about it, just take a moment. Like, just take a marriage, monogamous, heterosexual

relationship, right? That's hard to hold together. I can speak from some experience, that's all. That's already hard right now. Imagine, right. I'm trying to hold together. That plus like another relationship plus that persons with someone else. The structure then becomes potentially like very labyrinthine, and especially if you think that breaks in the structure in one place can cause fractures in other places, right. You might think we want our units small just to have like a modicum. Of social stability, that's one theory that I have about it.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah, yeah. I mean small doesn't necessarily mean. Right. I mean my my App Store is neighbors are a very very stable triad and I I mean so I agree with you, I think like the main argument against polyamory is it's like exhausting and hard to schedule. And when things are exhausting and hard to schedule and complex like that, there's. Make more room for breakdown and so on. So yeah, absolutely. But like, I'm not sure.

Speaker 5: Right.

Rebecca Kukla: That, like there is an essential ontological difference between 2:00 and 3:00 saying, right? So you know, they have their threesome very stably set up. And it's really clear what the division of Labor is and the household and so on, both in terms of economics and in terms of how they just how they run their lives. And that that they're a lot more organized than my twosome downstairs is that I'm in. I'll. Say that much.

Speaker 4: Yeah.

Rebecca Kukla: So. So I mean I I think you're right, but I don't think that's a difference in kind. I think that's like a contingent difference in degree. Let me add one more thing though. I also think that we have to remember that these relationships are happening within. Institutions, social structures and laws completely designed around dyads. Another source of instability is not just the more relationships, but the fact that the more relationships are not sitting in as well with the that they're they're grading against. Review that we've made for relationships to exist in and that makes it harder.

Speaker 2: Right.

Agnes: OK.

Unknown Speaker: Define.

Rebecca Kukla: Hopefully happy.

Speaker 8: Behaviors that you need to buy for. Like 8 years different different.

Rebecca Kukla: Different across different cultures. Yeah, sorry, that's a perfectly good question. It just took a different turn at the end than I was expecting.

Speaker 4: It to take.

Rebecca Kukla: Oh, OK. Yeah. So as I understand it, the question is if I'm moving from a biological definition of sex as organized around reproduction. To tell me if I'm getting this right to a definition of sex based on, you know, we've said a whole bunch of things so far here tonight. But playing with one another's bodies in a way that's supposed to be joyful and that engages parts of the bodies that are private according to our maps and so on. Then does that.

Unknown Speaker: OK.

Rebecca Kukla: Sex. A more culturally variable notion, and was that right? Yeah. And I take it that the reason it would make it a more culturally variable variable notion is because those to, to oversimplify, those maps of our bodies would be very culturally different. And like, what counts as an enjoyable thing to do with your body. It would be very different from culture to culture. Great. Absolutely. So yeah, I mean, part of me just wants to say, yeah, that's that's true. I I think that that's right. I mean you can see this like. If you watch foreign. Erotica, which is always fascinating to do. Really. No, seriously.

Speaker 6: OK.

Rebecca Kukla: It's it's fascinating which things are treated as scenes of ***** titillation that we might not have thought of as that. So yeah, I think they're just I I think that's very perceptive. What you said in terms of how that follows from what I've said. But I also think it's just. Empirically true. I need to say though, because I thought your question was going somewhere quite different. I like your actual question better. The definition of sacs in terms of reproductive function is just so radically inadequate to virtually everything that we actually do, which is that which we interpret as sex, right, like. I know that that's out there as an idea about what sex is supposed to be or something, but it rules out just like virtually. I know you weren't suggesting that just it's worth noticing that that rules out. Like virtually all sex. Like so obviously it rules out all queer sex, right? It rules out everything but heterosexual sex. But not only that, it rules out all heterosexual. Ducks, except between, you know, fertile pre menopausal women and and fertile men. Right. So according to that definition, if. Somebody I don't know how explicit I can be, but like if two people have. Regular penis, vagina, intercourse. And what? The woman is postmenopausal. Then it's not sex, which is absurd, right? Obviously, it's still sex. Right. Well, I was going to say that. Yeah. Yeah. Then. So then, then you got to rule out. Not just, like, all the old people and all the young people and all the queers, but you got to rule out.

Agnes: Or contraception or faith.

Rebecca Kukla: The contraceptive sacs and all of the withdrawal sacs and all of the sacs where one person didn't or where the man didn't orgasm and so on. It's like we're left with like a very, very tiny portion of sex. And then even with the portion of sacks which is left over, I don't know how much intention matters, but most of the sex, which could in fact result in reproduction. That's not why the people are doing it right. I mean, sometimes it is, but that's not the main motivation for that sex to. Happen. So I just think that like. Defining our cultural social notion of sex in terms of reproduction is just going to be a non starter. None of that is to contradict anything you said, which I think is right on the money.

Agnes: Yeah.

Speaker 5: I'm gonna let you feel.

Speaker 7: OK.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. Yeah.

Unknown Speaker: Yeah.

Speaker 5: Say like.

Rebecca Kukla: When it's good sex, yeah.

Agnes: From from the usual daily.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah, I feel like you never ended up reading out that passage. I feel like this is a good moment for, I don't know if you want to, like, read parts of it.

Agnes: Maybe I'll just say what it's.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah, it's kind of long, but we were discussing this right before.

Agnes: It's kind of long. So first. Let me just restate Sophia's questions. I think is a really good one, which is that one thing that seems distinctive about sex when we contrast it to having a dinner party or, you know, saying or other kinds of functions and activities that we do with other people.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah, it is.

Speaker 2: Eat.

Agnes: Is that we're not that rational when we're having sex and that in some way our kind of emotional life, like, really bubbles to the surface. And so there's something kind of we're sort of in some way dominated by passion. Right. OK. So there was this passage, and I mentioned it in the study group, but I didn't assign it. And it's this people. So in French, the word for orgasm is la petite more, which is the little deaf. Right and.

Unknown Speaker: Yeah.

Agnes: So this goes along with this piece, cause the thought is that like in some way, sexuality allows us to escape ourselves, right? So it's almost like death, like in the sense of we're trying not to be ourselves, right, and that. You know, one way that shows up is like in your question, Sophia, that like the kind of rational, self-conscious, self aware hold that we have of ourselves like that is exhausting. And we sometimes want out. And that's one thing that sexuality seems to offer us. And you know, it's in a certain way. If you think of it pushes against the idea of seeing sex as like, you know, very reflective or like really getting to know the other person or something or, you know, being aware of yourself or aware of about it's like, no, it's the opposite. It's like forgetting all of that. It's like the kind of escape. So yeah, let me let you.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. Yeah. So, yeah, I mean, So what we were talking about beforehand was this idea of is the ideal of good sex, like, where you're like, completely know the other person inside out and are super honest and, you know, have complete transparency, which is sort of our our I'm thinking stereotype of good sex. Or as good sex. The kind of sex where you just sort of throw that out and let pat over and maybe you don't know too much and you don't try to nail down.

Agnes: Yeah, just.

Unknown Speaker: Right.

Rebecca Kukla: I think I have like some weird magnetic power emanating from my body that kills them. I don't understand. This hasn't happened to you once. OK.

Unknown Speaker: Anyway.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah, I think that too much literality kills sex. And that's not the full richness of what you said, but it's a deeply related point to what you said, right? We don't want to be trapped in a very everyday rational literal exchange. We want to, like, let that go. This is, I think, part of why I keep coming back to the word play and why for me the word play is like absolutely essential to sex. Of course you could answer. Yeah. But we do lots of play where we don't like. Get absorbed in passion. It's not like when you play monopoly, you're like, so it's not any old play. But I do think that the notion of play is important here, partly because sex involves this. Letting go of the everyday and letting go of the literal and letting go of rules that we would normally think of as like rational rules to monitor our behavior. And that's part of what's exciting about it and what's what feels transgressive. About. Not to like beat a dead horse too much, but this again is partly why I think that. Good communication going into sex can be so important because one thing that can happen if you're overwhelmed by your passions and your rationality goes out the window and everything becomes non literal and playful, and then you're unrooted, is that people can get pretty hurt, right? I mean, the reason that we try to be rational, a lot of the times is because we think practical. Reason will keep us relatively safe and on track. And so if you throw out practical reason, obviously there's like room for harm, especially because as we've been talking about, you are playing with vulnerable parts of the body where shame is possible and harm is possible. And so when you throw out rationality and you throw out literal literality, there's just there's room for harm. And in fact, sex does have a lot of room for harm. So I think that one of the things that we can do by scaffolding in advance and saying look, here's like one word that even if I'm overwhelmed with passion and don't feel like I need to have, I don't feel like I'm in the position to have a big, long, honest, rational conversation with you in the middle of sex. I could just say that. One word and redirect things right, so we're giving ourselves tools. Same with the like setting of boundaries in advance, where before you start, you're like, OK, here's the thing that I just hate. And if you do this, it's going to Take Me Out of the mood. So that's off the table, right? By setting those limits and boundaries and exit conditions in advance, we keep ourselves safer to experience that kind of irrational, non literal passion in the moment. And I think that's part of why it's so helpful, because I absolutely agree with you that one of the things that's special about sex. So one way I put it in. This article that some of you guys read is when you enter into a sexual scene or a sexual situation, it's like you're switching contacts and one of the ways that you're switching contacts is that the normal rules of rational, literal everyday speech are suspended, right? So you can no longer count on. Things meaning what they usually mean or people acting like they usually act. Somebody who's very meek in everyday life might be suddenly become really dommy in bed or whatever. Right? So. The normal rules are. Suspended. And that's fantastic. That's like part of what's exciting and special and and essential to it that that there's that possibility. But we want to be able to do that in a way where nobody feels degraded. Nobody feels. Harmed. Nobody feels like something non consensual will happen to

them. Nobody gets hurt. And so I think that the way to maximize our ability to do that is to set up the scaffolding well in advance. But yeah, that's a fantastic question. But that kind of because that kind of suspension of everyday practical reason, I agree with you is super essential to the phenomenon. When it's going well, there's also just like boring everyday sex.

Agnes: Yeah.

Rebecca Kukla: Just barely hear you. I can't hear you, but can you not just the driving? The line, yeah. Yeah, I already so. Huh.

Speaker 5: I'm on straight.

Rebecca Kukla: Uh-huh. I think I understand. Umm. So I mean. Conversations like this always play a complicated line between the normative and the descriptive, in the sense that part of what we're doing is just describing the reality of how people experience sex. And then there's another question about when we need to critique that so. By boring descriptive answer to you, which doesn't really answer your question is that I think even if we think it's problematic, this just is how we experience bodies, right? We just do have codes for what? What's private, what isn't? And I mean so. I think Agnes and some of you keep pushing me in the direction of wanting to make your question did this to wanting to make sacks more unique. And a lot of my pushes sometimes in the direction of making sex less unique. I don't want to totally take away its uniqueness, but I think that's part of the dynamic here. And the reason I mentioned that is because I feel like this is not just about revealing sexual parts of the body that just in general, we move through the world with these sort of maps. Of not just privacy and publicity, because that's too dualistic, right? But very private. Things that we will do with friends, things that we will do out in public and there's it's, it's not just about which pieces of our body we reveal, right. It's also about just how we move and what kinds of activities we're willing to engage in. Like you can have people who've had sex together for, for years and years who would be horrified by the idea of like. Being one another P for instance, right? That's just a different thing. And then you have other couples who don't care. So it's not just insects that we've got these maps of private and public, and I don't think that that's going to go away anytime soon or that we can deny that. That's how we interact with one another's bodies. But you made a point about ethical and political concerns that we might have on the basis of that right, that that can lead to a panic about. If I can, if I can try to characterize what you're concerned is that we tend to label certain kinds of people as the people who are going to non consensually violate those boundaries, right. And in a way, this goes back to this kind of old fashioned idea that we have of the pervert. As a special kind of person who just gets those boundaries wrong and is going to non consensually violate our boundaries because they don't have the right boundaries. And then that notion of the pervert can, in a homophobic culture or a transphobic culture, I actually feel like at the moment the transphobic part is more alive than the homophobic part that can get turned into this idea that that kind of person is the kind of person likely to be. Or essentially to be a pervert who is going to violate these and who is dangerous

to us, right? So your question is difficult. I guess what I think is 2 things. One is you're absolutely right that that notion of the pervert who's a threat to us. Depends conceptually. And essentially on this prior notion of bodies as having these maps of privacy and publicity. So if I didn't have that, we couldn't have this notion of the pervert. You're absolutely right. But I think that the place to be worried is not at that first stage, but with that translation of it into this idea that there's a certain kind of person, a certain social category of person, who we can pick out, who has a special personality trait, which makes them a threat to those men.

Unknown Speaker: Oops.

Rebecca Kukla: Do you see what I mean? Because there are people who are a threat to those maps, right? There are racist rapists. I said racist was there's an interesting slip, but there are rapists there. There are indeed. You know, there's exhibitionists. There's definitely people out there in the world who are a threat to those maps of privacy and publicity. But I think what I don't believe in. Is like special social categories of people who are especially at risk of being that kind of person. And what we're probably better off doing is deconstructing the notion of, like the pervert of a social category and instead talking about particular individuals, in particular behaviors and pointing out the ways in which our ideas about who is likely to be preferred. I'm just using pervert now as shorthand for all that stuff you talked about. Our ideas about who is likely to be a pervert and pose a threat and who isn't are based in bigotry, eyes and ignorances rather than an actual empirical phenomenon. And that's the place to put the pressure rather than trying to implement an unrealistic ideal where there aren't those kinds of boundaries to start with. Is that helpful because it was a really interesting question.

Agnes: OK. I just add something to two things like one of them is I feel like what you're really asking is like can we have some amount of like, shame and privacy without prejudice, right? Like, do you know, can we uncouple those things from one another and?

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. Yeah.

Agnes: Like that, I think it's just a really interesting question. So I think I sort of just encourage you to keep asking it. It's it certainly seems like it's possible to decouple particular cases, right? And it's interesting. The case that you raised in the locker room like I've never heard that case raised about women, only men, and it could be connected to your point about, like men's bodies.

Rebecca Kukla: A great question, yeah.

Agnes: Not being desirable kind of blew my mind because I was like, whoa, I totally kind of guilty of that, like. Just and that is like like not, you know, not every case something with just this kind of background thought of like clearly women are more generally more physically desirable than men I'm like. Wait, why do? I think that right, so you're completely like, diagnose me there and that could change.

Rebecca Kukla: Have you seen it, moa? I mean, come on.

Agnes: And I think that it could be that's like. That could be part of what's going on in the locker room, right? Is that like, part of the shame there is, like men feeling like their bodies are in some way undesirable or fears or worries about that. So that could be another thing where it might change if that bit of our culture changed.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. And right, not just men feeling like their bodies are undesirable, but and so feeling ashamed of them. But men feeling like their bodies are under. Sorry, this sentence is more complicated than it needs to be. Going along with that is the idea that men pose this kind of threat to our boundaries. Because since they're undesirable, they're not going to get to engage with us any. Their way. Other than by forcing themselves on us inappropriately, right, that's the flip side of that. And I think that's a super powerful cultural notion, right, right, that they have to just they.

Agnes: Right, right. Right. Right, right. Exactly. Yeah.

Rebecca Kukla: Have. The poor deers have to use force because they're so gross that they're not going to get any kind of engagement of this sort. Except through force or trickery, and I think that's, I mean it doesn't match our actual physical attractions, right? Tons of us are attracted to male bodies. It's just this very deep. Cultural myth that has a really deep hold.

Unknown Speaker: Yes.

Agnes: Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 5: Like. And I was just wondering because I thought about that and like you have like the 1st.

Speaker 6: That is.

Rebecca Kukla: OK, you said something interesting towards the end that I didn't quite hear. Can you repeat just like the last two sentences, your question for the recap. So I got the part about worrying about bad sex being violating, but then I felt like you made another point after that that I half heard. But I can't reconstruct.

Speaker 5: They are saying that. How?

Speaker 4: Ah.

Speaker 5: There again.

Rebecca Kukla: Right. Yeah, I I think I understand the question. I mean you and I could have a long conversation. Or we could all have a long conversation about exactly what violating means, because that's another of. These rich terms. Right, I I'm assuming that you very carefully picked the word violating as opposed to like non consensual say to to capture something more subtle. Certainly one way of it's being violating is for it to be non consensual, but you're trying to pick up on other ways in which. It could be violating. And I don't know that I have in my pocket an excellent definition of violating. It's a super rich and interesting concept. So I would need to think about how I want to cash it out. I think that. Part of the issue here is this too is a really interesting question, so thank you. I think part of the issue here is there's actually like a lot of different ways for sex to be bad. And we have focused our cultural conversation so much around rape and issues of consent that we don't have

a lot of good tools for talking about, about bad sex. Past the point of it's being non conceptual sex, right? Like I don't think any of us thinks this really if we're pushed. But we talk as if consensual sex is good, non consensual sex is bad. That's kind of the end of the conversation. And so part of the problem is, like a paucity. Of discourse and concepts around other kinds of bad sex. So I mean, I've thought about some of the other ways in which can sex can be bad other than being non consensual. For example, I think sex can be degrading and insulting even when it's consensual, right? You can totally consent for real to something that degrades you. You can consent for real to something that harms you, right? There are many different ways in which you know you. You could consent to sex, that objectifies and dehumanizes you, which is related to degrading, but not not the same as it. It could be boring, right? It could be just boring. Yes. So this doesn't answer your question.

Agnes: It can be boring.

Rebecca Kukla: Except to say that I think if we expanded our discourse enormously around what the. Aesthetic and ethical dimensions of sex are that we care about and the ways it can go wrong. Then we would have way better tools where we wouldn't be just stuck categorizing it into violating versus non violating right? Because once you say to somebody, yeah, the sex I just had with you violated me. That's really.

Speaker 4: Hard to come back.

Rebecca Kukla: He's like, yeah, that was totally violating of me. But let's try it again next week and see it comes back. So so I think that like it's not that you're wrong that it can be experienced as violating, but maybe that's not the most helpful word here because it's so binarist Vic like it either is or it isn't. I think we might be better off saying, OK, you know that that was good for me mostly, but. Kind of boring, or that was good for me mostly. But you know, actually, when you thought it was hot, saying, oh, you like that *****, don't you? I just felt degraded by that word. Right. Like we can pull out the different parts of it and talk about it. And that can allow for a learning curve. I think what blocks the learning curve is where we have these very course concepts, right? Like you that went badly. Therefore I must not have consented to it. Therefore it was something like assault or rape. Therefore everything is terrible and I'm a rape victim and you're a *****. It's very hard to be like, OK, so let's repair this relationship. After that, which is, by the way, not to say that there isn't tons of rape too. I'm not, like, minimizing rape. I'm just saying that we need. More nuanced categories for the various ways things can go wrong that we can then.

Agnes: Talk about. Yeah, let me add something. I think that like in addition to talking about sort of the course of a relationship and how talk about sex develops, we can also just talk about our culture and how communication about sex is.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Agnes: Developing and like 1, I think one reason why we've sort of focused of late on consent. One reason. Is that for a long time there was a history of demonizing many forms of sex, like homosexual sex, right? And then the move towards consent in a way was saying like, look, the only constraint is consent and then anything that people

consent to, it's fine. Just don't worry about what's going on there. Right. And like, that was like, that was kind of a good step. One right. But then once you get past that step one now what you can do is like take all that stuff that we've been like, it's somehow OK and now we want, like, our richer normative vocabulary, right. We don't just want to use the same, like, rape, non rape, normative structure to talk.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Agnes: About that we want, but I do think that there it's like there's something the kind of everything that's consented to is OK, one like problematic thing that it kind of gives rise to is the idea that sort of like there's this, the illusion, the perfect sex or something like that. You always have to be having perfect. Anything other than perfect sex is sort of really embarrassing, right? Right. So, and that's the kind of normative poverty or something. And so like, it makes sense that that's where we are, right. But I think that as a like culture, we are, we're only now just kind of learning to introduce that kind of richer normative vocabulary.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah, I think that's exactly right. And I think there you're, you're maybe I'm just going to reiterate what you just said, but there was a real to the anything people can consent to is fine. And there's a sense in which anything both can consent to can be fine, but that doesn't mean that everything people consent to is fine. I mean, people. So many people consent to sex for years to, for example, try to hang on to a partner who they feel they've lost emotional touch with and they're just like desperately trying to hang on to that person. And it's awful, right? There's just some that's not quite the boring case. That's like another case. We didn't talk about yet, just like consensual desperation. Sex, which is another way in which sex could be terrible. Yeah, we've reached the point. It's like almost 11. So we've reached the like. Now let's talk about terrible sex. But yeah, I fully agree.

Agnes: But there was a question back there, yeah.

Speaker 6: Mm-hmm.

Rebecca Kukla: Huh. Yeah. I suppose you're right, but that's sad, yeah. I mean it makes total sense on what I was, what we were talking about at the beginning as the commodity model. Right. Because the idea is, women have this object and men try to get the object and it's a more valuable object. If you're like one of the first ones to get it. And it isn't so used right? I mean, it's just like it's like finding the rarer Pokémon or whatever. But I mean, that sounds funny, but I actually feel like that's the dynamic right. Like it's more highly prized if it's harder to get. And so inexperienced women have a more valuable commodity on offer, whereas inexperienced men are people who haven't succeeded in doing a lot of getting and their job is to have the social resources or social authority or whatever it is. To succeed in getting a lot of stuff, I mean, this is deeply economic model again, right? They're supposed to be trying to get rich off sex. And so if they haven't got very much experience, then in that economic model, they're poor. Whereas the woman who hasn't had a lot of experience is richer because she hasn't given away her stuff yet. This is a horrible way of thinking about it. I'm not endorsing any of this. I find it just incredibly depressing, but I do think that that

myth that you're talking about is like, really deeply built into that commodity model. Cause I think it's essential to the commodity model, not just that we're trading. Sex is treating sex as this tradable object, but that like the default starting position. Is women have all of it and men are supposed to get it right? That's the. That's the dynamic of the economics.

Agnes: So yeah, what you're saying makes sense to me, but I wonder, like, if we did a study, I wonder how true it would be that the inexperienced women aren't. Like, you know, ashamed and worried and certain, like, certainly I was like about that. That is, like, and maybe I'm just very capable of shame.

Speaker 4: That's coming out over the course of the night.

Agnes: But but I think like there's a sense of like. Not knowing what you're doing as being something very embarrassing, and especially if you're with someone who has more experience and so they do know what you're doing and now you might be shown up as somebody who, like doesn't know what they're doing, right. I feel like in, in any context that's embarrassing. So like. I mean maybe, maybe there's some sense in which if both people are doing something they don't, where they don't know what they're doing, maybe somehow like there's some sense that, like the man is in charge and therefore if he doesn't know what he's doing, that's like a worse situation or something like that. So I I don't know, maybe there is something to that, but I suspect that. Like I don't know, just my guess would be that women too feel. A. A kind of. Awkwardness about like that. Everyone feels awkward when they're, you know, engaging in sexual, like the weird thing about sex is that we don't pocket fraud or whatever, like, we're not very into it up until like. You know, a teenage or something years, right? Like that is we don't at 5 at six we're not. It's not something we're thinking of. It's almost like we're not practicing our whole childhoods, which we are with eating right, with eating, with talking, all these things we do. We're practicing all childhoods but with sex. It just kind of shows up. And we didn't practice for it. Now you know what? How do I do this? Right. So there's this kind of. So that kind of awkwardness, it seems to me, is kind of built in at. Least in my experience.

Rebecca Kukla: But yeah, I I agree with that. But I feel like the ideal, the fetishized ideal is like the woman who is a virgin but is just naturally. Perfect at sex. Right. So like you're not supposed to have had a lot of sex or any sex, but you're also supposed. To be good. At.

Agnes: It, but then you would be even more stressed. Try to meet that ideal.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah, no. I think it's very stressful. Again, I'm not endorsing any of this, but I feel like that's but also like in terms of this awful economic model, so. I said that the starting situation is that women have the goods and men are supposed to get the goods, but there's also a more complicated economic dynamic, right, which is that the goods over time, if you don't manage to sell them, start to devalue. So, like you're prized for your inexperience when you're 17 or whatever, but you're not prized for your inexperience at 35, right? Like at a certain point, the fact that you haven't

managed to trade off your goods lowers the value of your goods. Oh, this is such. A gross way of talking.

Agnes: OK. Yeah.

Rebecca Kukla: As freedom. OK, I heard everything about the last five words. I'm so sorry. Do I think that? Yeah. So I think that there's, I mean, you're obviously right that some people say that I think that there's an enormous amount of misconception about what the **** community actually looks like. So for one thing, in my experience, and I've done some like. Pretty close up anthropological. This isn't like me being TMI. That's a separate issue, but I've actually like done some anthropological stuff on what goes on in these communities and. There is not particularly a preponderance of male tops over female tops. There are just as many women doing the domming as doing the subbing. So that's one way in which this easy story about how it's just a manifestation of patriarchy doesn't really fit the reality. Also, the **** culture in most places where it's a well developed community. Is extremely queer, queer, positive and inclusive, so often it's just not mimicking heterosexual dynamic at all. So no, I don't think it's a manifestation of patriarchy. What I think it's a manual, but I'm going to qualify that in a moment. What I think it's mostly a manifestation of is a kind of an edgy, extreme version of what we've been talking about all night, which is that what gets us sexually excited and gives us sexual pleasure. Is often doing something with our bodies that feels transgressive, right, and feels like a violation of normal. Arms. And so you know, we've talked about touching or showing parts of the body that are normally kept private but intentionally experiencing or inflicting pain or intentionally restricting the bodies motions. Intentionally sticking something into the body, right, like a lot of stuff done with needles and knives. For God's sake, OK. Also, whatever my magic power is, it doesn't like you regenerate them, and then they're fine when they come back. All of all of those norms, right? Violating them can be fun, and it feels transgressive. And So what we want is ideally is we want a safe. Acceptable. Way of playing with that where we have really clear consent norms, right, because a lot of that stuff is dangerous. Yes. And **** communities have developed to be much, much, much more reflective about consent and levels of consent than sort of just everyday culture has. So I actually feel like it's a place where typical gender roles are more often than almost anywhere else. Undermined or subverted, or played around with or or queered or just like, not on the table altogether. So I don't have the patriarchy concern that being said. Obviously it would be naive of me to deny that there are men out there who identify as. **** enthusiasts and really what they enjoy is just subjugating and hurting. Right. So like that dynamic exists for sure. There are guys out there who want to exaggerate the worst part of gender roles and express masculinity by being dominating and subjugating and showing off their ability to cause. Physical harm and be physically stronger and there are women who, for whatever reason, are excited by or willing to play in that dynamic. They're also women who didn't want to be in that dynamic and get trapped in it by people. But my experience is that. And then don't want to overgeneralize you're going to find terrible community at all. But my experience for the most part is that that

kind of sadist, that kind of Dom is not somebody who's like deeply embedded in the actual sex positive **** communities that we have available. Those people are usually operating on their own. And going rogue and just expressing. So in that case I think yeah, it is an expression of patriarchy and it's this expression of toxic masculinity. But one of the things that I think is admirable and interesting about the **** community is that it has very little. It's got super critical hyper awareness about gender role stuff and very little tolerance for that. Version of it, but that version of it does exist too, but I I I think that the basic human urge to play around with domination and submission and pain and so forth is really fundamental to sexuality, and it has everything to do with this conversation we've been having. About transgression and norm violation and so on. And I don't think that that per se engages patriarchy, but yes, those those guys out there who you who are dangerous and awful. Now there's a lot of ads.

Speaker 8: Say. And I don't have any numbers about having. And so you might like want whether or not like I have application not learn that like I desire the other person, but that like the other person's desire of me is like.

Speaker 7: No.

Speaker 8: Picture of my own desire. It's like we went just want like a version of set for like eyesight depression. Because I mean, we have like accidents like talk about having sex. Like, there's something that's just it seems like necessary that like their desire of me is internally. For my own.

Speaker 7: Desire. And so it seems like we could.

Speaker 8: Have more like. The kitchen there, but eventually sort of like. Accidental sex coming about. I think that's that's.

Speaker 7: True, but if that.

Speaker 8: Is true like if that isn't. A condition that. We have and then also when. They're conceptually possible at.

Speaker 7: All because if it's necessary for the person who desire me for me to desire them, because if someone's got to do it. 1st but no one would first.

Speaker 8: And so I look like I waited at this opportunity was like, it seems like it's create. All these problems I can't figure how to solve.

Rebecca Kukla: OK, I need clarification so. So OK. I think I understand the worry. Can you say a little bit more to tell me about why this worry is opened up by my way or our way of talking about sex tonight rather than just being a standing worry?

Speaker 8: Like in the commodity model, for example.

Rebecca Kukla: Like, yeah.

Speaker 8: Whether or not. The other person desires to me.

Unknown Speaker: In particular, for whatever.

Speaker 8: Particular. Matter to to whether or not we're going to have sex, you know? Whether we're going to Texas matters like this person.

Rebecca Kukla: Right, I see.

Unknown Speaker: And then more.

Speaker 8: Complicated vision of desire like. We could accommodate my desire having. Certain.

Unknown Speaker: Conditions.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Speaker 8: Should we have?

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. So, yeah, so, OK, I think I understand what you're saying. So you're like, OK, so now sex sounds better. But also, like, more complicated and harder to get because you're, like, waiting around for this dance of mutual desire and engagement and so on. Right, yeah. Umm. I mean, maybe to some extent that's fair, I guess like back when. Marriages were, I know this is not what you're hearkening back to, but just helps clarify the question for me. Back when marriages were either explicitly arranged or all but arranged, and then we didn't have a concept of marital rape and we just assumed that once a husband, you know, procured a woman for himself, he could have. Next, with her whenever he wanted. Then there was a certain straightforwardness to the entire thing, whereas. Think you're right that now.

Unknown Speaker: You know.

Rebecca Kukla: Quite aside from our conversation, just in reality. People experience or people experience an enormous amount of stress over how to initiate. Sexual encounters, right. And worrying about whether they're to put it in the language that I introduced, right, worrying about whether their invitation was appropriate. When is it appropriate and what form is it appropriate? What if the person doesn't reciprocate? Well, I feel bad. How do I do that? And so. I I do think you're right that there's an enormous amount of anxiety around it, and maybe that anxiety is justified, and I'm not sure what to say about that exactly. But what I will say is, you know, Agnes is probably tired of my comparing sex to dinner parties, but. I don't think all of that is unique to sex in the sense that. OK, I actually I want to switch how I'm answering this just a little bit. If you think about what it takes to so just put what I just said on hold. For. A second, if you think what it takes to have a conversation not about sex, just a regular conversation with somebody. And you think about how subtle and complicated and coordinative? The skills are involved in successfully initiating, sustaining and then ending the conversation. It can start to feel amazing that we ever managed to have conversations, right, because it's not just about you walk up to me and say a thing and then I say a relevant thing back and then you say a relevant thing back and we trade relevant things for a few turns and then we walk away. Great. Having a conversation involves this incredibly elaborate dance, which is temporal and physical and semantic in terms of the content of what is said. It involves eye contact, gesture timing, tempo, right. So like one thing I'd like to point out to my class is this is not when we're talking about sex. Just. When I'm talking about philosophy of language. A couple of interesting ways to make a conversation totally derail. I promise this will be relevant. A couple of interesting ways to make a conversation totally derail is if you're talking to me and I don't give any acknowledgement or blink or do anything if I just stare at. Back like that, right? And don't do anything. Then the conversation

will completely derail. Similarly, if I make no eye contact at all, which is an interesting thing because like for some people, eye contact is difficult and so that can make conversations more challenging. But if I make no eye contact at all, that will also derail the conversation. But my favorite example is if I make some eye contact but not too much eye contact, and I say aha. Now and again, as one must right, but I do both those things on too regular of a schedule. It will derail the conversation. So if I do this like on a three second cycle.

Speaker 6: Uh-huh.

Rebecca Kukla: Right. That's going to completely derail the conversation too. So it's like you can't describe to people what the rules are. And the other thing about conversations is now I'm coming closer to answering your questions like. Once you start, like when you make a conversational move, almost by definition it calls for another conversational move back. But now, since there's been a conversational move back that calls for a conversation will move back, and so on. And so I sometimes wonder how we ever end any conversation, right. And sometimes it can feel really hard to end the conversation like, because at each moment you're like, whatever you say calls for some response and like, ending is difficult and starting them is difficult because you just, like, walk up to somebody. And so we've got all these, like, little social. Tricks of acceptable things to start conversations about right. This is why small talk exists like you're allowed to start conversations about specific things, but then those can derail too in weird ways. If you pick the wrong one. Why am I saying all of this? What I'm saying is we have this incredibly advanced high level set of skills that are not codified, able that are built into our bodies that we develop over time for coordinating our communicative behavior with one another in incredibly subtle ways. Where we pick up on just like absolutely minute things about how the other person is responding to us to get rich normative information about what can and can't come next. And it's at the level of head position, tone, gesture like our whole bodies are involved. This, and I think any attempt to like explain it or give somebody the rules for it, is going to be a crashing failure. So sort of the answer to how we do this, like how we ever managed to initiate sex is we bring. Whole set of skills to bear, right? And it's skills that are not all sexually specific, but some of them are. And so we're not going to be able to give an answer to your question almost by definition, because there's like no set of rules for doing it, which is exactly what's anxiety producing about it. And yet we've all built up this incredible. Repertoire. Of what we can think of as something like discursive empathy, right? Where we understand when we're interacting with one another, all kinds of subtle details about what can and can't come next and when it needs to stop, and so on. And it goes terribly wrong. A lot of the time, which is why it can be excruciatingly difficult and awkward to initiate. Text but it can also be almost as excruciatingly difficult and awkward to initiate conversations, right?

Agnes: Yeah, let me just add something. So I think that the conversation and the sex thing are, I mean, there's they're analogous. They're just connected, right? Yeah. Because at least in my experience, the single best indicator of sexual compatibility is

conversation. That is the the, the kind of back and forth of conversation has some kind of similarity. Right to that communicative. And now but but so then there's a there's a question, right? So the conversational engagement sort of gives you some information. He didn't give the information about mutual desire and all that, but it does matter, sort of like how you're setting up sexual encounters. Right. So if you're setting them up, if you're getting to your sexual encounters. Say through meeting the people around you and like finding someone you can talk to. And that's one thing. Whereas if you're like finding people online, right, and you don't have a conversation first, right, then the problem seems to me to be. Like much more like, there's that source of information, isn't there? Right. So I do see that there's, like, one thing that this kind of raises is it's almost like we're having more challenging sex in the sense that we have. We want to have the kind of sex that is sensitive to like all these different norms. And then the question. Of like how to have that. It might be more difficult if, say, you're in a community where like it's harder for you to find sexual partners just in the people with the people around you. And then you have to kind of jump into it. These these challenges might be like bigger challenges for that community.

Rebecca Kukla: I totally agree, and I'm also interested, just like a curiosity. I'm interested to see how this is going to evolve as this becomes more and more the norm of how people meet people. Right, because my intuition is very much like yours. That like that embodied flow of conversation is one of the main things that shows us whether we are good at being physically responsive to one another, right? It's not just about the words that are said. It's like a huge clue, whether we read one another well and build. Off one other pleasure. And yet it's, you know, it's super super common now just to swipe right on an app and have a minimal conversation. And from what I understand the the sex is often fine. So like, there's another way into it that that might be imaginatively more difficult if that's not the way that we're used to getting sex. And I don't have that much to say.

Unknown Speaker: OK.

Rebecca Kukla: About that, yeah. But I agree that like for me at least, a lot of it is about that initial bottle. Really back and forth. And so it is hard to and I mean you know a lot of people will short of the swipe. Right. And let's go meet thing. There's also lots of people who use dating apps and then have back and forth over texts or chat before they get together. But to me, like that kind of electronic communication, which has its own rhythm and norms and all of not dismissing. It's just a very different rhythm and very different norms, and I don't know how to be confident that that transfer over from that case in person physical case. So it's a whole new set of challenges, but I feel like people who are in a different moment in their life that need seem to be developing skills for those challenges that I don't really understand.

Speaker 5: A lot of water still really worried about.

Unknown Speaker: Their usual that's possible.

Speaker 5: Or like, especially with classified. So I don't know.

Rebecca Kukla: Can you tell me why you think that? Obviously not desire for the actual activity.

Unknown Speaker: Oh. I mean.

Speaker 8: Design.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Not.

Rebecca Kukla: You know something very funny just happened rhetorically, which was your example? That was supposed to be the contrast. Actually worked for me the opposite way and made me understand what you were saying about the sex case, but not by contrast, by similarity. So I think sometimes we want a sandwich because we're hungry and then we go and get a sandwich and then we eat our sandwich and we enjoy it. And now we're done wanting our sandwich and we're done. But there are so many much more interesting relationships to eating than that right we eat so we can go a number of ways with this. Right. Like we eat as eating can be the medium in which socializing happens and which bonding happens. It can be a way of bringing people together. But also sometimes you know, we want to eat way past the point where we're full just because. Because there's something about continuing to eat that pleases us, like the activity of eating itself, there's the way that we can, like, get fixated on a junk food doesn't need to be. And I don't like the term junk food, actually. But, you know, a snack food, let's say a snack food, get fixated on a snack food and it stops being about. Hunger and just becomes about the activity of consuming the snack food. There's foods that have all kinds of confected memories and meanings for us that we eat to put ourselves in specific emotional states, and so on. And so thinking about the variety of reasons why we desire to eat. Actually help me understand what you mean about the the variety of reasons why legally desire to have sex. Because it's even though you wanted them to contrast. But so sometimes I think that the sex is just like your sandwich case. I think sometimes, like, I really need a good way. And I get it. And I'm done and that's that. But there's so many other reasons. There's so many other things we might be trying to get out of that sexual encounter. We might try to be trying.

Speaker 4: The stop.

Rebecca Kukla: To solidify our bond with somebody, we might try be trying to go down memory lane with them. We might be trying to like feel better about our own bodies. So my guess is that there's nothing remotely like. So now I think your question is much more interesting than I did at first, but now I feel like there's probably nothing remotely like a unified answer like this comes back the very, very first thing I said when I first, when we just like. Opened the evening where I said that sex has become socially embedded in so many ways that it plays all these different functions that I think that like there's no one answer to this. Anymore. But you look frustrated.

Unknown Speaker: Yeah.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Right.

Unknown Speaker: My right side.

Speaker 5: .1 percent .7. Sorry, the side of the line.

Rebecca Kukla: I missed the crucial words. Desires are constituted very essentially by. What their desire is for. I'm trying to decide if I agree with that. I mean, it sounds obvious. I don't know if I agree with that. I haven't thought through before.

Agnes: Plato says.

Rebecca Kukla: I guess my impulse is to push this. One step further here and say no, I want to. I want to say that so I understand how you heard me. So there might be reasons why you want to have sex, not because of sexual desire, but because it meets certain other needs. But I guess I think that what I was pushing was the stronger claim that. All of those different kinds of desires might be sexualized, that they might actually be sexual desire. Right. So that sometimes what you're sexually desiring is a certain kind of intimacy with something very familiar that you missed. And sometimes what you're sexually desiring is something quite different. Like, we can tell different stories. But I think that I want the sexual desire to be. It's also separately true that we sometimes want the activity of sex not because of sexual desire. But I think I was talking about sexual desire. Do you have a more unified this than I? Do I've been?

Agnes: Thinking about it, so I think that. One like so if you if you imagine and this won't cover every case, maybe. But if you imagine a case where you're in a romantic relationship with someone but for some reason you can't have sex with them, right. And then the question is, OK, what would you get if you could have sex? What you know? What does that add to the story? Right. And it almost seems to me like. The answer is that this sort of there's a kind, there's some kind of like like completeness to your engagement with them, right that. You're you're you're being held. Back from in that case, and it's not so much. It's not so much that you, like, want some additional thing, but that all the other things that you are doing with them or engaging with them are like this could in some way count as like a a perfection of those things or something like that. Right. So it's.

Speaker 2: It would be like a release of constraint or.

Agnes: Like it would be an unconstrained relationship if you could add the sex into the story. It's not that we're fraud cases because I think this is only like sex in the, you know, in a certain kind of context, but it seems to me that at least some of the time.

Speaker 2: It.

Agnes: It isn't that there's like I I sort of see what you're saying, that it isn't.

Speaker 2: Like, oh, there's some app.

Speaker 5: Right.

Agnes: Somehow that.

Speaker 5: Narrative.

Agnes: Yeah.

Speaker 2: The idea.

Agnes: Both of the course.

Speaker 2: Uh.

Agnes: Ohh so interesting. What a brilliant theory. OK, OK. Sophia, I'm not going to look at you, but I am going to talk to you. So this is actually super awkward and weird. So like the idea that there are these private parts of your body, it's almost like.

Rebecca Kukla: Don't look that much that way.

Agnes: I know like twilight zone, you sound, so it's almost like you're you're. Holding off from having something like that completion of the relationship with other people in other context such so that it can only I. Know I can't do it. So that you're you're sort of like creating context in which that sort of completion can take place? Us that that the, the, the covered parts of your body are like the you know well we're holding off in these cases anyway that.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. Yeah. But I mean, we don't feel like that. We don't feel like all of our relationships are incomplete unless we have sex with them, right?

Agnes: Right. That's right. So it's only a particular kind of relationship of which this would be the completion, yes.

Unknown Speaker: Yeah.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. So I mean, in a way, one might worry that this is a circular answer, because then the question is. Well. Nope, doesn't work for those relationships. And I do worry. Sometimes I feel like it depends on where I speak, like which part of the microphone I speak into. I worry that. Isn't to disagree with what you said, I think. What you said describes real phenomenon, but I'm worried that that buys into this like romantic idea that in order for the relationship to be like real and good, it has to be total in this weird way you know which, which strikes me as a really problem. Medic ideal. In both directions. Because I also think that we sometimes want to have sex with people that we don't want to have a total relationship with of that kind. Right. So it goes in both directions, but I don't know. This is a difficult question. I do know that like I I understand. More and more, as I'm understanding the phenomenon that we're talking about here, because this is at risk of being TMI, I mean, I think of times where like felt very by somebody and very sexual. And like, in an ***** mood. And I'm like, yeah. But like, actually having sex wouldn't add anything. Hello. OK. There is. Yeah, that completely derailed me. Yeah, there seems to be at least the potential for a disconnect between feeling, feeling sexual desire and wanting to actually have sex in both directions.

Unknown Speaker: That's.

Rebecca Kukla: Right. That's the interesting thing there.

Agnes: Let me just like one thought that I have which is like and I do think this is kind of a crazy thought to say, but imagine that like in some way all of our relationships with other people to the extent that we're not having sex with them are in some way inhibited. Right, like because like. At least we're covering parts of our bodies, right? And we're like, not those parts of our bodies are not in play. Right. So like one one thing you might think is like, sex is like this in some way, totally uninhibited. Right engagement and so maybe we don't have to think about it romantically, but there's

some, there is something about sex and inhibition, right? And release of inhibition of inhibition so.

Rebecca Kukla: I'm trying to get. Is this one working for me? Yes, it's rarely total right, like even when you're having sex and really good sex, that doesn't mean everything's on the table, right? For most of us, there are things that we don't want to have on the table. Like I use the example of not peeing in front of your partner or whatever, including most of us. Yeah. I mean, there's plenty. There's a sizable minority of people who do want to incorporate that into their sacks, but that's not the norm. So this myth of total inhibition is also a kind of a myth. Right, yeah.

Agnes: Yeah.

Rebecca Kukla: Haha.

Speaker 5: So.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. Yeah, I'm. I'm trying to decide if it's true that I would never want anybody I hated at dinner party. Yeah, I. Think that's fair?

Agnes: I would totally want people that I hate.

Rebecca Kukla: That's what I was going to say. I'm not sure this is universal. I was just going to say that, right, like there are people who are. Attracted to the idea of engaging with people that they hate not just sexually, but I didn't get the point. Also, yeah.

Agnes: I still I. Take the point I think I certainly I wouldn't. I wouldn't like, fantasize about having them at my dinner party. I might invite them or something, but there's something about the the the fantasy element even like that. Does, I think does seem peculiar to sex.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. And again, I mean, I've sort of argued throughout the evening on and off that I think that it's and this relates to, I don't, I'm sorry, I don't know your name, but it relates all the way back to your question about the irrationality and the passion that like part of what? Is really deeply going on in sexual encounters. Is this change to a non literal frame where things don't have to mean what they usually mean and they don't have to have their usual flat footed everyday rational significances and influences and so on. And part of that is that somebody who we hate in real life. Can take on a different meaning for us.

Unknown Speaker: Yes.

Rebecca Kukla: For the purposes of the encounter, right, which is also why. So I agree with you that that you know one way of describing that is fantasy. I think in some sense, all sex involves fantasy in the sense that it involves this loosening up of everyday meanings. So it's not just that we might be willing to, like, fantasize about or even have sex with somebody we hate. It's also that we might find, excuse me, very sexually pleasurable to role play roles that we would never want to actually live out in real life, right, or to engage. In play versions of activities that we would not that we would find ethically repulsive or just boring or off putting or overly stereotyped in real life, not all of us engaged in that kind of scene, play and role play, but it's certainly common enough and I think we do like little mini versions of it, even if we

don't do like full on role play. You know we'll we'll we'll do little things during sex. I I'm probably too embarrassed to give an actual example, but you know the way that you talk during sex often involves taking on. A little bit of a role which is different from your normal social role, right? And letting your partner have a different role from their normal social role. So even in just these small ways, I think that fantasy is essential. So I think I deeply agree with you.

Agnes: So maybe we can even connect up sort of three points. One of them is the idea of the like, escape from the self. So like and then the other is idea of like inhibition, right? Like that it's not all inhibitions, but there is some way in which ourselves are a constraint, like who we are is like kind of an annoying thing to have to live with all the time, right. And so. And so this, you know, this kind of there's a there's going to be a particular. Kind of inhibition that gets released where it's in some sense I doesn't have to. To live according to some forms that one wants to be released from, and maybe not the peeing one, but other ones you know, so not all of them. And and fantasy seems to me to play into that of like in some way when I fantasize, I can sort of choose who I am and I'm not constrained to be who I am. So yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Rebecca Kukla: Is there a good part? Of this, yeah. Including I think this is partly why so many people who might be very high achieving and typey and in control and organized in their everyday life, particularly like something. Right. I mean, I think part of the attraction of submission for a lot of people is not necessarily minding traditional gender roles or anything like that. Were talking about that earlier. It it can be that. But it so often it can just be. A time where you can pretend to be a person who isn't in charge of making your life go. However, it's going to go right, and that could be super appealing in terms of a role change. Most of the people I've met who are very sub in sexual settings tend to be just the opposite in the rest of their life, which is super interesting.

Speaker 8: And that and also.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Unknown Speaker: Like. Right.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. I mean. Yeah. So, I mean, I don't have a systematic theory of this, but I suspect you're right that as a generalization, mysteriousness is sexy, yeah. Yeah.

Agnes: Like this in Graduate School because there were, like a couple of, like, girls in the Graduate School cohort who, like all the guys, wanted them. And because they were mysterious and I'm like, how do you be mysterious like? Obviously so unmysterious and it's like this trick you can do and then people will just find you, like, mystifying, you know. Anyway. So I like, yeah, I think you're right that there is that thing of, like, somehow you barely have to do anything at all if you're mysterious and and you, you know, people just kind of are.

Speaker 5: Yeah.

Agnes: Drawn to you, but it's like it's like some people have the trick and like the rest of us, you know, just evidently I'm mysterious.

Rebecca Kukla: Right. But I think it's built into even like Harlequin romances and whatever, right? The idea of the mysterious stranger is like a complete trope. Yes. But what I was going to say was. You're linked to power, so. I mean, I guess I think like I, I'm enough of a Foucauldian that I think it's power all the way down in some sense like all of this is we can analyze any of this in terms of power relations and vectors of power. Is this one going to work? Yep. I don't know that I think it's like an especially great example of power in a bad sense. Like, I think maybe the model you have in mind is like haha, you were mysterious, but I got you. And that so that might be part of the dynamic, but I also think that if we go back to the conversation we were having earlier about how. You know you don't actually want everything to be spelled out literally in all of its detail, that there's such a thing as like knowing too much, what's going to happen knowing the person too well, right? It does make sense that if you know less in some way, there's more room for play. And in fact, it connects with this conversation we just had. Fantasy too, right? There's more room for fantasy if you know less. And so, I mean, we could talk about power there too, but I don't think it necessarily always has to be just like an asymmetrical power play to like, drag the mystery off of somebody. It can just be that mysterious people lend themselves more to this kind of space of non locked down. Fantasy.

Agnes: You can. Project onto them. Whatever it is you want, right? So it's like. They're they fit any fantasy game you have better.

Speaker 2: Right.

Rebecca Kukla: Yes.

Unknown Speaker: Yeah, Dave.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah, right.

Speaker 6: JS.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah, I'm glad we get to talk about. That, yeah.

Unknown Speaker: The most.

Speaker 5: They just tell you where there's. Like a lot of our government.

Unknown Speaker: How far?

Speaker 6: Relation to give up.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. Yeah, it's a great question. Again, I feel like I'm repeating my little hobby horse here, but like, I think that if you have good quality negotiation of accent conditions. And this is a contentious view, and not everybody's going to agree with me that just about anything, any form of giving up of 1's freedom and any form of degradation or whatever it may be, can be a totally legitimate and ethically acceptable. Activity. So I mean so just to use your example right, I mean having a slave relationship with a master is actually a very standard sexual relationship. Umm. I want to be careful what I say here, because I think it's very easy for these kinds of really asymmetrical power relationships, which in normal non play circumstances would do. A lot of harm. I think it's very easy for them to play off of. Historical resonances and personal resonances and traumas and social meanings. So a slave fantasy might seem fun, and then all of a sudden it might be pushing up against really horrible other social

narratives around, whatever it may be. Race and slavery or sex trafficking and slavery and all of a sudden it can be extremely traumatic. So I think that these are extremely. Dangerous things to play with, but I also think that once you, you know, use your scaffolding to create that excitable and free space space of play, and everybody's clear that it's fantasy I my.

Speaker 7: Off.

Rebecca Kukla: My impulse is to say that, at least in principle. There is no relationship, so otherwise revolting that it can't be made into fun sex play. It's just that the more dangerous it is, and the more social resonances it has, the more like grade a ninja skills you need to actually pull them off without anybody getting hurt, right? And so it can. You know, it gets really tricky. So for example. This isn't exactly what you're asking about, but it's really interesting case. So there are times where people want to engage in consensual play around some, like really horrible inequality of power, and they do. They want to do it where other people can see, but when other people can see then.

Speaker 4: You ask.

Rebecca Kukla: Other people are non consensually, at least potentially non consensually. Pulled into that dynamic. And that can be awful for the people who. Witness it. Right? So not only is it tricky between the people involved, but it's also tricky how to situate that in the larger world and how to avoid traumatizing or, you know, abusing the consent of bystanders so it can become harder and harder to make this stuff. Ethical. But I think that as a matter of logical possibility, any power and balance and any kind of abuse played out as a fantasy with proper exit conditions and proper understanding of what everybody's getting out of it and not done as a kind of like a therapy for trauma, because that always goes terribly. Can be ethical.

Agnes: Add something like. There's a way in which. The idea of consensual non consent isn't a special case, right? It's kind of every case, right? Because even the idea of consent, right? So if we take the thought that like in some way, sex is like dinner parties or whatever. But like, we don't place that much like, wait on like consenting going to the dinner. Party, right, right. And so why are we putting all this? Like like, why is there this question of consent? Well, because we want the person to control, say, whether or not they have sex. Because sex involves losing control, right? So it's sort of like your control. You're like, you're, like, controlling the loss of control. Right? Right. And that's already paradoxical. Like, in, in, in kind of in every case. And so there's a way in which these cases sort of bring out something that's paradoxical about the structure of sex, where it's like.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Agnes: I'm like like deliberately choosing to give up control of my body in some way to someone else, where what that means is that I can't make deliberate choices like fully right? So so it would it sort of. It had better and somebody had better be possible.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Agnes: Guys. It's impossible, Jim.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah, I think that's exactly right. And like, yeah, the in the dinner party case, when you accept somebody's invitation to dinner. You if the analogy is kind of nice like you might lay down some ground meals like you might be like. I don't eat mammals and I'm allergic to walnuts. Right. But then within that, you don't, like, micromanage. It's not like, you know, it's not the old you guys know the whole much teased Antioch protocol where you were supposed to ask consent for each new thing that you did to the persons body as you had sex. That's right. Oh, yeah. It was like much mocked in the 90s. Antioch College set up these rules where each new thing that you touched on the body, you had to verbally ask for consent supposedly. And then, like, people mocked it for years. Right. But that's not how we do dinner parties. We're not like, and can I now add, carrots, can I add more carrots?

Unknown Speaker: Right.

Speaker 4: OK.

Rebecca Kukla: We just, you know, you put yourself in the hands of your hosts to an extent you made like some constraints that are deal Breakers for you. And then you're presented with a meal which is not under your full control. There's like a little baby version of the same thing. Thing, but yeah, we constantly have these social dynamics where what you're agreeing to do is to put yourself into somebody else's hands in an important way.

Speaker 2: This one.

Rebecca Kukla: That's a super central human dynamic, I think. And like you said, we better understand it. Because we just don't go through the world consenting to each thing that happens and that happens. And part of the pleasure of human interaction may be especially in sex, but just in general, part of the pleasure is getting to that point of trust with another person where you can give yourself over to them for a while, right, and let them take the reins for a while if you'd ever get to do that, you're like. Missing out on one of the fundamental pleasures of interacting with other people.

Speaker 5: Like.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Speaker 5: And then. So much.

Rebecca Kukla: I feel like you almost answered your own question though, right? I mean, like, yeah, it fits in so beautifully with the commodity model. The remember the commodity model is based on capitalist kind of unfettered capitalist economics. And one thing one way of lowering the price of something is. By increasing supply. Right, like very literally. So I feel like we've got this idea that you're going to devalue the commodity if you produce too much.

Unknown Speaker: But.

Rebecca Kukla: But that doesn't justify it at all. It's disgusting. I mean, all of this should just make us realize what a terrible model that is for thinking about sexuality, right? Because if anything, like, wouldn't you rather sleep with somebody who really

enjoys sex? Like, this is so weird about the concept of a ****. To me, right, like it just it seems bad or fastly. Crashingly obviously like a better idea to have sex with people who really like sex. Then, with people who are not so into it. So I just, you know, if we didn't have the commodity model, then so-called slots ought to be like the dream, right? It's like somebody who's really into it. That's awesome. Like the dinner party again. Right. You don't want to invite somebody over for your dinner. Party who doesn't? Like food that's awful. We've all had that happen. Maybe bring them over and. They're like. Just have to say that's awful. You want somebody who's gonna be like, oh, yeah, this is great. You're fantastic. Or whatever. *****. The concept of slots.

Speaker 2: All right, so.

Agnes: And just trying to find something in the idea. Right. So let's just say that, like, suppose for a moment, OK, this might try to be totally wrong. We have, like, two kinds of sex. OK. It's like, what kind of sex is, like, we are just like. Having fun in some sense like play, right? And then another kind of sex. Has a certain kind of deeper meaning, so let's call it second kind of sex deeper. Meaning sex. OK. OK. And now maybe the like one big thing in the the slot idea is that a a theory that people who have a lot of sex. Only have the first kind of sex, the fun kind of sex, and they're not having the deeper meaning kind of sex. And maybe for your spouse or whatever you want someone who will have the deeper meaning kind of sex. Idea.

Rebecca Kukla: OK, maybe, but I can't imagine what the empirical evidence for that would be, right? I mean. Since nobody had ever studied this since you just made it up.

Agnes: Yeah.

Rebecca Kukla: What? What needs all kinds of background assumptions in place about the relationship between how eager and willing somebody has is to have sex with their capacity for having different kinds which seem unjustified to me, which is to not, not to deny that you might be on to something in terms of the culture.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Rebecca Kukla: Trope, but I just can't see why we would think that. Yeah. Again, like, yeah, I'm going to stop pushing the food and allergy.

Speaker 6: Right.

Speaker 5: Or.

Rebecca Kukla: Like what kind of? Responsibilities. Do you have in mind?

Speaker 6: I think.

Agnes: Like making it breakfast.

Unknown Speaker: There.

Speaker 5: The.

Rebecca Kukla: Oh, that carries on beyond that day. I mean, I don't think it has to, but I think that if you have a one night stand with somebody, so OK, on the one hand, I think it's totally common and totally fine for people to have a one night stand and then never have any relationship with one. Another. After that, and nobody has

necessarily done anything wrong in that circumstance. So no, I don't think it creates any kind of continuing burden. However, I do think that even in the context of a one night stand, ethically partners owe each other more than good sex. For example, I think they owe each other. Taking so it's going to be a much more attenuated form in the one night stand case, but they owe each other taking the time to make themselves trustworthy to that person. Right. So if it's a one night stand, it's not going to be like you could trust me with your finances and your child and your cat or anything like that, but it's going to still there still has to be enough ground laying that you make the other person feel safe in that setting. And that you in fact make good on that. You don't just make them feel safe, but you make sure that they are safe, right. And you make sure that you end that encounter in a way that leaves the person not feeling degraded or they're not feeling like their expectations are different than they were or not feeling hurt. And all of that's a little bit separate from whether the sex was good. At the. Right. I also think that even if you never see the person again or talk to the person again, you have certain ongoing responsibilities. For example, not to violate their privacy. Now what their privacy is depends on the situation. It's not like the sex was necessarily some huge secret might have been, might not have been, but so not. Violating their privacy doesn't necessarily mean never telling anybody it happened. But you know there should be some shared sense of which parts of this are private and which parts aren't, and it shouldn't show up on the Internet a week later that, like so and so, is, like, really into water sports or whatever. So I do think that there are continuing duties and ethical frameworks which make it possible for people to safely be vulnerable with one another in that way, and that that's like a serious responsibility of people who have one night stands. But I don't think that you owe A1 night stand an ongoing. Relationship. If nobody had that expectation going in, I kind of love, you know, Dan, Savages, campsite rule. So Dan Savage who? My love for years and I feel like he's finally fell, falling a little bit behind the times, which makes me sad. But that's a whole other conversation. But anyway, he has this lovely rule for all. One night stands, particularly if you're having a one night stand or a brief relationship, not just one night. Stands also brief relationships with, especially if there was somebody who has. Less power than you for whatever reason. Like they're younger or have less economic power or whatever it may be, which is the campsite rule, which is that you should leave the person in better ethical and personal shape than you found them, like the campsite. Leave it cleaner than you found it. So you know your relationship with somebody might be brief, it might be fleeting, it might be no more than a passing thing, however brief and fleeting it is. You should take seriously the idea that that person should be better off in life when you leave than when you got there, and that requires various kinds of care and attentiveness that go beyond just like making sure they have a good orgasm.

Agnes: You just add one thing to that, which is, it seems to me that. It's it's just going to be a little bit open-ended what you might owe such a person, like, who knows what might happen, right? Like, like they might, like, have some allergic reaction. You

might have to drive to the hospital, right. And like, and like, you do have to right now and.

Unknown Speaker: Yeah.

Rebecca Kukla: Yes.

Agnes: I think that there's a way in which one night stands are riskier in the sense that there's an open-ended set of obligation. And you don't? You can't. You're not going to know in advance what they might be. You're sort of entangling yourself with someone who's a bit of a, you know, like you don't know. Right. So I guess I I think you you it's sort of like you may end up owing them something more than you thought you would when you went into it. And it's like, that's just. Part of the the nature of a one night stand that there are those, those risks are there. I.

Speaker 6: Yes.

Rebecca Kukla: Think that's a great and really important point. Then whenever you engage with somebody's actually there, it's a no, not just for when it stands, there's an. Open. Ended Ness and so you might end up having. To figure out later what you owe in ways. That you didn't predict, yeah.

Speaker 2: Matt.

Agnes: You hadn't had it earlier.

Speaker 5: You can have you set your ability.

Rebecca Kukla: Of morally valuing them. That is a good, great question. Umm. Can you? Well, maybe you want me to do this work and not you? I'm not sure, but can you say what you mean by morally valuing somebody? Or is that part of the question?

Speaker 6: Yeah, it's still like recognizing.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Unknown Speaker: And maybe like just fulfilled the promise.

Speaker 5: Of what would be good.

Speaker 8: Right.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah. I mean, yeah, I think yeah, you can you tell? I've been going for a while. I'm like, yeah. No, no. But take the question more seriously. I mean, yeah, this is like, the the healthier flip side of the whole slip discourse, right. I mean, it's weird that we don't automatically.

Unknown Speaker: Thanks.

Rebecca Kukla: That it's wonderful when we get to the point like so. OK. So bad sex, I think does not morally value people. But like when it goes well, if you can get to that point of. Passing normal boundaries of privacy and so forth, and letting yourself be open to another person and having it work, but also, as I think he's gone. But the person over here was talking about. You know when you desire somebody and then they desire you back and you recognize that somebody who you find desirable is showing desire for you and it's the kind of trustworthy desire that allows you to transgress normal stuff. I mean, to me, that is a way of valuing the person. What was catching me up in your question is I don't know how much weight to put on the word morally value. But it's definitely a way of valuing them and respecting them. And,

you know, finding and amplifying something that you find good in them and allowing them to express that. So yeah, I think like when it goes well, it's definitely a form of mutual respect and valuation. And maybe that's all we need. For moral valuation, I'm not sure.

Agnes: Base.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Agnes: Used to add something though like so you might think of it as good sex as, like, really good coordination, right? So like, it's sort of like there's a coordination problem that we have in dealing with other people. Right. And sex is like. And so in that sense, you're valuing, in a way, humanity. Right.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Agnes: In the sense of like a very big part of what humanity is, is engaging with other people in some kind of. Like cooperative way that works right? So this would be like almost like a kind of hyper continuum of like. So if you know David Vallimont's view of, like love is a moral emotion, where when I love you, I'm sort of like appreciating you're like, you're like inner Conti and nothing of like your your your, you know, rational spirit that is the same in everybody. But like I'm appreciating it in you.

Rebecca Kukla: I don't know if I buy.

Agnes: This would be, yeah, I'll buy you. But the point so this is along those lines, right? So this would be to say sex would be like a would be like that activity where it's. Like pure coordination in some sense, right. And there on that model, it wouldn't be like appreciating what's good about you in particular. Like if your particularity like that, throw that away and that's the content, right. The idea would be like it's like coordination park salons in the sense that, like, love would. Be on the bell. Model of rationality, par excellence, or something that there be one way to think. What what's sort of appeal? OK, what's unappealing about that is that it doesn't. It doesn't bring in all the particularity, the person that we sometimes think we love, but what's sort of appealing about it is that it makes sense of why you could potentially have good sex with somebody you didn't know at all, right, that you kind of you somehow still find your way into this kind of like human rhythm or something like that. So. Exactly. Exactly.

Rebecca Kukla: So I don't know if this counts as moral. It probably counts as moral, but just before, like before we run out of time to say this. Can we just point out that objectification has gotten a really bad rap? Like, I mean, so you don't want to be just objectified. You don't want to be taken as only an object. But the fact is our bodies are us, right? Like we are a body, we are unbelievably tightly identified with our bodies to the point where. Like we'd rather just say we are our bodies. And so when our bodies are appreciated and played with well. And and so forth. Don't know that that's moral appreciation, but like, that's awesome. And it frustrates me how objectification gets conflated over and over again with what we might call mere objectification. Or do you dehumanization? I think it's, you know, you don't want to remove somebody's humanity by treating them merely as an embodied object. But

you don't always have to be engaging. They're like deep, rational humanity every time you interact with them, either. Right? I think it's like, not only fine, but sometimes awesome to just be like. That is a spectacular body. It moves beautifully. It looks beautifully. It's peeling. I want to touch it. It's lovely. I don't think that. That's even slightly a problem, and in fact I think that part of our being valued is. Having people sometimes value our bodies that way. They're like it's just it's no weirder than the fact that sometimes we like people to. You are close. Yeah, right. Here's a good here's a good point.

Speaker 4: Or here.

Rebecca Kukla: It matters to me an enormous amount that I'm funny, like it's too much to take care about this I've realized over the years I care way more than people think I'm funny than that. They think I'm like smart or good or productive. This is like the main thing I care about, and perhaps unfortunately was also like the main thing I cared about when I parented. I was like, I don't care if my kid is successful. I just want him to be funny. But OK for that aside, so like if somebody finds me funny and laughs at my joke. I don't have to be like, Oh yes, but are they appreciating me as a total human being of moral center, of rationality? Will and action deserving of respect on the basis of my humanity right, like, no, like it's fine with me if they just think I'm funny and they get a laugh and they move on in life. That to me is valuing. Something really important about me, and similarly like objectification. And when somebody appreciates me, Quay physical object in the world, given how incredibly important it is that I'm a physical object in the world, I think that's awesome. So we have to remember that objectification does not have to be dehumanizing, and it's sad that we have a culture where the 2 are so closely linked and that the way that we. Objectify people, especially young women. Is in fact, often dehumanizing, but it. Doesn't have to be.

Agnes: We're going to take two more questions in the back, yeah.

Unknown Speaker: Hey. Hi.

Speaker 6: Sorry, when I because I I I. Don't think this place? And I said like, it's just like like people have. And I thought that you, like, just see my just because like calling. Come to work like that because. It it seems that. Or if you just kind of follow in that in favor a lot of sense, but if. It's more more of a you know.

Rebecca Kukla: Yeah.

Speaker 6: Would be preferred or something that's stronger? And I I thought I wonder sometime. And like what the? 10/15/20. And like the sexual partner, is that. Just like in in practice and obviously you know.

Rebecca Kukla: Or at least not all of them, yeah.

Speaker 6: But I I I'm I I have the. Way that they're. Different the other than. That I enjoy going to use force complete and that. I've completed before. I should give you this category. I don't and I don't. Know why I have the exception to? The idea that friends and teachers is completely sort of. You have an open question support.

Rebecca Kukla: So it is and and I also I think these things are super hard to generalize about.

Agnes: It's a really good question.

Rebecca Kukla: And different people feel comfortable with different constellations of relationships. So one way that you're talking about this, that's jarring to me, but it doesn't mean you're wrong. It just means we think about the categories a little bit differently. I have plenty of people who I think of primarily as friends. But who? I have slept with also. So to be like the way you you define friends as as people who you enjoy but don't sleep with. Whereas to me, sleeping with somebody is completely consistent with. They're still being a friend. In fact, only a friend. So that might be just a difference in terms of how we understand the texture of the term, but. I mean, there's different kinds of relationships that sex gets embedded into, right. So sometimes you just have good rapport with somebody and then you also happen to be sexually attracted to their body. And so you also have sex with them. I would have thought of that as like what gets called friends with benefits. I would have thought of that as not taking them out of the friend category, which maybe is kind of what you're asking, right? But for other people, sex becomes intertwined inextricably. With other kinds of like even just forgetting about monogamy all together with other kinds of like emotional exclusivity, for example, or emotional intimacy, that it may be that we have certain ways in which we can for some people, ways in which we can feel emotionally intimate with somebody and trusting of them only if it's all intertwined with sex press it also, for some people, sexual relationships get intertwined with, even if they're not mono. Get intertwined with like the setting up of things like family units, including extended families and family responsibilities, and like who's you know who, who has now a share in the labor of keeping a household or a cluster of households or commune of households running and sex might serve as kind of the. Blue for that. So I think that there are different meanings that sucks has even within the ethical non monogamy community. There isn't way of generalizing what you're describing. Sounds to me like what I would have thought of as Pauly a romantic. Nick. So it's not just about not being monogamous, but it's about sort of not signaling, singling out certain relationships for having that kind of romantic intensity that might or might not be how you conceive of yourself. But I guess my general point is that I don't think there's anything general to be said here about the meaning that sex has. But the deep thing. That what you said, that's exactly right, is. Right. The traditional heterosexual monogamous family form, even if people stick to it a lot less than they claim, gives us a sort of a fixed blueprint for how all these things line up. Right. So the person you have sex with is also the person you share your finances with. It's also the person you Co parent with blah blah, blah. And so you're just. Handed a blueprint for how those things match up, and then once you leave that behind, there's no blueprint. And so any consolation is possible. And, you know, even like, within the range of people who are making other blueprints, they're not going to look the same as one another. I don't think that's probably.

Unknown Speaker: So.

Rebecca Kukla: Only semi helpful.

Unknown Speaker: Yeah.

Agnes: Thought I had about. That is that it seems to me that. A sexual relationship requires coordination in a particular dimension, right? And I like just a lot of my friends there isn't that it's. And so like even the thing you know, saying earlier about how there's this commonality in sex and conversation, it's not every kind of conversation. Right. So there's a kind of energy and. Dynamic to what you might call a sexualized conversation that isn't the case for all conversations. So for me, that's one way I can tell, right? And it also seems to me that like with friendships. You know, there are just. Sort. Like, oh, a lot of different ways of being friends and and sex would require, like, a kind of sexual friendship that a friendship includes sex would just require that you sort of understand about one another, that you are coordinating along that dimension. Right. And so it's a little bit like. Michael's. Question about like how does it ever get started? It's like there is there is some kind of obstacle, especially if the friendship just sort of pre exists. There is a kind of obstacle to it getting started because it's like you wanna know like. But do you feel the way I feel about how you feel? Right. And so that creates a kind of barrier or something I think so. So it doesn't. It's not as though there's this tendency for all friendships. Even I think if you know if one is open to it, there isn't just a tendency for all the friendships to collapse into a sexual dimension. It seems to me. OK. Final question. Yes, right.

Speaker 5: To address the how effects kind of secure?

Unknown Speaker: Or.

Speaker 5: Maybe because you're able to start at the model. There's. Of things talking about and how good variations are swapping that actually.

Unknown Speaker: How? How?

Rebecca Kukla: I'm not sure I accept your sex philosophy dualism here. Oh, I mean, all I can say is there's some really bad philosophy and there's some really good sex. So I don't know how to commensurate them. I also think that, OK, so here's a slightly less funny. Response to your question. I mean the real response to your question. Is. I I genuinely don't know how to rank them because so I put this in a flip way, but I actually think there's a deep point there. I think that sex and philosophy are two really good examples of activities that can range from absolutely abysmally terrible up to like. Absolutely spectacularly. Life changing. They fantastic. So how you can be like, unlike pizza eating, right, which is always like pretty good, pretty good. Oh, yeah. That was really quite good. Range of pizza eating. But but second philosophy go from like life destroying like terrible to life, transformative and everything in between. So I don't know how to compare, which is better than which, however. Off.

Unknown Speaker: No.

Rebecca Kukla: I do think that it matters that philosophy is not for everyone, right? And this business about how the unexamined life isn't worth living or philosophy is somehow like the ultimate proof of our worth as a human being is. Classes and ablest and in various ways insensitive to the different ways in which people enjoy engaging in

the world. There are asexual people, so we can say the same for sex, but I think sex is a lot more universal as a source of pleasure than philosophy is and right. Like so when we start putting philosophy. Now. Higher on a pedestal, we're being exclusionary in a way that we're not. When we put socks on a pedestal. Although even there, like we do risk pathologizing people who aren't into sex if we're not careful. But there's just it's more exclusionary in the falsity case, but that's not to say sex is better. That's just to say we have. To watch out for that exclusionary move.

Agnes: On the last point, I think we should just find ways to include more people in philosophy.

Rebecca Kukla: But not everybody's going to want to be included. But I also agree we should be better about being inclusive.

Agnes: Yeah. So like interestingly, I mean like there's a question like like could it just be OK even if you were offered lots of opportunities and you weren't deprived in any way if you just had no interest in sex? Right. And that seems fine to me. Like, but if I make the same point about philosophy.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Unknown Speaker: I am less sure.

Rebecca Kukla: So actually. I think this is a super interesting note to end with like so. I think and I didn't always think this, I I think on the one hand, we should be dramatically more inclusive about philosophy and that's often really powerful. So you know, I like a lot of people these days have taught philosophy classes and medium security prisons and that's like an incredibly rewarding thing to do. And it turns out that, you know, when. Those are self selecting groups of prisoners. Obviously not everybody takes those classes, but when the people who are attracted to it take it, they get a ton out of it. I'm actually just now at the early stages of trying to look into designing a curriculum of philosophy for people with intellectual disabilities, which as far as I know has actually never been done before. And so I don't think that philosophy has to be restricted to certain kinds of people. But over the years, I've really come to believe that for some people, it's just not to their taste and it doesn't mean they're Dumber. And it doesn't mean they're less reflective. It just means that that's not their way of engaging with ideas. They engage with ideas in some more active way. Some more gold driven way and so I've tried to learn to like make philosophy. More and more on offer to more and more people, while also being more and more accepting of the fact that there are people who are living full, valuable lives for whom it's. Just not their thing. And the same is true. And you know, this might be a legitimate point of disagreement between us, because this is just something I'm thinking through at this stage. Of my life right now. The same is obviously true for sex, but sex? Seems to be.

Speaker 4: More popular.

Agnes: So like I don't you know. I would never say there's anything wrong with the people who don't do philosophy. There's something wrong with philosophy if we can't make it speak to people. But, but just to speak to the question is philosopher, that's such a good question. I've never thought about it before. I'm going to be thinking

about it for like the next month. So I think one thing is like really different time frames, right? Like for sex like you can have a lot of fun in like, you know, a relatively short time. Like maybe like half an hour or something. Right. And I think with philosophy, like your question, right. Like, I'm going to have a lot of fun with this question, but it's going to take me a long time. Like, it's going to take me a month or maybe a year of thinking about this. Question. Right. So it's a very different kind of fun. It has a different temporal pattern and I might talk about it with a lot of different people, right. And I'll get different things out of those different conversations. And like you know, so there, there are a lot of different ways to ask is A better than B or something. It's like if you were to ask me like if I had to lose one of those. Two things from my. Life, right, that's that's hard. I mean, I would pick losing sex, which would be really hard. It would really suck. But yeah, I would still pick. I would pick. Cosby, right? But. You know, but that salary is nice. But but that's, you know, there were, I mean just in terms of like how I spend my time. Like I spent a lot more time doing philosophy and having sex, right. So a lot more of what I'm doing with my life would be lost if I right. So there's there's just a lot of different ways when you're saying is A better than B, right. A lot of different we start focus that question. And I guess I think one thing I think about philosophy in terms of the way.

Speaker 2: That it occupies time.

Agnes: That maybe maybe. I would say I do value it more than sex. Is that like if I think about like all the times I've had sex or something, they don't somehow string together into a giant like sexual development or sexual activity or whatever. Like, they're just, you know, they're just separate, right. They're just like. Def. Instances of fun or something like that. I don't want to like, you know, maybe meaningful fun or whatever, but stuff. But there's just this way in which philosophy, like the philosophy that we're doing right now is continuous with the discussion that some of us had in the study group. And like I'm making connections with, you know, other night owls that we had in my head and this stuff, I'm going to keep thinking about. And so there's this way in which. There is this kind of continuity that exists for me with my philosophical life that doesn't exist with my sexual life. And so that's just those are very different like kinds of phenomena I guess. I'm going to give.

Rebecca Kukla: You last word. All right, counterpoint. Like I said, I already think they're not commensurable, so this isn't an argument for sex being better than philosophy, but just you're right about the continuity and the development, and the more time spent and so on. However, I feel like sex has a kind of a non replaceability thing that philosophy doesn't have, so I have very little trouble imagining. Which in Korea? Years and doing something else and you know, I would continue to love philosophy, but by time I get totally sopped up by the new thing, you know? So I just recently finished a Masters degree in geography for a couple years. I was just doing mostly geography and not philosophy. And you know, it's not hard for me to imagine deciding. Yeah, that's where my research interests lie. And that's just what I'm going to do. Now on and not doing philosophy anymore and that would be a loss, but. Even

though I would have lost something, it's not at all clear to me that my life overall would be worse like it would. I would have lost one thing and gained another thing, whereas it's not like I can lose sex and replace it with something else, right? Like if I lose success, just a straight loss, there isn't anything that could take its place in the same way. So yeah, you got continuity. On the one hand. Irreplaceability on.

Agnes: The other awesome. OK, thank you so much. Rachel, this is awesome.

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Agnes Callard
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