

The Empowered Series

RJM

My name is Ryan James Monroe and you are listening to The Empowered Series. (music plays) Hi there. Thank you so much for tuning in to another episode of The Empowered Series. I'm so excited about today's episode, as it is our fourth installation of the pride series, and I am sitting down with queer dating coach Ariella Serur. Ariella is on a mission to disrupt traditional dating advice and 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 they have the courage to go after what they want in dating and in life without feeling overwhelmed or exhausted. If you want to learn 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's School of Psychology in sexuality, women, and gender with a concentration in LGBTQ issues. I'm so excited that Ariella has decided to sit down with me today and share her learnings and wisdom that she's gotten from her experience in being a queer dating coach. I feel--I mean, she has proven that this is an untapped wealth of knowledge that we

really, truly need in our community. So I'm so excited to bring this conversation to you. And without further ado, Ariella! (music plays)

[Ariella](#)

Hiii!

[RJM](#)

Hi! How's it going?

[Ariella](#)

I'm good. I'm very busy.

[RJM](#)

Yeah.

[Ariella](#)

But it's feeling okay. I'm deciding--I'm trying to navigate and explore whether I'll be going back to theater in the same way. So I'm--

[RJM](#)

Wow.

[Ariella](#)

--exploring that a little bit today.

RJM

Okay.

[Ariella](#)

But, yeah, but I'm good. How are you doing?

RJM

It has been one of those days for me, I think. I don't know what is going on in the cosmos. But more than three people I have talked to today are having one of those days. And I think it's because it's the end of Mercury in retrograde. We're coming to the end of it.

[Ariella](#)

Last week was a shit show. (laughs)

RJM

Right? Exactly. And you know, it's so funny, looking at you on my computer screen, it has been over a yea. Because I met you in a virtual space over a year ago and we've not been in a virtual space really since.

[Ariella](#)

No.

[RJM](#)

Wow. Time flies when you're living through a pandemic.

[Ariella](#)

Yeah. You look great. Even if you're--

[RJM](#)

Thank you.

[Ariella](#)

You seem--you look glowy and your nails look great.

[RJM](#)

I did them today because I was stressed. I was like, "I need a little bit of glam."

[Ariella](#)

I think that it's suiting you.

RJM

Thank you. I appreciate it. And you look great. And I'm loving all of your photography that's happening. All these beautiful pictures you're posting. You're doing the thing!

Ariella

I'm doing--my pictures for my career dating coach, you mean?

RJM

Yes, I was looking through and I was looking through your Instagram a couple of weeks ago--

Ariella

Recycling.

RJM

Whatever!

Ariella

Recycling those old Corinne Louie headshots session back from early 2020 before we all knew. (music plays)

RJM

Alright. So we're ready to go?

Ariella

Yeah. Let's do it.

RJM

Alright. So go ahead and close your eyes and do whatever you need to do to make yourself present and...here. Take a deep breath in. And release it. Think about everything that is going on, everything that has happened today, everything that's still to happen today, everything that's gone on this week. Breathe it in. Respect it, appreciate it, recognize it, and release it because you don't need it here. (exhales) And take a second to think about everything that is good, everything that's bringing you joy, everything that's inspiring you. Breathe that in. Recognize that and release that into the space. (exhales) Take another second, however long you need, to do whatever you need to do. And we'll jump right in. (long pause)

Ariella

I love that. Thank you.

RJM

Absolutely. Thank you. Alright. So, I'm so excited to ask you this first question. Because when I was going through your website, I was reading your definition of success. And I read it three times because I was so obsessed. And the very first--so,, I'm just gonna read the very first point because it just set me off. And this is what this first question is. And you define success in a dating context as being able to move through fear. And my first question for you is, can you tell us a story about a time where you had to move through fear? The fear was real, you were having self doubt, you were having whatever it is for you, however it shows up for you, was happening. And you had to get through it in order to accomplish whatever it was you were trying to accomplish? And tell us what that was for you, and how you got through it.

Ariella

Well, there's so many different, (laughing) so many different answers to this, because there's so many times where we have to move through fear, right? So I'm thinking of a scarier, heavier one and I'm thinking of a lighter one. All within the context of dating is where my brain's going. Is that okay?

RJM

Sure. Absolutely.

Ariella

I'll tell you the lighter one; it feels more appropriate.

RJM

Okay.

Ariella

A lot of folks have questions as it relates to initiation when it comes to dating. How to start talking to someone that they don't know, how to start talking to a stranger, or how to ask out a stranger. And I remember I was doing a show in Syracuse in 2019. And I saw this person working at this grab and go poke bowl place, whatever. I was in Syracuse and I wasn't seeing a lot of queer people around and this person was very visibly queer. And the first day I got to Syracuse, I went to this grab and go place. And when I saw them, I was gut checked, gut checked at wanting to connect with this person. And I was like, "Focus on the show, you just got to town. Do not prioritize this Syracusan person. Just focus on what you came here to do, you have a job to do." So I just left and I was like, " If it's meant to happen, it'll happen." So I went back to the poke place

(laughing) the following week, or whatever, and I saw this person again. And I had already ordered my food. And I looked down at my food, and I was like, "I can't eat anymore. I can't. I am so filled with emotion about wanting to talk to this person, and so afraid to do it." So, what I did to move through it in that sense, was that first I decided I needed to. I decided there was no way that I would be able to leave without talking to this person, without connecting them, without at least indulging the curiosity I was having. The second thing I did was that I drafted out something on my phone to say, so that I wasn't just going to go up to them and be babbling; I had kind of a plan of action. So it was acknowledging all of my feelings, deciding what I wanted to do, and then setting myself up as much as possible to be able to do it by looking at legitimate skills of how it is I'm going to approach this person. And it wound up going really well! It was so fun!

RJM

(laughing)

Ariella

Yeah, so that feels like one of the moments where was most--as far as dating goes--there are many other times in life where I felt afraid, but

where I felt most arrested by fear and had to figure out how to move through it because I really wanted to.

RJM

So what is running through your head in the fearful moment, before you had gotten to the moment of "This is what I'm gonna do. These are the skills that I have. These are the tools that I know." What is running through your head in that moment?

Ariella

You know, in this case, it wasn't so much "This person's gonna think I'm weird." It was more "Oh, I don't know what to say and I want to talk to them so bad." And it's more my body that experiences the fear more than a narrative that goes along with the fear. I don't remember--there are other moments where I can think of, you know, having a narrative in my head of "Oh, I might be rejected," or "I'm not cool enough," or anything like that. But in this moment, it was really like my stomach was so tight. And I had already--what was in my head was really just "I must do this. I must." So, it wasn't so much mental noise in that moment to filter through.

RJM

Interesting. I love that. I mean, I--yeah, when you launched this company, or this practice--how do you refer to it? Do you refer to as a company or practice interchangeably?

Ariella

Practice, business, whatever. Whatever you wanna call it.

RJM

Yeah. I mean, when you launched it, I was like, "Holy shit. That is what I need." (laughs) And so, what was the journey to, I mean, becoming a certified life coach, deciding to create this practice, putting out into the world? And was there fear in that as well? What was going on during that, I wonder?

Ariella

Yeah. And I just want to say, to have thoughts during fear is so normal, right? And I think that's why I don't--this is really something I've worked on, especially as it relates to dating. And I think that's why I feel so comfortable doing it a lot of the times is that I have really worked on not having my thoughts overtake a scenario when it comes to going after something that I want. So, I just want to normalize the fact that it might not

actually be normal that I didn't really have a mental narration going on in that moment. I think that's probably--

RJM

Yeah.

Ariella

--not normal. But it's also something that--that's why I have this business, right? It's something I became really practiced in, and I've dated a lot and don't take it personally when someone isn't into me. So, I just want to say that came with practice. (laughs)

RJM

Well, no, I appreciate that. Because I've certainly found--and largely the reason why I started this podcast was exploring and normalizing that when we're afraid of something, or when we're really excited about something and like, "I want to do this thing." Whether it's dating, whether it's creating something, starting a business, whatever. I mean, oftentimes, the first thing that happens, it is physical and mental, right?

Ariella

Yeah. Totally.

RJM

Yeah. And something--I mean, I've spoken about this a lot so far in this podcast--for me, it's perfectionism. For me if it's not gonna happen, I'm not doing it. If I can't guarantee success, better not. And it is, I mean, I'm still very much within that work myself, right?

Ariella

Yeah.

RJM

So through therapy and through reading and talking to people and trial and, you know, trying and failing. I'm working on that. But yeah, no, totally.

Ariella

Yeah, perfectionism is tough. I find myself struggling with that a bit in my coaching business. And I've been asked to do so many things in my business that have been new to me, like giving speeches and being on podcasts, and whatnot. And with time they get comfortable, right?

Podcasts now have become comfortable for me, but giving keynotes, that kind of thing is still--or workshops, hour-long workshops on dating--those things kind of still feel really new, as opposed to coaching or having a

conversation. And, I know I was really--I gave a speech a couple of weeks ago at a queer summit and I was really struggling with perfectionism for that. I really wanted it to be perfect and I would have a mantra before of "You're not being held to a standard of perfection. These people want to hear what you have to say and they're lucky that they get to." I feel like perfection is something that I brush up against a lot. Especially when I'm in control of a lot of things in my business.

RJM

Yeah. You posted about that, I think in one way or another, or you spoke about that you were giving that address. I think, right?

Ariella

Yeah. And then I talked about those mantras on another podcast, but I can't keep up with my content (laughing)

RJM

I get it. I get it. So, take us through becoming a certified life coach and take us through creating this business.

[Ariella](#)

Okay, well, basically, the life coaching came out of Create and Incubate, which is--is that where we met or did we meet--

[RJM](#)

Mhmm.

[Ariella](#)

Okay. I couldn't remember if we met through that or one of Clarice's circles, artists' circles. Okay, so this is--

[RJM](#)

Both. We've met in both. (laughs)

[Ariella](#)

Okay, okay, cool. I didn't know which one was first, but it must have been--

[RJM](#)

I think it was Create and Incubate. Yeah.

Ariella

So basically, January of 2020, my friend Lizzie and I started this group called Create and Incubate--it used to meet at my apartment in the West Village--where we would gather artists, who were primarily actors, and try to turn up the volume on their artistry in other areas of their lives. So it was basically a space for performing artists to practice being generative artists, being creative artists where they actually make work. And we would share it with each other. It was an intimate group of people. And we would meet weekly. And we would each share work each time and give each other some feedback, but it was really a space to nurture each other and support each other. So fast forward, I basically wound up getting my life coaching certification to help support my facilitation work in that group. So when the pandemic hit, we switched to virtual and we were doing workshops and that kind of stuff, but I wound up liking the life coaching more than I had thought. That was the thing. So then I was like, "Oh, shit. Maybe I should be looking at this seriously, not just using it to support my Create and Incubate stuff."

RJM

Right.

Ariella

So basically what had happened was that when you become a life coach, a lot of times you need to niche down, which is pick where you want to be and who you want to help and what you want to do. And I was really soul searching to figure out what that was going to be. And for a lot of the beginning of the pandemic--the first few months--I felt like I had this idea sitting right in my periphery, but I couldn't see it. And every day I would try to just move it an inch closer so that it would be in my line of vision. I don't know if that makes sense for people not watching me do this hand gesture. (laughs) But I was like, "Please move to the front of my face so that I can see what this idea is." Because I knew it would be powerful. So every day I would be like "Just move forward." And I would talk, I was like "I have an idea. I don't know what it is yet. I have an idea." So basically, through a lot of conversations with friends and experimentation and coaching whoever I could get my hands on, and then figuring out what about that I liked, what about it didn't I like? And then through Instagram polls, I knew I wanted to work with queer people. So I put out a poll of queer folks in their twenties, I think I said, What is it you most want to achieve right now? And I qualified achieve with a couple of things so it didn't seem so scary and capitalist. And some people specifically called out dating. And I had been considering non-monogamy or relationship coaching, but never dating. And then when I saw those folks respond, I

started to look into the dating coaching industry more and realized how problematic it was. How seriously problematic it was, where it's steeped in systems of oppression. And it's always gendered. Always. And it just wasn't actually applicable to queer or trans daters. So I was like, "Wait. This is infuriating. Someone needs to be giving us dating advice that actually works for us that's not based in games and manipulation, blah, blah, blah. That's what I'm doing."

RJM

I love it. I mean, was there a lot of queer dating services? Was there a lot of queer coaching? Not at all?

Ariella

No, no. There are queer coaches, not for dating. There is a company called, I think the Girlfriend Academy, where they give classes and it's a little more relationship focused. But again, I think it's--it's girlfriend. It seems pretty binary. So yeah, there really just aren't many, there aren't many. And a lot of them that are there are binary. They are lesbian focused, or whatever. It's not really for non-binary or trans folks and I just think we need gender-free advice that can work for anybody.

RJM

Right, because it's, I'm gonna guess, because I am somebody who definitely needs a dating coach. That is not something that I know a lot about. And that is something that in therapy I've worked a lot on is why is dating such a--I'm somebody who a lot of things that I thought were dates ended up being business meetings, or vice versa, right? But usually the other way around. Usually, I think I'm on a date, and somebody actually just wants to pick my brain on a project, which is very strange. But it feels like--and that is a very, I have in my life attributed that to my queer experience, which is a lot of worth that I created for myself was through that which I produced.

Ariella

Mhmm.

RJM

And so, it made sense that people would want to talk to me because I was a brain they could pick, right? And so it's a lot of undoing that. And so I'm excited that you're doing this work and it's been so exciting to follow the journey so far. It's really cool. In the dating coaches that existed that you saw in your research, was there any inclusivity toward queer--toward even gay people specifically, like in that niche, or no?

Ariella

Not really, besides this Girlfriend Academy, not really. I kind of put up a whole mind map of everybody that was kind of doing something similar. There were queer coaches, there are sex coaches, there are relationship coaches--

RJM

Sure.

Ariella

--there are some queer folks in those spaces. But as far as dating goes, no. Not that I was able to find. Any queer people specifically focused on dating? No.

RJM

Were there dating coaches for straight people?

Ariella

Yes. The dating coaching industry is strong. It is a thing. It is a thing. So the first one that I found was this guy who was like, "I help successful, smart women who have everything but the guy get the guy." And I was like, "This is trash."

RJM

Oh wow.

Ariella

This is trash! And this is so bad. And a lot of stuff was fatphobic. A lot of it is so ableist. So it's really I so care that all of the content I create is applicable to people. And I have a fuck ton of privilege, and I hire people to help me teach me the things I don't know, support me in my group coaching and in my course, so that people in the course, if they don't feel comfortable talking to me about something, they have other people that might have more shared experience to them. So I really care that this is not hierarchical dating advice, that it is applicable and accessible and useful. So...that's the journey.

RJM

Yeah. And have you found that there is, for lack of a better term, there's a market for this. People want this or need this?

Ariella

Oh, yeah!. For sure, for sure. Yeah, I mean, I have a Date Better Boot Camp happening now and it sold out very quickly. My prices are low. So I really hope to keep it accessible. So I think there wasn't so much barrier to

entry for a lot of folks to apply. But yeah, I have totally seen that this is something that people need, and I'm so happy that I could help bring this information to them.

RJM

When you thought "I'm gonna start a practice, I'm going to start a business, whatever," were you scared?

Ariella

I have felt fear in so many moments that I can't--it is so a part of my daily existence, because I'm always putting myself in new situations--that it's hard to even think about was I afraid before this began? I'm sure there were parts that were scary. And yet there are parts that are scary every day. So it doesn't feel so monumental as far as, I wasn't standing on the edge of a cliff being like, "Now I have to jump off." Every day I'm climbing and it's always scary. (laughs) It's always scary to climb. (music plays)

RJM

Are there commonalities between what people want help with or need help with or that is standing in their way--are there commonalities amongst queer people? And the reason I ask is because something that I've thought a lot about is when I was coming out, it was--I came out in 2009.

And so a few years leading up to that of preparing my self. Gay marriage was illegal. You could not start a family for real. Adoption? Out of the question. Surrogacy? Very difficult and expensive. Jobs were at stake, you know, these things were still very real. And now--well, before I say that, and even today, the Supreme Court, right, ruled in favor of this Catholic agency in Philadelphia, ruling that they don't have to consider same-sex couples for foster care assignments. So--

[Ariella](#)

Uhh.

[RJM](#)

Isn't that crazy?

[Ariella](#)

Yeah.

[RJM](#)

I saw that on my phone this morning, and I was just like, "Well."

[Ariella](#)

Happy Pride.

RJM

Happy Pride. And this is why we still do this and this is why we have these conversations still.

Ariella

Totally.

RJM

And hopefully someday we won't have these conversations, but it's not today.

Ariella

Yeah.

RJM

So all of those things, those moments popping up where something crazy happens, like today. Really said to me "Cool, well, if I'm gay, I will not get married. If I'm gay, I will not have kids, adopted or biological." And so when I finally fully accepted that I was, in fact, gay, am in fact, gay, part of me resigned the dream of having that. And so do you think that has hindered people and do you find this in your work that there are

commonalities based on what the queer experience in America has been and is? It's a question. (laughs)

Ariella

Yes, there are definitely commonalities. There are definitely commonalities. I mean, yes. Also, the internalized homophobia, internalized transphobia, all of this that we are getting kind of reflected on to us from our society at large is something for a lot of queer and trans folks to move through. And I think that we all have ways of kind of, I don't know, I'm picturing we're all kind of in this box which is society and we all have kind of ways of elbowing the box out of our way. So it sounds like for you, yours was "Well, I'm fine being in the box" or "I don't even want your--I don't want what's outside of the box to begin with," you know? Where for me, I'm really--I must question every single thing in the box and outside of it. I'm so much--question the institution of marriage, why do we relationship in the first place? All of that, that's my way of reckoning with it. Where other queer folks are like, "No, I want to fucking get the thing that society has. And I want to make it gay as hell. And I want to be able to queer what it is that we imagine as these kind of really heteronormative familial ideals," right?

RJM

Mmm.

Ariella

So I think that there are so many different responses to having a society tell us that we're wrong in a type of way. And I think there are definitely commonalities in how we handle that and view that. More often than that kind of big picture society stuff, there are so many similarities on the ground of dating, and so much of the struggle is the same. So that--and basically every client I've ever had is like, "I know it's just me, but I hate small talk." And I'm like, "It's literally any client I've ever had! Every single one says that."

RJM

(laughs)

Ariella

One literally DMed me during this Boot Camp I'm in being like, "I don't know if this is appropriate to post in the group or if it's even applicable, so can I run an idea--can I run something by you?" And I was like, "Yeah," and she was like, "I just hate small talk." And I was like, "Please write it in the group. Write it in the group. Everyone else is gonna feel that way too."

So there are so many things--there's so many commonalities. I mean, I can go into a lot more, but that's just one example that comes up, a laughable amount, where everybody thinks that they're alone in it.

RJM

Mmm. Are there things that you have seen that are specific to the queer experience...that are hindrances or barriers?

Ariella

Yes. Yes, for sure. I think one of the big parts of the queer experience that I find to be the most beautiful is the real question mark, as it relates to gender roles. And I think that that's for the better. I think that we would be fine without any gender roles. So something that comes up really common that is kind of--that feels more specific to queer folks--is a lot of the times, people getting stuck in the chat. I did an Australian podcast and one of the hosts Cindra was like, "We get stuck in the chat." I was like, "I'm always gonna think about it like that." She was like, "Please help me, I'm stuck in the chat all the time." And so that comes up really often. Where if we were operating--so a lot of times, so in Cindra's case, she's a woma dating women, she feels like she gets stuck in the chat. The reason why I think that that's a specifically queer issue, is because even if a heteronormative--if you're with a man and a woman--even if both of you

are operating against gender norms, you know what the gender norm and the gender stereotype would be. So you're still actually navigating the stereotype and you're navigating the gender role. Even if you're like, "That's not me." When it's two queer people together, that becomes--the dance is, has no music playing and is in an empty field versus maybe with the man and woman couple, you at least know what dance shoes you have on and you are listening to the same music. You know what I mean?

RJM

Right, so it's like you're stuck in the chat because you don't know who was supposed to ask, "Hey, can we get a drink? Can we meet in person?"

Ariella

Yes.

RJM

And then you don't know who is supposed to pay. And you don't know--right?

[Ariella](#)

Yes. And stuck in the chat too can be we're on a date, and we want to kiss and we don't know how to, we're stuck in the chat. We're literally stuck talking.

[RJM](#)

Wow!

[Ariella](#)

Where we don't know how to transcend the touch barrier? And also, I think specific to a lot of queer folks, is the fear of making other people uncomfortable. And yeah, yeah, the fear of making other people uncomfortable, I'd say, especially for women. A real fear of that.

[RJM](#)

Something that I have certainly felt, and I know a lot of gay men have felt is going on these apps, you're horny. You're on these apps to get off and just chat with somebody. And that may not even mean meeting somebody to hook up.

[Ariella](#)

Yeah.

RJM

But the dating app situation is something that blows my fucking mind. I can't get into it. And it seems like that is the only way to date somebody. It seems like it's the only way to meet somebody. And do you find that that is a common fear or complication (laughing) and is it true?

Ariella

It's not true that it's the only way to meet people. I break it down in four quadrants. So I can explain those to you if you'd like to hear--

RJM

I would loooove that.

Ariella

So the way that I talk about meeting people, or how to meet people, or where to meet people, I think of it in four categories, quadrants, whatever you want to call it. The first one is online--that's dating apps, online, social media, whatever. So that's just one out of the four. So already, that's only one little pocket, then we've got what I call Conscious Communities, which is basically--conscious not meaning spiritual, conscious meaning I know I am in this place. So that could be classes you sign up for, that could be book clubs, volunteer work, it could be your place of work if that's not a

boundary for you. It's just anywhere you know that you go. So that's category number two. Number three is your wider network, your friends of friends. So that's literally being like, "Hey, I'm looking for someone. You know anyone? Can you send me up?" And then four is literal strangers. (laughs) Anyone that you literally see on the street, at a party, whatever, that's number four. So if dating apps don't feel good for you, I also think--especially with gay cis men--where sex is coming into play and where romance is coming into play is we have to be picking apps that are meant for--that have a greater chance of other people looking for something similar, right? So I think that's a lot of "I'm on the apps," and it's just a Grindr and then we're like, "Wait a minute, are you on the apps?"

RJM

Are you though, for real? Right.

Ariella

Are you for real or do you just want to get off? Which is totally cool. But then we just have to be clear in our own minds of "Okay, let's compartmentalize. Let's not call this dating if the other people have not agreed to be here to date." And that's not to say people don't find dates from Grindr. They do too. But it's just less--that's less common for that space. So it's just, we have to stay aware of--someone described different

dating apps as different bars that you can go to, and what bar is Grindr versus Hinge? And what are the people that go to that bar looking for versus the vibes of the people that go to the Hinge bar, whatever it is.

RJM

So it's an intentionality type thing, right? It's "I'm going on this app to get off or to date somebody."

Ariella

Yes, intentionality from your point of view, for sure. But it's also literally, what is the app made for, and what is the app providing space for, what is the app known for?

RJM

Got it.

Ariella

So even if you were to be intentional about your Grindr usage, if everybody else is there to get off or to have sex, you can be as intentional as you want and you're not going to find what you're looking for. Again, that's not to say--a lot of people do default to Grindr in a lot of ways and you can definitely still find people on it. It's just when we're thinking of

where we want to be most intentional and what would be the most bang for our buck? (laughs) I mean, a bang feels like then it would be Grindr.

RJM

(laughs)

Ariella

It's just where is it--why is this--where do I have the most emotional capacity and ability to put my intentionality towards? Should it be an app that's geared for relationship or an app that's geared towards sex? And any answer is okay and valid and beautiful and just know which one it is and pick accordingly based on what you're looking for.

RJM

Are there apps that are not super popular that you recommend?

Ariella

Well, OkCupid--it's like OkCupid feels like the most legitimate relationship app that's geared towards non-monogamy, that really allows non monogamy to be super present. Which I am a no- monogamous person, so I really love that that's the case. Feeld is also allows for non-monogamy, but it also has the connotation--

RJM

I have never even heard of that. Feeld, it's called?

Ariella

F-E-E-L-D. But that does have the connotation of more sex. So a lot of times you'll find couples and things on field. But OkCupid I think is a surprising--you have to pay up for some features--but OkCupid's a surprising one. That I know we've all heard of it, but I don't think that we've heard it's revamp, you know?

RJM

Right. We've all passed through OkCupid, you know what I mean? We've gone through it, and we've deleted it, and...you know?

Ariella

(laughign) Right. I feel like Hinge and Bumble are kind of known more as the relationshipy apps or the more serious refined dating, versus Tinder or Grindr. And then Lex--it's not really for cis guys, though. Lex is more for women and trans folks.

RJM

Okay.

Ariella

Lex is all for personal ads. So there is no--there are no pictures. It's literally--it's honestly an incredible app. I read it to go to bed because it's just people posting what they want and if you want to respond to an ad, you respond to an ad. So--

RJM

Wow!

Ariella

--it makes my heart warm to read people stating their desires so clearly. It's very cool.

RJM

So you use Lex in order to read about who the person is, to learn about who they are...

Ariella

Kind of. Because Lex can be really anything. So Lex could be like "I need a roommate. 950 Sugar Hill."

RJM

Got it.

Ariella

It could be like "I'm going to Jacob Riis beach today. Meet me by the pink umbrella at 12 pm, I'll be right by the bathrooms." Or it could be "Topsy femme seeks leather daddy bottom...choke me--literally it ranges whole gamut. So it's not necessarily people being like, "I'm this person." It's being like, "I'm looking for this." And then people can respond to that.

RJM

Very interesting. Okay, I'd never heard of that up before in my life. Wow. Can you tell me about a time--have you ever wanted to quit or give up? Has it ever become too much? Has it ever become too scary? Or, you know, the risk became too high for what you were willing to risk? Like? Have you had a moment where you were ready to quit?

Ariella

Okay. I read this amazing book called The Dip by Seth Godin. Have you read it?

RJM

I have not.

Ariella

Okay.

RJM

You--however, I want to say, because I wanted to say this to you--but since we're talking about books, when I did your virtual--remind me what it's called, Creative Incubators, right?

Ariella

Create and Incubate, but yes, yes.

RJM

Yeah. Y'all quoted Glennon Doyle Untamed.

Ariella

Untamed. Yeah.

RJM

And that was my introduction and so I bought it. And then I was one of the first, along with y'all, to have a read the book before everybody was buying it.

Ariella

Yessss! Yes.

RJM

So thank you so much for that; it's my favorite book in the world.

Ariella

Awesome! Oh, my god, yes, it's very good.

RJM

Okay, go ahead.

Ariella

So this is another book. So this is The Dip by Seth Godin. And it's a really short book. And I heard about it from Jen Waldman, who is an acting coach in New York City. And basically, what the book is, is the book talks about quitting and when to quit. And in the book, Seth talks

about...anything that is worth doing will have a dip. So basically, what that means is that things might be really exciting at the beginning. They are-- there's a lot of energy, you feel like you're learning a new skill, all this kind of stuff. So my hand is kind of diagonally moving upward. And then things fall and there's a dip, and this is where it gets really hard. Now I was facing--okay, so basically, the alternative to that, when you go--okay, not the alternative. (laughs) (sing-song) Explaining a book on a podcas. Okay. So, moving up, then you fall down, it's the dip, and then you know that you're going to get up again, you know that it's going to go up again, you just have to move through this hard part. So, as an example, there was one time I waited to get COVID tested at City MD, and I had already been waiting for two hours out in the cold. So this is the dip, right? Because I know eventually it's going to get better. If you quit in the dip, Seth says that's a waste of your time. So, I knew that since I was in the dip, since I knew I would probably have to wait another two hours, I've already wasted two hours. If I quit now, I just have to get through the dip, right? The alternative curve to the dip is what's called the cul de sac, where things are just kind of perpetually getting a little bit worse and worse, and there really is no sign that they're going to get better. So, anyway, what Seth talks about is that before you begin any hard thing--anything that's going to be difficult--to know what are the reasons with which you would quit

ahead of time. So that when you're--there's this amazing quote, you want me to read you a quote?

RJM

I would love it.

Ariella

Okay!

RJM

I'm ready.

Ariella

Ready for it? Okay. So...okay, I'm so obsessed with this book. I actually start my coaching course, my Date Better Boot Camp starts with me teaching The Dip.

RJM

Wow. Okay, fierce.

Ariella

So this is--I really believe in this. So, Seth says "quitting before you start: here's an assignment for you. Write it down. Write down under what circumstances you're willing to quit and when, and then stick to it." He says, "Deciding in advance when to quit: Here's a quote from ultra marathoner, Dick Collins, 'Decide before the race the conditions that will cause you to stop and drop out. You don't want to be out there saying, 'well, gee, my leg hurts, I'm a little dehydrated, I'm sleepy, I'm tired and it's cold and windy,' and talk yourself into quitting. If you're making a decision based on how you feel at that moment, you will probably make the wrong decision.' So there's tool number one, if quitting is going to be a strategic decision that enables you to make smart choices then you should outline your quitting strategy before the discomfort sets in." Okay. So this is really important to me in my coaching business. I read this book between pausing on being an actor and starting my business. I wish I had read this book before I ever decided to be an actor. I think I would be a lot clearer on when is actually the right time to stop. Because it's unclear as an actor sometimes whether you're in a hard part or whether things just aren't going to get better. (laughs)

RJM

Right. yeah.

Ariella

For my coaching business, I have not thought about when I would quit, because I knew before I started when I would quit. And yet, I navigate a fuck ton of hard parts. So what I do--what I did was I laid out all the possible hard things that could happen in my coaching, like a client leaving, not knowing how to make Instagram graphics, needing to make a website, fucking up a speech or podcast, whatever it is.

RJM

Right.

Ariella

All of the hard parts that could possibly be. Then I said, "Would I quit based on this?" If the answer is no, then what do I need? How can I support myself when that hard part comes up? So for me, a lot of times it's outsourcing. A lot of what's hardest for me is graphics, and learning--learning, accessibility, diversity, equity and inclusion measures. That's what I care so much about and I'm also unable to learn it as fast as I want to. So a lot of it--I hire a lot of people in my business. More than I am making enough money to at this moment, but it's fine. We'll get there.

RJM

Yeah.

Ariella

So anyway, this is a hard part, would I quit? If I won't quit, what can I give myself immediately? What do I know I need to go to? And I already have it laid out. So now, my only two quit objectives are if I'm doing the work for a while, and I don't enjoy doing the work. If I'm not actually enjoying coaching, I'm gonna quit. My second one is that if I'm doing it for a while-- and I'll give myself a little time here, because I'm an entrepreneur--if I'm doing the work for a while, and I'm not making enough money, then I'm going to quit. And again, that will take some time, I'm a baby business owner, but--

RJM

Sure.

Ariella

--if I don't see how this can be something I can live off of, I will quit. So those are the two reasons.

RJM

I love it. And the way you're saying "if these things happen, I will quit. period." It's, you know, it's so different than "if this becomes something that I can't use to support my life, I'll start to think about quitting," right? No, the deal is this going in?

Ariella

Yeah, this is the deal I have with myself. Because I can't support this as a hobby. It's too much emotional labor. Especially if I want to continue performing and whatnot, I can't--this has to be a livelihood. So if I see that it won't be that way, then I will quit.

RJM

That is amazing. I'm so glad you shared that with us. I mean, that takes a lot of being honest with yourself. That takes a lot of vision and practicality.

Ariella

Yeah. Yeah--

RJM

I love it.

Ariella

I wish I did that for acting. (laughs)

RJM

And, in this moment of now theaters coming back, now we have some decisions to make, is that something you can do again? Is that something you can do in the middle of a thing? Or...

Ariella

Yeah, I think that's a really interesting idea. I'm still in the camp of "I'm not quite sure to what extent I'm starting again." So I feel unable to do this exercise fully yet, because me and myself are not...we're still negotiating. We're still in talks about whether we'll start acting again. (laughs)

RJM

Yeah.

Ariella

But if we decide that we will start acting again full force, then, yes, that's a great idea to do the exercise now, even though I've done this before. But yeah, it's a great exercise.

RJM

Yeah.

Ariella

So I have everybody in the boot camp do this right when we begin. I give them a little summary of the of the book and then I have them write down what could come up in your dating journey that's hard, or what can come up within the context of this actual bootcamp that is challenging for you. And in the context of the boot camp, this is really a way to get in touch with what it is that you need to support yourself throughout this journey.

RJM

I love it.

Ariella

Yeah.

RJM

And something that came up when you were talking about it in context of starting your business, if the graphics become hard, right, we can outsource or we can use an app, or whatever it is. If this is hard, we can do

X, Y, and Z. So then when that moment comes, you're like, "Cool. I'm not gonna quit because I know what to do."

[Ariella](#)

Yes, exactly, exactly! But that's--and this is entirely from the book. And it's not even "I'm going to bang my head against the wall and try to figure out how to make a graphic." No, I already decided that's an area I will need support. I am not an aesthetic person in that way, and don't have the desire to become more growth-oriented in that capacity.

[RJM](#)

(laughs) Yeah.

[Ariella](#)

So I decided "this is a place where you need help, and you should get the help that you need."

[RJM](#)

And this is how, and this is where the help is.

[Ariella](#)

Yeah.

RJM

I love that. Thank you for that. (music plays) Alright, so last question.

Ariella

Okay.

RJM

What makes you feel empowered?

Ariella

Moving through fear. I think that that's--I mean, that is so much of why I care about this business and why I care about, you know, that definition of success. And why all of my, you know, marketing taglines are teaching people--helping queer folks date better so that we have the courage to go after what we want in dating and in life. Because I think that I learn I'm powerful, and I feel empowered every time I notice something that scares me, and then I'm able to move through it. And that is a lot, a lot of the time.

RJM

I love it. Thank you for sharing yourself and sharing your learnings and your business with us. I am so excited to continue watching your journey. I

can't wait to engage in the business when I can. And I appreciate your time. I appreciate you being here. And I appreciate the work you're doing.

Ariella

Thank you for having me.

RJM

Absolutely. (music plays) I hope that that conversation was as informative for you as it was for me. If you would like to follow up with Ariella and learn more about her practice, you can find her on Instagram @queerdatingcoach. Or you can look at her website www.queerdatingcoach.com. I wanted to sit down with Ariella because I think that dating is such an important part in our lives. And, for me personally, it is something that I am very afraid of (laughs) and have a lot of trouble with myself. So I learned a lot from our conversation and I will certainly be following up with her myself. And I hope that you learned something as well. Thank you so much for being here. I appreciate you coming along on this journey, and I am so excited to bring you our final pride series episode next week. Until then, hang in there, keep the faith, enjoy your pride weekend, and I will talk to you very soon. (music plays)

The music for The Empowered Series was created and recorded by Alec Michael Ryan, who can be found on Instagram @alecmichaelryan. The cover art was created by Matty Frank, who can be found on Instagram @be.frank and you can follow the show on Instagram @theempoweredseries.