

Between the Pages Podcast

Caitlin

Hello everyone, and welcome to Between the Pages: a podcast on books and sexuality hosted by yours truly, Caitlin Viccora. Okay, so we are super excited to have Ariella Serur on the show with us today. Ariella Serur is @queerdatingcoach on Instagram, is on a mission to transform the dating pool into one we enthusiastically want to jump into. In her practice she helps kind queer folks navigate the dating landscape so that they have the courage to go after what they want in dating and in life without feeling overwhelmed or exhausted. If you want to know how to date or date better, she'll help you understand what you want and how to talk about it. So dating becomes an enjoyable process and satiating part of your personal growth journey. Ariella is a certified life coach, registered yoga teacher, and is currently receiving a graduate advanced certificate from Columbia University School of Psychology in Sexuality, Women, and Gender with a concentration in LGBTQ issues. Welcome, Ariella!

Ariella

Thanks so much for having me. I know that's a real mouthful. I've practiced saying the advanced certificate line (laughs) and it's really difficult, and you nailed it.

Caitlin

There's so many words, I honestly think that that is the one thing that grad school really prepared me for is just saying a lot of words all at once that sound really academic. So (laughs)

Ariella

Wait, that's my biggest learning curve navigating grad school, actually. I was like, "I'm not used to this many words simply in a sentence. This is different. This is different." You nailed it.

Caitlin

Honestly, not that many words need to be in a sentence is what I'm learning in the real world outside of academia. So...I think we're fine.

Ariella

My grades are going up the more words I put in the sentences, so it is a real thing (laughing) in grad school. They like it nice and thick, so--

Caitlin

Ugh, oh my gosh, amazing. I'm super excited to talk to you. I love your content that you put out on queer dating coach on Instagram. And so, I was telling you before we started recording, I slid into your DMs and I was like "We gotta talk because you're doing some cool shit." We always start off with sort of our opener icebreaker question, which is what is the worst sex advice or sex ed tidbit that you've ever received?

Ariella

It's interesting, when I was thinking about this, I have trouble thinking of something specific. But, I can say that--and through my studies, too, it's becoming more prevalent that we talk about queer sex education only with relation to STDs and STIs. That there is no normalization of queer sex ed that it's really just, okay, but if you do this thing, you still might catch these things. So I think that's probably the biggest piece of advice that feels wrong or not comprehensive. There's just a lot about sex and intimacy that isn't taught, period. So, the gap feels like the problem more than the bad advice, if that makes sense.

Caitlin

Absolutely, yeah. And I think that that gap has real ramifications with kind of on the individual and sort of societal level. I remember, my mind was sort of blown a couple years ago when I was in grad school, they were going over the statistics around STIs and pregnancy in young people, you know, folks who identify as bi or lesbian actually have really high rates of teen pregnancy.

Ariella

Yeah!

Caitlin

And that's something that--yeah, should not be mind blowing. But it's also like, wow. Where we never are taught that that's something that we need to

worry, or even just the idea of someone identifying as a lesbian, but also maybe having sex with someone who could get them pregnant. None of that is talked about at all.

Ariella

Yes, absolutely. We just went over this in my class as well. So, I felt equally mind-blown. And also that, at the same time, as someone that has a lot of sex with other people that have vulvas, the understanding of, you know, we're not as likely to catch things. And I'm kind of like, "that's also not true." As nice as that would be, we are not immune in this way. So there is just a lot of misconception floating around. Hopefully there will be a shift to educate folks on what's actually true.

Caitlin

Yeah, and I think that those gaps have real consequences for people, because you know, identity does not equal behavior, right? And that's something that I think a lot of people are really, really surprised at, because they just, they assume the behavior when they hear the identity. And so the more that we normalize that and the more that we give folks the information about all types of sex, and all types of risk, the better that we get with sort of starting to fill those gaps.

Ariella

I completely agree with you.

Caitlin

Well, so I know I read your lovely bio, but I was wondering if you could kind of tell me in your own words, sort of who you are and what you do in the world.

Ariella

So, I really do want to change the dating pool. That is my big vision, is to come in with ideas that aren't necessarily new. I'm gathering ideas from a lot of places, a lot of things that inspire me. But hopefully these ideas are just a bit more liberating, from the trajectory we've been taught is good and normal and safe. So, I want us to be able to create lives that we feel really good about, that are really honed in on our own personal desires instead of what society has taught us and kind of be able to objectively look at the things that society has taught us are okay and normal and good. And realize the ways in which that is all secretly society trying to control us and keep us in boxes. I'm hoping that my work just helps kind of open up the sides of the box a bit. And then we can choose whether we want to be in the box or out of the box. Or we can choose what we want our lives, relationships, dating lives, to look like. So, that's kind of the type of content I try and create, content that helps to liberate or normalize. And my work with people one-on-one is really helping them either figure out how to date in a queer context for the first time, or how to date for the first time in general, queer or, well, I really only work with queer folks, but some queer folks have never dated period. So, how to date is one of the things I deal with most. And the other kind of pillar is how to break patterns that people find themselves in when it comes

to dating. And with the how to date, also, under that category, is how to date in any way that's different from how you have dated in the past. So that might also include non-monogamy, if you're someone that's been really oriented towards monogamy. So, it's a lot of, I'm the person that's there holding your hand and challenging you to do new things while we also figure out what is true and most aligned for you. And that's the path that we follow together.

Caitlin

I love that so much. And I love that your work is really centered on breaking these stereotypes and these systems of oppression that really have boxed us into the way that we have envisioned sex and relationships. And so--

Ariella

Yeah.

Caitlin

--I think that that's super, super important work, and, yeah, requires a lot of unlearning. It sounds like that's really a through line in a lot of your work with folks.

Ariella

Yeah, it is, it is totally, I almost feel like unlearning can almost be the pre-work before coming to me to be open to hearing what I have to say. Because I feel like a lot of what I'm doing is challenging what we've been taught and trying to fill up the cup with something that just feels better. So, it is a lot of

unlearning, and then, what can we replace those thoughts and beliefs with that feel better for us and feel truer to us?

Caitlin

Totally. I'm curious, sort of how you fell into this work. I've never seen a dating coach that specifically is focused on queer folks and trying to unlearn and relearn a lot of this stuff. And so, yeah, I'm curious how this popped up in your life.

Ariella

Okay, so there's the me and dating journey, and then there's me and dating coaching journey. So as far as the dating coaching goes, basically, long story short, I had gotten my life coaching certification and was figuring out who I wanted to help and what I felt uniquely qualified to do. And I knew that the community I wanted to work with was queer folks. They're the folks that I feel most passionately about championing. So, I basically put up an Instagram poll that was like, "Queer folks, what do you need the most help with? What is the thing that you most want to achieve right now?" And I qualified achieve so it didn't seem so scary and capitalistic, but, what is the thing that you're craving. And some people specifically called out dating, and to me, I was kind of floored, because dating has felt like my bread and butter for a while now. So anyway, I started to look more into dating coaching. And, the more and more I researched about it, the angrier I got about the type of literature and content that is actually being put out there. Especially the fact--and I have a whole rant on my website against the dating coaching

industry, because so much of it is really geared around gender in a way that feels so fucked up and archaic to me. It is, a lot of dating coaches are like, "I teach women how to get their man," or things like that, how to get a guy to text you back. Stuff that the more and more I investigated, I was like, "This sucks!" This makes me angry. So, I was like, "I want to change this shit." Because, even I would read such problematic things of like: "Prepare yourself to get in shape before meeting people." Come on, come on! So bad. So we need to be liberated in this process of dating, too, and be able to connect to people exactly how we are when we're being honest with ourselves and still working on ourselves, right? But, I just was very passionate about how much I felt was wrong. (laughs) And feeling like I might be someone that can help shift some of these narratives and help queer folks figure out the relationships that work best for them along the way. So that's kind of my dating coaching journey. But as far as me dating, basically what had happened was in college, I was pretty self conscious and uncomfortable in my body, you know, went through one of those times. And, when I moved to New York, I was acting. And I decided that for every audition I would go on, I would try to go on a date. Which, if you know any actors, that's a ton of auditions. (laughing) So it wasn't exactly one for one, but it was kind of this little goal, a little game I set up for myself because I was equally afraid of both: of auditions and dates. You're putting yourself into situations where you can feel really judged, they make you feel self conscious. So, how do I figure out how to strengthen both of these muscles, and how might each muscle inform the other and strengthen them both? Working out your bicep and your tricep, or whatever. So that was kind of the goal. And I started to do it a lot. I started to date a lot. I would

basically--I would ask out...everyone. Anyone that I saw. I just started to ask people out, and I learned a lot. And, basically, since then, I had been really helping friends. I was always the go-to person for navigating a relationship conflict or dating conflict or, how can I have a conversation with someone who I'm interested in them becoming my fuck buddy instead of my friend, and I always would role-play with people. It felt like the experience after coming out, where you can reflect and be like, "Wow, I was so gay all along." That's how, essentially, quote unquote, coming out as a dating coach felt to me, where I talked about dating in that professional context, in that rehearsal environment, helped those friends out. So, it's kind of been part of my life blood for a while. And now I'm just talking about it to the public instead of to my closest friends.

Caitlin

Oh my gosh, wow. There's so much there. First of all, just that challenge itself, I feel like tells me everything I need to know about you, where you're just like, "fuck it, we are going to, we're gonna go out of date for every audition, we're gonna put ourselves out there, we're gonna take myself out of the comfort zone and really just try it." And I feel like that central tenet is so important to dating in general, right?

Ariella

For sure.

Caitlin

Is being able to just put yourself out there and be like, "Okay, this is me. It's not going to be the end of the world if this doesn't work out." Because I'm assuming, I have no idea what your success rate was, but I'm assuming if you're asking out all these people, it's it's not always going to be a hell yes answer. And so learning how to deal with that rejection, and be able to be okay, and be able to have that self confidence still, I feel is a really big thing that people want to focus on in terms of dating.

Ariella

Yeah, for sure. And the thing is that, it's funny, because it doesn't necessarily get easier. It doesn't necessarily get easier to ask out a stranger. I'll be totally honest, my adrenaline is still pumping. I still get, feel like I'm got punched, and my legs just start walking up to someone. And I'm like "Jesus Christ, I can't believe that I'm already walking." I don't know what I'm gonna say. Or sometimes I draft out something to say before. So it doesn't necessarily, our bodies still processes that as a really scary situation to be in. But...how I feel about myself, regardless of what the outcome of that interaction is, does not shift. How I feel about myself stays really neutral. And it is not at the whim of whether someone says yes or no to going out with me. It's really not touched--my sense of self worth has no bearing, it is not touched at all, by someone saying yes or no to going on a date with me. So I do think we can strengthen that part, we can strengthen the resilience of having your self-worth stay pretty well intact, even if it still feels like going out on a limb is

something that's scary to do and requires courage, regardless of how many times that you've done it.

Caitlin

Yeah, well, and I almost draw a parallel. So you said that you're an actor, and I almost draw that parallel of those physiological feelings that you get when you're going on stage. You're still, I'm a high school theater kid, so not at all on the same level, just to clarify (laughing) not equating our experiences at all--

Ariella

(laughing) That's legit.

Caitlin

But, listen, and we thought it was very legit, so (laughs)

Ariella

That's exactly how I felt in high school, too. I was like, "this is it. This is it."

Caitlin

I'm from the DC area, and we even had our own version of the Tonys is called the cappies, because Capitol. Oh, it was a lot. It was really, this could be another podcast.

Ariella

(laughing) Absolutely.

Caitlin

But yeah, you know those, that physiological feeling that you get. Those feelings are still there. But, you know, if you have a bad performance, or whatever, it doesn't affect your self worth, it doesn't affect your understanding of yourself as an actor. So there's almost that parallel of dating where you're like, "Yeah, maybe I'm nervous about this, but it's still not going to affect my worth as a person, right?"

Ariella

There's a ton of parallels, it is really interesting. And, yes, and you could still be bummed, right? If you have a faulty performance, or if someone says no. You can, it can still suck a bit. But it's that overall, we can have emotions that are quote, unquote, "negative," but how we feel about ourselves can still be mainly positive. Mainly like, "Alright, we did a hard, scary thing. Didn't go exactly the way that I wanted, and how am I gonna take care of myself after this experience?" So that's kind of the muscle that we can work on in this.

Caitlin

I love that. Yeah. So, in terms of your one-on-one coaching, I'm curious, who's it for, what's for, as you say on your website, you do a really great job of breaking it down of who should seek out your services and what they can

expect from working with you. And so I'm wondering if you can sort of let the audience know what the details are with that.

Ariella

It kind of ranges. The folks coming to me right now, it seems to be primarily people that are trying to figure out how to date in a new way, like I said earlier. So, it's someone who is entering into the dating pool, maybe after a break, maybe entering into a different dating pool, like a non-monogamous one, or maybe they've never been in it before. That's a lot of folks coming to me right now. So, if they need some kind of help or feel like what they've been taught about dating and relationships, they're a little suspicious of, or my content's resonating with them and they want to figure out how to have a more positive optimistic mindset about what dating is, and what quote unquote "success" in dating looks like. Those are a lot of people that wind up finding me. On the other side of that, there's also people who are trying to break patterns in dating, like if they find that they keep being ghosted, or they're going for people that aren't giving them what they want. And they're like, "I have a feeling I'm playing some kind of role in this. I can't quite figure out what it is. I am interested in taking responsibility and adjusting my behavior accordingly." Also folks who come to me because they have kind of an interesting situation happening with someone in their life, and they need help getting clarity on it, or need help figuring out how to have difficult conversations. So I'd say a lot of work is centered around cultivating self compassion, unlearning what society has taught us is good and normal, reorienting ourselves to a more true, authentic version of what it is that we

want, so that I kind of phrase as understanding ourselves, and figuring out how to talk about that. So that's in the interpersonal communications sphere. So that's a lot of conversations about talking to friends who you want to be more than friends with, or trying to figure out how to ask out the person that works at the dispensary down the street, or someone that you've been sleeping with for a while and you're not quite sure how to have a conversation that moves you to the quote unquote "next level," if you're thinking about it, as far as levels go. Those are the types of things. It's about understanding yourself, what you want, figuring out how to communicate that effectively to yourself and to other people so that you can ultimately get what you want and build up the courage in that way.

Caitlin

I just think it's the most important thing, you know? As you're talking, honestly, this could be so life changing for folks if everyone had access to this type of self work and also this type of communication work. You know, it sounds like a through line through your work is just this idea of self compassion. And then also just being compassionate towards others in your exchanges, whether that be a friends with benefits, a hookup, or something that you're trying to pursue a more serious relationship with. Love the fact that you work with folks who are monogamous and non-monogamous and all the different types of relationships that can occur. For folks who are non-monogamous, I'm wondering how you help them navigate away, especially if they have a primary partner or a nesting partner. And for folks who are not familiar with those terms, you know, a primary partner would be someone

they are, you know, in a serious relationship with already, nesting partner would be someone that they live with. How do you help them pursue non-monogamy in a way that's going to be also compassionate to the other folks that they're bringing into their relationships?

Ariella

Yeah, first I want to say that non-monogamy has never been more complicated than it is during COVID.

Caitlin

Mmm.

Ariella

So, I just want to throw that out there. I was in a non-monogamous relationship for three years, we wound up breaking up during COVID. But, going from a really pretty active, non-monogamous nesting primary partnership, to forced monogamy essentially, in the way that our location was changing and whatnot was a really difficult transition. For me in particular. So, if you are listening to this, and you are typically non-monogamous, or identify as non-monogamous and you're feeling like that's really difficult to negotiate with your partner right now because of safety, there is no right way to push through this or to not push through it and know that you're not alone. And it is really, it can be tricky. And it is tricky for a lot of non-monogamous folks out there right now. So, you're not alone. We're with you. It is, it's tough. As far as cultivating and, you know, acting with compassion for folks

outside of your primary relationship or nesting relationship. I think a lot of folks that are practiced in non-monogamy are actually, for the most part, excellent communicators. It winds up having to be a pillar that you have to figure out pretty early on, if you're gonna have very quote unquote "taboo" conversations that we were taught aren't okay to have with your partner and with other people. So, I'd say first and foremost is to be transparent with yourself about what it is that you're looking for from these outside relationships outside of your primary partnership, if you're operating in that kind of hierarchical structure. And then to be honest with the other people. That would mean maybe on your dating profile, you talk about what it is exactly that you're looking for outside of your partnership, or if you have any agreements about outside of your partnership, you're mainly looking for hookups or friendships or flirting or whatever it is. You can be as transparent as it feels good to you so that people aren't left in this gray space of wondering. Which I think is the best way to be compassionate and kind is to be transparent and to be honest about where you're at and what you're looking for.

Caitlin

No, I mean, it's advice that all folks, you know, whether you practice non-monogamy or not, I feel like could benefit from of just being clear, being compassionate, letting things happen as they will. So yeah, thank you for that. I'm always just curious, especially for folks who are maybe newer to non-monogamy, I'm always curious sort of how to best go about that. But honestly, if folks are interested in learning more, you should book [Ariella](#)

when she has an opening, because I would imagine that would be a really good session for your coaching. (laughs)

Ariella

If that's not an option for any given point in time, I'm not sure if this is a book that you've talked about on the show before, but "The Ethical Slut" is kind of the bible of where to start. There are many books about how to start approaching non-monogamy, and Ethical Slut's kind of industry standard. If you don't know where to start, there's also *Opening Up* and *More Than Two*. *Opening Up* is a nice, easy, easy, read where *Ethical Slut* feels more like--not a textbook. It's interesting, but it is a bit more dense. So, that's kind of the foundation and a lot of that is already so informative, as far as opening up our mind to what's possible and how it's okay to be a slut and to claim that if that's true for you. So, that's another place to start besides me.

Caitlin

I love that. And we'll definitely, I'll put the link for that book in show notes for sure. So you can take a look at it. But yeah, that book is very interesting. I've only, I've skimmed because as we said, sort of a little bit more academic or a little bit more dense. Yeah, that seems like a really good kind of blueprint or starting point for folks who are interested in learning more. So, another question that I was wondering, is just, I'm curious, what are some common pitfalls that folks fall into when dating?

Ariella

The most common is kind of two different sides of the same coin. So, one of them is that we're going on dates with folks, and the stakes are too high. We are already seeing the people that we're going out with as really important people that we want in our lives, and we are kind of becoming clingy to them in a particular way, want them to fit our picture of what we're looking for, whatnot. The other side of this, is showing up to dates and being really judgmental. And it's sitting with our arms crossed and looking at someone being like, "How do you fit into my picture, because my picture feels really clear to me." So those are kind of the two main things that we, we're going into these dates with too much expectation. And there are too many things that we can't control. And when we do that, we're not actually giving ourselves the ability to be discerning in the moment about how it is that we're feeling in this person's presence. So that's the big mindset issue, basically, if you will. Where people are putting not the appropriate amount of weight on a first date. They're putting on too much. Where I think a first date is--back to a first audition, it is not, you can't go into a first audition thinking that you're going to book Broadway. You have to go in, and then if you have callbacks and callbacks, then, okay, maybe you're getting closer. (laughs) But, if you go into every experience like that, where the stakes are so high, you're gonna get burnt out way too quickly, and you're not going to be able to take care of yourself. So I like to think of first dates as a super low, low stake experience. My basic philosophy comes from the fact that, personally for me, I don't take for granted how impactful a brief moment can be on my life. So, a first date can be just that. It's really about showing up generous with what you might

teach this person, what they might teach you. And, if they make you feel the way that you want to feel, which is something that I clarify a lot in coaching, how do you want to feel? Then fine, then you could take them a little bit more seriously and lean in. But for a first date, it doesn't really need to be any deeper than that. It can just be about getting to know each other, see what you--how you might impact each other in the smallest of ways. And if you wind up getting along or you wind up making each other feel good, then fine. Go on a second date. We don't need to belabor the first date more than that, or else it's going to be really tough to keep going.

Caitlin

Yeah. And I wonder why that is. I know, I'm asking a kind of a more high level societal question of you, but I'm wondering why we put so much emphasis on that first date or I'm drawing a parallel of online dating or swiping or whatever. We sort of rule people out really quickly because they don't meet these criteria that we've set for folks. Why do we have this image in our head of this perfect person? And if they don't meet it in their profile, or they don't meet it in a first date, then we say no, and we don't hold anyone else in our lives to that same standard, except in this dating atmosphere and I just--

Ariella

Since people can't see us, I'm rolling my entire head and nodding my whole body.

Caitlin

(laughs)

Ariella

I think that this is one of the biggest issues in dating, is preconceived notions that we have of what's gonna be right for us. And the answer why is it this way? It's all because that's how we were taught. That's literally it. That is how we were taught. The people that we wind up picturing in our heads for the people that we think are gonna be best for us are what we've essentially seen reflected in the media, reflected in our families. This has been gifted to us and it is up to us to decide whether it is a gift that we want to keep or a gift that we don't want to keep. And a lot of that is rooted in intersectional systems of oppression. A lot of that is rooted in fatphobia, transphobia, potentially internalized homophobia, racism, ableism, everything, right? Who we picture is what society taught us to picture. And untangling that is, it's a heavy job. What I can say about that is really just to know how it is you want to feel, and to allow everything else to be a question mark. Because if we don't do that, then we wind up having this list of arbitrary standards where we can have someone that checks boxes, and yet something's missing. And yet, we don't feel the way we want to feel. So if we start with feelings, then we won't run into that problem.

Caitlin

Totally. And then it allows you to be present in the moment and not worry about checking the boxes in real time and be able to actually just feel your

feelings and let that guide you. I love that approach. And, you know, as you're talking about the systems of oppression that definitely play into this situation, it kind of leads me to your transparency around your Diversity, Equity and Inclusion statement on your website. And it's something that I think is woven throughout your work. And, I think it's also particularly important in the queer community, as you outline in your statement. And so I'm wondering if you can kind of talk through some of these initiatives you have as part of your inclusion work?

Ariella

Yeah, I mean, for the most part, it's just everything I make, I really want people to feel seen and safe. And I take a lot of responsibility for doing that. So, whether that's something on my story, where I don't phrase something exactly in a way I stand by, I really try to be like, "Okay, you know what, I should have said that differently. That wasn't clear or that might have made people feel excluded." Or, I came out with a sexting ebook, originally when I had someone design it, she had put in a bunch of stock images of thin, straight looking white women. And I was like, "This is not reflective of the queer community. I cannot make an ebook that has these images in it. That's not who I see around me, this is not the people that I care about helping." The person I'm seeing and I wound up sketching images of our friends in sexy positions, and putting that in the ebook instead, because we wanted queer people in it. And if I can't find those images online, then I'm gonna make them. So that's a microcosm of what my inclusion statement is, right? I'm just actually genuinely trying to look out and take responsibility, where I can as a

white person, understanding that although I've been affected by the system of oppression that, you know, homophobia is rooted in, there's a lot of other ways in which I have a ton of privilege. So, I just want to make sure that the space I'm creating feels good. I just care about taking responsibility in this way and showing up in the best way I can for the community I care about most. So, right now I'm in the process of creating my first coaching curriculum, as opposed to dealing with one-on-one clients and the way that I have been. So with that, once I have the curriculum set, I'm gonna hire consultants to look it over to make sure that it feels good, or that I'm not leaving something out, or I'm not viewing something from the standpoint of my privilege, as opposed to a more holistic standpoint. So, I really want people to be able to look over my curriculum and see what I'm missing, and make sure that people that have been affected by a combination of systems of oppression can feel seen and feel valued in this space. So, I also hire someone to make transcripts of every speaking engagement I do, as far as podcasts. IGTV has a closed caption feature, whatnot. I offer one free session a month. And, I also will do, sometimes I'll have someone do a kind of a workshare exchange, if they want to have access to my coaching and they can't do that, then sometimes they'll be the folks that read over the transcripts from the podcasts so that I'm making sure that my practice is still accessible to folks who can't hear and I can have more people come through my coaching and have access to me in that way, too. Yeah. So I think that those are kind of the main ways in which I'm trying to look out and just holding myself to a high standard of really thinking how might this make someone else feel. And, this "someone else" needs to be the people that have been most affected by

systems of oppression. So, it's something I care a lot about and it's something I really hold myself to a high standard to do. I just want to say if you're listening to this, and if you do follow my work, and if there's ever something that rubs you the wrong way, or a way in which you feel like I can be better as it relates to inclusivity and accessibility, and if you have the space to tell me that, I'm always open to hearing. So, feel free to send me a message. I will treat it with care and appreciate that you did that emotional labor and I'm here for that, I'm here for that kind of feedback.

Caitlin

Yeah, and I will just say in even just the short time I've been following you, I think that it's so clear in everything that you do that you are really intentional with that work and not putting the labor on other folks, especially folks who are marginalized. It's something that I'm thinking about in my own work, too, even when you reached out to me about transcribing this podcast. I was like "Yeah, that really is something I need to pursue and be more intentional about." And so, I actually like printed out your inclusion statement and started annotating it because I was like, "Wow, this is really great work!" And that I could draw some parallels into my work as well. So, I wanted to really thank you for that example.

Ariella

Aw, I'm glad. Thanks for telling me that, that's really great.

Caitlin

Totally, totally. And yeah, so you mentioned your Switchy Sexting Guide. But I love that example of just an area that I think people are thinking more about in terms of inclusion. It's just interesting in queer spaces, in the queer community, often mainstream queerness is just very white and thin, and they're like, "Well, it's queer, and so we're inclusive." And it's like, "No, queerness is so much more vast than that, right?" And, there's so many more representations of queer folks than what we see. And also, I think that so much of that white, cis, thin lesbian representation is just so informed by all the other isms, right? It's informed by racism--

Ariella

Yeah, a hundred percent!

Caitlin

--it's informed by sexism, you know, and again, it just shows that those systems of oppressions are just at work, even in spaces that are not entirely heteronormative. Even if you're, even if someone is labeling a space as queer, it can still hold a lot of those oppressive systems--

Ariella

A hundred percent.

Caitlin

--and so, you know, being really intentional about that is super important.

Ariella

And the thing is that they're all interdependent. So it's really hard to dismantle all of them. Until we dismantle all of them, all of them will still be there.

Caitlin

Exactly.

Ariella

They're super present in queer spaces. And that is something I'm really aware of, and trying to rectify for my own space so that people feel safe with me.

And, I really try to do that work on my end.

Caitlin

Yeah, for sure, for sure. So, as I mentioned, I'm a recent follow, and I love the content of your Instagram and your newsletter. And so I'm wondering if there's a process that you follow with coming up for topics. I love your polls that you've been doing lately, in your Instastories. I just think it's such a cool way to get data on your end, and also create that sort of conversation with your audience. And so yeah, wondering about your process.

Ariella

Yeah. So, a lot of times, it is just kind of what's inspiring me in the moment, and what I'm seeing reflected in the world around me. So, in the beginning of my Instagram, I was doing a lot of responses to watching The Bachelorette, because I was new to watching. So, I would watch Tayshia's season and kind

of reflect what went wrong, or what can we learn here. So even last night, watching in Matt's season, I have a whole list of notes of what are the attachment styles that are present here? What's problematic? Where is communication going well? I think Matt happens to be a great communicator, to be honest. I think he does a lot of things well, which is probably why some people think he's boring, because he's not ruffling feathers in a way that less great communicators could be. So sometimes it's inspiration from the outside and what I'm seeing in my life, as far as it relates to dating. Sometimes it's what happens in a coaching session. Sometimes it's getting an inquiry for my waitlist and seeing what the quote unquote "problem" is in that moment and wanting to make something that addresses that. Last week's piece about defaulting to heteronormativity if your sexuality allows for that was based on someone writing me about that, and then me being like, "Okay, let me see if I can make something about this. Let me share my own story here." And something on my Instagram, too, is that if you have a question about dating, I don't answer--I don't give advice through DMs. And I kind of lay this out in my boundaries highlight, but you can always message me and be like "I'd love to hear you speak on blank." And then I'll try to make something for you. If that feels good, maybe I'll ask you a couple follow up questions to understand the angle and the problem that we're--that you're trying to get at. And then I'll make things that way, too. It's a little willy nilly inspirational right now. It's not super, it's not planned. It's kind of what am I in the mood for, what have people been reaching out to me about, and just following that.

Caitlin

I love that though, because I feel like I can always tell when it's planned. You know? I just as a consumer on Instagram, I can always be like, "Oh, this person is very clearly trying to, you know, mine this information." And with you, it feels so organic and so natural to be like, "Hey, this randomly popped up. Got a DM about this. What do you think about this as queer people? What do you think about this as non-LGBTQ folks?" I appreciate that, even just as a consumer, and I'm sure also all that data informs your work as well.

Ariella

Totally, totally. It is a lot of following the through line. I posted about getting an undercut and then was curious about what people had to say about that. And that led into how do we know if someone's queer when we're looking at them? Do we need to know? And that kind of led into, what about the people that flirt with us that don't identify as queer? So, all that, I mean especially recently has kind of just been following this thread of what winds up happening in conversations and DMs. But, the other thing that I'll say about that is, when I was planning to launch my business, I kind of looked at all of the folks that were doing something similar, along the same lines, and I consumed a ton of content. I'm very clear about what I like and what I don't like. And I would really keep track of what is it that I like, what's speaking to me here? And what do I find really annoying? What do I roll my eyes at? And I kind of had all of that going into starting to make my own content. And I really follow that. Really, if there's something that I don't like, like I don't love reading long captions. I'm not gonna be someone that has a long caption

because I don't like to consume it. Which is fine for the folks that do like to consume it. It's just not my style. So I've stayed really true to making things that I would want to read or listen to or consume. And that's the entire way that I lead through this process. It has to feel good for me.

Caitlin

Absolutely. I know you mentioned *The Ethical Slut* as a recommendation for folks who are interested in non-monogamy. But I'm wondering if there's another favorite sexuality related read that you'd like to recommend to people?

Ariella

Okay. Well, I'll say...funny behind the scenes: if you want to be in a relationship with me, there's two books that are required reading right now. (laughs) And I'm serious, I'm serious about it. I'm seeing people, and I'm like, "If you want to take this to the--if you want to be in a relationship, here is your homework." And I've absolutely articulated this, this is not a joke. (laughs) So the two books are *Ethical Slut*, and *Mating in Captivity* by Esther Perel, which talks about--I'm not sure, have you talked about that on the podcast before?

Caitlin

Haven't talked about it, but read it and loved it. (laughs)

Ariella

So, that's basically talking about how sometimes with emotional intimacy, sexual desire can decrease. So, I think that whenever I'm in a relationship next, my partner and I both having this information on how can we continue to cultivate sexual desire, even when spending a lot of time together is really important to me. So those are the two required reading. Outside of that, probably the most important book I've ever read is *The Body is Not An Apology* by Sonya Renee Taylor. Have you read that yet?

Caitlin

Oh, it's so good.

Ariella

Oh, it's so good. It is really just so incredible how she really explains to us how the reason why we've been gifted so much shame about ourselves and our bodies is exclusively for capitalism and for people to profit off of us and to profit off of our insecurities. If you don't know where to start on your self love journey, that is the place to start. The place! It's brilliant and really remarkable and eye opening. So, I'd say that. Not related to serious business, (laughs) have you talked about *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*?

Caitlin

Okay, no, I haven't read it yet. But I feel like I need to.

Ariella

Okay, my friend recommended it to me, and gave me no information about it. And I am usually someone that reads exclusively nonfiction, or, occasionally, a young adult dystopian fiction novel. (laughs) Those are the two places where I live and she was like, "No, this is not dystopian fiction. It is fiction, and you need to read it." And I was pretty much like, "Oh, but why?" And I started reading it and I could not put it down. I don't even want to say anything else about it. But it's, yeah, it's a novel. And if you read it, feel free to DM me. You and anyone listening. (laughs) Really any of the books, feel free to DM me and tell me what you think about it. Because they're all books I--those are probably the the four books I care about most. So those are my those are my four recommendations.

Caitlin

Amazing. Yeah, and fully agree with *The Body Is Not An Apology*, too, and I just realized I accidentally stole my therapist's copy of it. I was reflecting on it. I was like, "Oh my god, I read it last year in January." And then I was like, "Oh, I'll definitely return it to my therapist in March." And, of course, fucking, you know, the world shut down. (laughs)

Ariella

Yeah! Wow, that's wild. And they just came out with a new edition, literally last week or two weeks ago or something.

Caitlin

I saw that. So I'm like "Maybe I'll just buy the second edition and then give my therapist it back at some point in the future."

Ariella

That's a nice idea.

Caitlin

Yeah!

Ariella

I gifted it to people--Well, I was trying to really gift it to everybody this year for the holidays, but because the new edition was coming out, they stopped selling it and I was like "No!!" But I also, I donate monthly to The Body Is Not An Apology because I really talk about it that much and think it's that important. So, this is a real recommendation here. This is a mountain I would die on. It's an incredible, liberating read.

Caitlin

Yeah, and I'll totally, I'll link the bookshop link in the show notes, but I'll also link the Body Is Not An Apology website, which is where you can contribute to the work and learn a bunch of stuff because Sonya Renee Taylor is amazing, but yeah, what is one thing that the audience can do to support you and support your work?

Ariella

Right now, it's getting on the email list or following me on Instagram, really. I am very active on Instagram these days. Feel free to DM me. You can read my boundaries if you if you want to know exactly how to DM me on my highlights, but I really interact with folks a lot there. And I have a waitlist going for the group coaching program that I'll be launching in the next month or so. So if you already know that you're really interested, feel free to sign up for the waitlist on my website, that's queerdatingcoach.com/waitlist. And then if it's a fit for the both of us, then you'll automatically have a spot. So, that's kind of how I'm running things right now. If it feels important to you to get on that, or if you want to fill that out so that I make content based on what you're needing, that's how that happens too sometimes. So, those are the ways to support me and feel free to get in touch and message me. I love to hear from folks.

Caitlin

Yay! Amazing, yeah, and I definitely recommend at least following @queerdatingcoach because she's an amazing follow. But, yeah, really appreciated your time and this was a really fun conversation.

Ariella

Absolutely, I loved it. Thanks so much for having me.