Introduction to the Discussion

can't really talk about intimacy without bringing up conflict because the deeper you go inside of somebody, the innermost layers in intimacy, it is going to bring up, and I say conflict, not as like throwing plates and you're upset at each other and you're yelling, but just like a conflict of, I don't like that, you know, or that kind of placing you where you might have not been able to voice that.

and you're internally conflicted. So how can we hold the conflict or how can we hold the, you know, whether it's a power differential or whether it's, you know, being able, being conflicted about somebody's needs or your own needs, how can we hold that?

And how can we still hold each other and high five at the end? This is Dr. Talks. Welcome to the Functional Edge podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Julia Ward, medical director and founder of Balanced Body Functional Medicine.

Today we're honored to welcome back Dr. Maria DeFranco to our show. In this episode, Dr. Maria and I are going to have a very open discussion about sex and pelvic floor anatomy, along with like feelings of shame and intimacy.

So this is going to be a little bit different from our usual podcast because it's going to be more of a discussion. So please stay tuned for an engaging conversation that promises to empower and inspire your path to wellness.

Welcome back, Dr. Maria. Thank you so much, Dr. Julie. I really appreciate that. And just to give our listeners a little background about yourself, can you just tell us a little bit about what you do?

Yes, absolutely. So first, we'll just start with a disclaimer, because you did mention we're going to be talking about sex. And I am not a sex therapist, or it's not really an expertise of mine.

However, I do specialize in the pelvic bowl and embodiment practices as well as musculoskeletal health. So it is a natural topic for us to discuss and explore.

A lot of questions can come up in the treatment room that are addressed through that holistic viewpoint that I carry. I'm a holistic chiropractor with about 20 years of experience with body work, and I address the person's body, mind, and soul with all different kinds of modalities, really, depending on what they're presenting.

That's great. That's awesome. And I'd like to also say I am not a sex therapist or sex expert in any way, but it comes up because I do treat the body from a functional point of view.

I'm looking at hormones, I'm looking at nutrients, like there's a variety of different things that kind of play into that.

Backgrounds and Sexual Shame

So I think we both kind of come across this in various different forms. Yes, absolutely. And it's such a big part of health, right? Sexual health is such a big part of health and well-being.

And I think what I discovered in our discussion, which inspired us to really kind of go on air with it, was how much we're both passionate about sex and we're not afraid to really talk about it and have those, you know, those discussions that a lot of times we don't have even with like our closest girlfriends.

You know, both being practitioners and having a background in the body and wellness, it's just a great opportunity for us to, you know, open up the discussion and see what comes through.

Yes, yes. And I think we all bring our own kind of emotional baggage towards our attitudes towards sex and how

we were brought up. And so, you know, that just reflects on how we then deal with different situations or even just talking about it.

So, yeah, I realized how little my family talked about sex growing up. Like that just was not a topic for conversation, you know. And I think early on my parents, they did try to teach us when we were young kids, I mean, like toddlers, about the names of anatomical parts and things like that.

But after that, they kind of just dropped it. You know, life got in the way. There was never really, you know, there was just not much talk. And so when I read books now, like I'll put a reference, there's a really great book that a friend of mine has written.

It's called No Shame, Real Talk with Your Kids About Sex, Self-Confidence, and Healthy Relationships. It's by Dr. Leah Liss. That's a fantastic book about like how to talk to your kids about sex, not just to edge it, but to protect them.

Because once you know all this information, you know, you're better able to kind of navigate all the pitfalls that go along with this. Yeah, absolutely.

I think even in sex ed, you know, in high school, like there isn't really much that we're necessarily learning. And it's not very empowering, not inherently.

So I love the title of that book. Because so much of I think what drives the lack of conversation is shame. Yes. And often we're kind of implicitly taught that we don't have a pelvis, that we're kind of cut off from here down.

Yeah. Even being able to name the body parts or having discussions about what they do, the function of them, whether it's, you know, not just sexually, but Also, you know, you're a general or, you know, like reproductive in terms of menstruation, like that is like there's so much richness in what the these this area of the body does for us that talking about it without shame.

And I think that's kind of why we were both like, we should do a podcast because we I don't think we have a whole lot of shame when you and I are talking.

It's like I'm learning from you. You're learning from me. And it's a really rich conversation. about, you know, your experiences and mine. So I'm just really appreciative that you're open to take this.

Yeah, awesome. Well, one of the phrases that you use is authentic intimacy. So what does that mean to you and how is it different from just like performing sex?

Yeah, for me, authentic intimacy, maybe just breaking down those words, authentic meaning real, like the essential essence of us. And intimacy actually comes from the Latin word.

Intimus, which means the innermost or the most inward part. So I think of that as like the deepest part, like who we are without the mask, who we are without the performance or the pretending, which a lot of us are taught to do.

So authentic intimacy is the deepest part, showing up as me as the deepest part of myself and also simultaneously the most real. and you doing the same.

I love how people break down that word. Have you heard into me see, right? Like into me, you see. Oh yeah, that's awesome. I'm seeing through the masks that, you know, we were, or the conditioning, we could also use the word conditioning, you know, to be a certain way.

Yeah. Have to look a certain way, have to talk a certain way. It's kind of, it goes, it cuts through all of that and goes through deeper, deeper parts.

Yeah, that's awesome.

Authentic Intimacy vs Performance

Yeah, because I think a lot of us do carry some hidden agendas when we are having sex, whether that's pleasing, performing, or just chasing that orgasm.

These can kind of disconnect us from our partners. Can you speak a little more about that? Yeah, I mean, I think because for me, it inherently disconnects me from myself.

And if I'm not connected to myself, then I can't be connected to my partner. Not really, right? Because then who is my partner connecting with? Yeah, yeah.

So I think when we carry those hidden agendas, and I mean, we all do, myself included, it's like I catch myself doing what I think is expected. you know, operative word, think.

So I'm in my head thinking a certain way of how this is supposed to go. Yeah. As opposed to doing what feels good or feeling what I'm experiencing. Instead, I'm like thinking about it, right?

And that's the difference too, between even in the treatment room, facilitating a bodywork session when you're getting a massage or, you know, chiropractic, if you can really feel the pressure, the release, it's less about like, I'm being, she's trying to fix a problem.

It's more like, just connecting me with myself, you know? And so I think intimacy and sexual intimacy is very similar. The more you're in your body feeling as opposed to thinking, the less that performance comes through.

I mean, what's your experience? I mean, does that make sense? Do you feel… Yeah, absolutely. It seems like when you have an agenda, it sort of blocks your ability to really connect with yourself and with your partner because your mind is on, I have to get to this point.

I have to accomplish this thing instead of just letting things sort of blossom naturally. Totally, you might miss the nuance. If I'm like going to the next thing, I'm not fully in receivership or like receiver mode.

If I receive, then how can I experience sensation, whether it's through my eyes, taste, smell, touch. Yeah. So yeah, I think performance implies like a you know, external motivation of some kind.

And I feel like, you know, when you're intimate with somebody, you're just, you're fully immersed in your experience, not like reading off of a script.

Right. You know? Exactly. You are the script. You are the blank page. It's like, you know. Yeah. So if somebody notices that they are maybe caught up in that performing kind of mode, what would be like a gentle first step to kind of bring them back to more presence?

Yeah, I think the gentle first step for me would be, what am I feeling right now? Just asking myself that question. And I don't mean emotion. Like, am I feeling safe?

Am I feeling happy? Am I feeling passionate? That can also kind of get us in our head. But like, what am I feeling with my fingertips? OK, am I feeling the softness of my lover's skin?

Oh, I'm feeling the softness of my lover's skin. or going even deeper into the other senses. What am I smelling right now? Oh, I'm smelling my own perfume.

I'm having a sensation, having an experience. What am I seeing? The five doorways to being embodied are our five senses. So I think that's a way of anchoring in the body really quickly.

And that brings you back to your experience as opposed to just thinking and being the observer of it. That's my sensation. I mean, when do you feel, is that OK if I ask, When do you feel the most embodied where you lose track

of the agenda?

Like, have there been ways that you've gotten to that point where? It's definitely, you know, you want to be just sort of, okay, this is my time to focus on my partner.

This is not, you know, I'm not trying to think about what's going to happen next or what's happened in the past. It's just, this is our time. Yeah. Really incurring to the present moment with your partner.

Right. Right, yeah. And I also find it helps to set an intention before the session begins. My goal here is to bring you as much love and pleasure as possible.

Wow. And sometimes just setting that little intention can make a huge difference. Wow, what a beautiful intention. I don't think I've ever explored voicing tension like that.

I mean, I felt my whole body soften and tear up a little bit. What did you say, pleasure? The most love and pleasure attention that I can give. It hasn't always been like this.

I'm totally guilty of just doing the kind of, I've heard it called like sort of popcorn sex before. It's kind of like you're going through the motions, but your mind is elsewhere.

Maybe you're still stressed or maybe you're thinking about something else and then it's just not fulfilling for either person. Right. Right. So maybe setting the intention, may this be fulfilling for both of us.

Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. Love that. Beautiful. Yeah. And again, just going back to Dr. Leah's book, I realized how much shame there was growing up about sex because we didn't talk about it because it was just sort of this implied thing.

Wow. You know, can you talk about how like inherited sexual shame can show up in the body? Like posture, breath, tone of voice? Sure. Shame implies that there's something wrong, right?

And so when there's something wrong, then things tend to go away or numb out or high or kind of collapse.

Presence, Intention, and Embodiment

So I often see it as a disconnect. It shows up as like just disconnection in the anatomy and the body, almost like a vacancy, you know, a void of aliveness.

Now, one thing I want, I'm working on the pelvis and the pelvic bowl. I often ask like, who lives here? If there was an intelligence that lives in your pelvic bowl, how would they show up?

And then it's almost like the anatomy italicizes. It's like, oh wait, somebody's listening to me? And so then things start to unfurl a little bit. So yeah, I would say a general disconnect.

Shame disconnects us immediately from who we truly are. So yeah, and then posture wise, you know, like that collapse, you know, you could kind of see the head carried forward or kind of tucking the tail, you know, like a tucked tail pelvis, where we kind of lack that lordotic curve in the low back.

definitely can be a sign of shame, deeply inherited shame in the body. And also I see it so many times because I am fortunate to treat families. So I treat them, sometimes multi-generations, right?

And the kids of the parents that I treat oftentimes will come in with the same very similar posture and they'll walk, you know, very similar to how their parents walk.

And then sure enough, I'll, you know, coach the parents on proper body mechanics and we don't really even have to have a discussion with the kids because the kids are just constantly watching their parents, yeah, listen to me

and how they move.

And so sure, I believe that, you know, if my mom, you know, is kind of disembodied in her pelvis, walk the top tail, I might have learned to do the same, the same thing, you know, just from mirroring and watching and kind of modeling after our care, right?

So it's really interesting what the body language conveys. Is it 85% of communication is nonverbal? So we're constantly looking and seeing how people are moving.

I think sometimes you can override your anatomy by, you know, okay, what would it be like to walk around without a top tail? And then how does that inform my shame-based abuse or my shame-based conditioning?

You know, it's almost like, you know, you start skipping and you have a bad day. Your friend's like, just skip with me. And you're like, no, I don't want to skip.

That's stupid. And then she makes you do it. And before you know it, your anatomy is making laugh and the movement. So I do think it can be overrobed by, you know, going into those places and changing the body posture.

Do you see that? Like, do you have patients that have had a lot of shame, not necessarily sexual shame, but just shame in general, and you find that there's some issues with muscles on the inside of the pelvic wall?

Maybe they're just not freed up. Maybe they're just kind of stuck to the pelvic wall, things like that. Like, does that happen? Yes, absolutely. I mean, I can most specifically and accurately speak to my own experience that, and I wish not to project that on my clients or my patients, although I have seen it.

I've seen it very often, but definitely my own experience of not even knowing that there were muscles there. I did have the pelvic work, it felt like no man's land.

I was like, even with all my background in anatomy, you know, learning that there are muscles there, but when I had those muscles accessed in a therapeutic way, not even sexually, but therapeutically, I was really disconnected, really shut down.

It's like my pelvic bowl was playing possum, you know? Because she learned to do that. She learned to go offline. It was safer to go offline. It's almost like muscle atrophy, where it kind of furls in on itself.

We'd be going into a fetal position when they're sad. They've been shamed. Definitely the muscles are listening to that. The muscles are super responsive to that.

And you tell your body the same thing or certain things over and over again, it's eventually going to believe you, even though it's true. Well, they won't.

That's a great point. I do, you know, occasionally some of my patients come in and do express concerns or problems with sexual health. And one of the questions I always ask is, well, how often are you having sex?

Because if we're only having sex once every couple of weeks, once a month and whatever, it's sort of like trying to go to the gym once a week or once a month or once every couple of weeks.

It's just, you're not going to get as good of results as if you were doing this more on a consistent basis. It's sort of like you got to use the equipment in order to keep it in good working order.

You can't just ignore it for months on end and then just expect to just jump right back in. You know, these things like they do, they atrophy. And then of course, as we get older in life with hormonal changes and everything else, that just exacerbates the problem.

Yes. It's even more important as we get into later life. And maybe that's why nature has made women have their

sexual prime in their fifties, you know?

Maybe that's sort of like… Yeah. I don't know. Yes, but we're just going to go for it and focus on us, you know? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Shame, Pelvic Health, and Body Awareness

Wow. That's such a good analogy. I love that. As you were sharing, I'm kind of like, it's like digestion too. If you're not chewing your food properly or even eating regularly, you know, your digestion can also go offline or it's like you need to eat regularly too.

And I think sex is no different. I mean, everybody has a different sexual appetite. But really, there's so many health benefits in having and experiencing sexual pleasure or just the sexual experience.

And if you don't have a partner, too, I think we'll eventually get there. But talking about solo sexual practice, too. I mean, there's really good benefits for that as well.

So if you're not partnered, it's OK, too. It's OK. This conversation is still for you, you know? Yeah, yeah. You've got to know what you like. You've got to explore your body so that you know what you like so that you can then share that with somebody else or not.

You know, you can stay doing the solo thing, but yeah. Let's talk a little bit about the regulation of the nervous system and how sex really helps with that.

Yeah. Well, we are, you know, social creatures by nature, right, in our personal neurobiology. it shows us that we co-regulate with each other. You're in a peaceful state and I'm feeling a little anxious, but I get around you.

Most likely, you're going to help me co-regulate. I choose it. I choose it with you. Sex, it's multiple levels because you have the physical aspect where you are feeling contact with another person.

You are in close proximity where you're feeling The other person's heartbeat maybe, you know, you're you're feeling the electricity of the skin, right?

Our bodies are electric So I think it's almost like it can be attunement like on steroids where it's not just you know, we're we're sitting and eye gazing, we are experiencing, ideally, we're experiencing pleasure alongside each other and with each other.

And that is really co-regulating to the nervous system along with, you know, sending those really good, feel-good hormones, you know, oxygen, serotonin, dopamine.

Yeah, it can actually rewire our brains. You know, interactions with others helps us, like positive interactions with others really help wire, we rupture in relationship, we also repair in relationship.

So yeah, it's a beautiful way to consciously build those neurochemical pathways that allow for pleasure, allow for ease and safety. Yeah, with two really aware and intuitive people, you know, are consensual and agreeing.

So yeah, absolutely. Yeah, in this way, intimacy can almost serve as a sort of medicine to help regulate the nervous system. And I think partners should check in sort of before and after to make sure, are we really connected?

Are we really grounded? How are we feeling? Yeah. Just a good check-in. Can you walk us through a 60 to 90 second practice couples can try tonight to shift out of performance and into the connection mode?

And then I'll give you one little idea. Okay. I was so free. I was like, I want to hear your idea. Well, this is something my husband and I learned. We went on a Kama Sutra retreat and it was really awesome because it was all about,

you know, you think about Kama Sutra and sexual positions, but this was more of like just intimate, like connecting more on an intimate level.

And it was all about just really just that deeper connection. And one of the things we would do would be to sit facing each other so that we were really close, like our hearts were really like this far apart.

And just having that intense connection for a few minutes, you know, we can look into each other's eyes, we could put our hearts together. It really makes a huge difference, especially at the beginning of an intimate session.

And I felt like that was a really great thing to do. Love that you're mentioning that and also in the sexual context because I've experienced that in a non-sexual context and it can be really like that's a way to encourage attunement.

Yeah. After this, I have a dear friend coming over and we're going to be going over some health assessment. She's getting her master's in nursing. And I already had the idea because she's like, can we go through, you know, using the otoscope and the ophthalmoscope and just like running through.

And I'm like, okay, before we even do it, we're going to go heart to heart. We're going to eye gaze a little bit. We're going to create a unified field so that we can just flow, right?

So in a way it's like you're doing the prerequisite to establish flow so you can really have that intentionality. Yeah. And I love that. I mean, I guess so much of what we're talking about can be utilized even outside the sexual experience, right?

Like there's so much applicability. I love that. Yeah. And so I guess I'll just kind of piggyback on that in terms of couples that want to experience that.

I love that practice. I would say also just like the eye gazing and holding it for not just 30 seconds, not just 60, but 90 seconds. Yeah. Because that's also been proven to release oxytocin is just eye gazing with your partner and without agenda and just like maybe kind of it'll naturally happen, but at times you'll feel like they're penetrating into you and you're receiving them.

at minute times where your eyes are like going into the soul essentially and they're receiving you. And so I think that really signals safety and connection.

We do so much better as humans, baseline, if we have safety and we have connection, we learn better, we play better. for more intimate, you know. Yeah, safety, you have to have that feeling of like I'm being seen, I'm being heard by my partner because I think so often that can be the root of the problem if people are not having good sex, if they're not having a good relationship.

It's like, do you really feel seen by your partner? If not, why? You know, what is going on? Yeah, I love that.

Nervous System Regulation and Connection

What about for people with like low desire or pain? What body-based steps would you recommend to begin to rebuild capacity and pleasure? I think, yeah, so first of all, if you're having pain, you know, you need to look into why is that?

Is there a vaginal atrophy, meaning like has the tissue in the vagina kind of shriveled because it's lacking hormones, it's lacking moisture, you know, what's going on with that?

Because oftentimes there are medical fixes that we can do for that. And now there's all kinds of laser treatments that you can do. There's the O-Shot.

There's a variety of different things. But I think it also has to start again with that. Am I being seen and heard by my

partner? Do I feel safe? with my partner.

But yeah, so I would look at that. I would look at the physical aspect of it too, like are the hormones tuned up? Is there something mechanical that needs to be addressed?

Beautiful. Yeah, I agree with that. And I wonder too if non-sexual physical touch to start, like, might be a really good way for somebody to build safety with their partner and that desire where, again, kind of going back to what you're saying is there's no agenda, like, can I just massage your shoulders, you know, massage your feet, there's no agenda with this, I just want you to enjoy, you know, or like, just like lightly stroking, like the scalp line and, you know, doing things like that, I feel like relax the nervous system.

Yeah. And then, you know, can facilitate pleasure associated just with touch, doesn't necessarily be, you know, sexual touch. Yeah. And also creating safety in one's environment, like not just like between you and your partner, but like what, like, okay, do we want to, you know, make sure the door is locked or make sure that they see, like, yeah, both of our phones are off.

You know, like how can we establish a safe container, you know? Yeah, the set and the setting is really important. Yeah. Make sure you're in a comfortable, safe room or wherever you are.

It could be outside, but you have to feel safe. Yes. You know, that's a huge amount of, you know, what you're going to be feeling during a session is do I feel safe?

How is the lighting, the music? the temperature, it all kind of plays into that. Yeah, exactly. We want to light candles. We want to have our pelts around, like what soft cozy things, you know, we have.

And I think also cozy to me, coziness can be an antidote to shame, actually. Like if I'm feeling shame, what is like a greater thing but a warm blanket?

Or, you know, a friend is like feeling down. It's like, yeah, give that person something soft. And same thing, if we can surround ourselves with softness, I think that can also help play into, you know, rebuilding capacity for pleasure.

Again, piecing to the senses, like, you know, you said. And then just to mention like a few, some of the red flags that you might see for, you know, if somebody is having, you know, somebody might need extra help or professional help if they are having pain.

Or, you know, if they've had trauma in the past, that's kind of a whole separate animal, isn't it? Yeah. Yeah. And they might need more professional help with getting over that kind of trauma.

Yeah, I think any trauma, any form of trauma, capital T trauma, little t, that is impacting one's own sexual experience or perception of safety, I definitely think to have a trusted medical practitioner that they can go to to get support.

Persistent pain during sex that doesn't resolve is also a big red flag. You know, there's a difference between having had sex in a while and the muscles are, you know, there might be a little bit of atrophy, but okay, now we're doing it regularly, that pain goes away, as opposed to pain that intensifies or even pain orgasm.

Those are definitely red flags. You want to pay attention to that. Ongoing issues with desire or arousal that, you know, is affecting or causing somebody distress.

I definitely think that's grounds to talk to a sex therapist. you know, kind of train medical professional with that.

Building Safety and Rebuilding Desire

Or even if there's like a significant mismatch in desires or frequency, why not have, you know, why not have a third

party supporting both of you guys that can help get creative, you know, solutions and make sure both parties are heard.

Because I think if, you know, we go about it with curiosity and a safe environment that a therapist should know how to create, then it opens up doors to having both parties be met and feel met.

So I would say those are the first red flags, prominent red flags that come to mind. Yeah. Cool. Well, this has been really, really fun. Are we leaving anything out?

There is one thing that's coming to mind that regarding the pelvic bowl and open sexually down here. Maybe we touched on that on our last podcast, but it's important enough to reiterate it.

I feel the more open we are in our throats, our voice, the more we're ultimately going to have safety, and pleasure in our pelvic bowls, right? So like oftentimes when I'm doing pelvic work on people facilitating, I can't really do that without kind of clearing off and cleaning off that person's needs and their ability to speak their needs.

Because if I'm open here and I'm not open here and I can't speak what I want or what feels good or what doesn't feel good, then that can, it can almost kind of work out of my favor, right?

So I do think, you know, we, I mean, I guess I could speak for myself regarding needs. Needs have been difficult to really have because oftentimes when we have a need, in my experience in the past have been shamed for it or misunderstood or said it's difficult or you know, so I've said it before, I think sharing our needs with somebody is even more intimate than sex.

Yeah, it feels more and you feel more vulnerable because again, I had similar experiences with growing up when you have needs that's almost like you're Shamed for it or you're discounted for it.

You get a lot of negative Attention for having needs for expressing needs. Yeah. Yeah Yeah, so what and go ahead go ahead And when you become a mom raising kids You get so used to putting everyone else's needs ahead of your own You get so used to saying I'm not gonna deal with my needs right now because everyone else is more important I've got to take care of everyone else that it becomes such an ingrained habit.

And it can really shut down your voice and ability to express your needs because you've had so much negative consequences from them in the past. But it can have those unintended consequences of shutting down everything else.

Yes, exactly. Unintended consequences of shutting down everything else, including intimacy, including relationships. So then we learn, okay, at the sake of not speaking my needs, I might still get to have the relationship.

I might still get to have the approval for my parents or for my children or whatever it is. So, I mean, this is just coming through as we're sharing, you know, there's so much that can be said through the voice without even using words.

So, we know certain sounds of pleasure, right? Like, let those come through. Like, that's very affirming. We can also use our voice to, you know, you can, if you have enough comfort with your partner, like you don't even necessarily have to find the words, like let them be sounds, let that come through.

And you can even like play with your partner and be like, hey, sometimes words are difficult for me to say. Instead of saying like, I don't like that, or that doesn't feel good, which I totally encourage people to say.

Can have conversations about that. How would you want, how do you want to hear that? Like your needs around communication. Oh, do you want me to be straight up direct?

But sometimes I think I'm talking about like three different things right now. So let me, let me hone in. You know,

many couples struggle to say this doesn't feel good.

And then without the anticipation of shame or defensiveness, I definitely want to encourage people to be able to say those things to each other and still be held in intimacy and really use those as doors to go deeper.

Okay, well then tell me what you do like. Okay, what do you want more of? Or even after the fact, what would you like more of and what would you prefer less of?

Or, you know, maybe redirecting, redirection instead of rejection. I think it's interesting when I voice my needs, that puts me at the risk of rejection and that also puts the other person at the risk of them feeling rejected that they're not doing a good enough job.

Right, right. All of a sudden you don't want to offend or put them off. Saying that you didn't do a good job. It's not about you doing a good job. It's just how I feel.

Just how I feel. Yeah. And sometimes that can trigger a whole shame response. And then they go into a shame spiral and you're like, wait, I'm still stuck not having my need, you know?

So how to prevent the shame hijack response. Cause I do it too. You know, somebody tells me, I don't like that. You just instantly go, you know, I wasn't doing a good enough job.

Okay. Well, what do you buy that? Tell me more, you know, and yeah, we can do that in the bedroom. Oh my gosh. How wonderful would that be to do that in life?

You know, I like how you do it this way. This is, this makes me feel uncomfortable or I really, really like when you do this, you know, this, I just can't relax into.

You know, using words like that, I think, are really helpful. And just opening up those non-judgmental conversations. Like, if you knew that I wasn't going to feel any shame about, you know, how you experienced that, you know, what feedback would you give me?

And then through that, looking for creative ways to connect and also remembering you're both on the same team. You're on team pleasure. You want that pleasure for both y'all.

And then this also brings up, I think I might have mentioned it before, but conflict, you know, kind of being on the other side of intimacy, can't really talk about intimacy without bringing up conflict.

Needs, Communication, and Conflict

Because the deeper you go inside of somebody, the innermost layers, In intimacy, it is going to bring up, and I say conflict, not like throwing plates and you're upset at each other and you're yelling, but just like a conflict of, I don't like that.

Or that kind of place in you where you might have not been able to voice that and you're internally conflicted. So how can we hold the conflict or how can we hold the, you know, whether it's a power differential or whether it's, you know, being able, being conflicted about somebody's needs or your own needs, how can we hold that?

And how can we still hold each other and high five at the end? You know, I've been doing jiu-jitsu a lot. And one of the things I love about jiu-jitsu is it's conflict.

I mean, it is conflict at its finest. We are conflicting over who's going to tap each other first. And then when you tap, it's saying, Hey, I'm done. And it's a light tap.

And it's just, that's too much that immediately the person goes, okay. You know, okay. You need to continue to keep rolling. You don't even skip a beat.

It's not like, Oh, you tapped. How could you have tapped? Yeah. Yeah. I took you there. Okay, thanks for letting me know. Took you to your edge. So anyway, I guess just being comfortable with conflict.

Yes. How do you navigate conflict? That also helps us be more robust in expressing our needs and being okay with them. In the past, we were taught that that might have meant conflict.

It doesn't happen anymore. The Kama Sutra training, they called it a love stop. Okay, like if something is happening and all of a sudden you're getting maybe defensive, if you're getting upset about something, you're just like, okay, let's just do a little love stop.

This is what I'm experiencing from what you said or what you did. And this is why it's making me uncomfortable. I love that languaging. I think a lot of this is so much, especially if you grow up with not talking about sex at all, you just don't have the language to talk about your needs or what you like, what you don't like.

It's like, what? There's like, I can say what I like. You know? Yeah. I really encourage a lot of times my clients just to walk around the house, even when they're by themselves and just say, I have needs too, you know?

I have needs too. I have to say that to myself because it's a loving way to like recover that we have needs and it's okay. And even like, I love listing the needs too.

Like, and I'm not talking necessarily survival basic needs. I'm talking emotional needs. Yes. You need to feel important. I even feel cherished. I even need to feel listened to.

None of those are wrong, right? But sometimes we harbor our own shame around having those needs. And so if we can, you know, like oftentimes with my clients, I'm like, needs are my love language.

If they tell me that they're cold and they need a blanket, I'm like, oh my God, thank you so much for trusting me with that information. Because I know how hard it is to say, hey, or I need more pressure or I need less pressure.

Oh my God. Thank you. Can we just take a minute to celebrate that you've expressed your need? Like it's riveting for me because I know it takes trust.

It's trust for you to tell me what you need. Yeah. Honor it. Yeah. That's awesome. Yeah. It's really great. Well, I guess one last note on orgasm, pleasure, and reframing goals.

Yeah. Love it. Yeah. So if orgasm has become sort of a scoreboard, how do we redefine a successful sexual encounter so both people relax and feel met?

Okay, we're saving the best for last. I love this because it is about the orgasm, right? Like, I don't achieve orgasm or, you know, the scoreboard analogy is so great.

And well, okay, what is orgasm? Orgasm in itself is a release. It's a climax, but it's a release. It's a letting go. Even the French word that they use for orgasm, right?

Le petit mort. Yeah, tiny death. A little death. Yeah, a little death. And then reverse. It's like a complete emptying of oneself, right? So like, I think just like framing why we go after it or why we achieve that, want to achieve that is ultimately so much of our, our lives are like the opposite of release.

It's like, hold back. So, okay, let's honor that. Maybe that's why we go for it on some level and why we fixate around it. But I also like wonder if we could incorporate like orgasm side quests.

side quest of release. How can I experience release with my partner in other ways, just to take the pressure off? Because it kind of primes the pump. So I can release through my voice.

I can release, we release through our sweat. We can release through muscle release as you know I might be

grabbing or squeezing my partner or they're squeezing me.

I can feel the blood flow like releasing from my muscles through that pressure or that impact. During sex we can release through laughter. we can release through tears.

You know, I think all of that nuance is totally missed, but that's like the fertile ground for possible orgasm. Because I don't want to take orgasm completely off the table because it's so great and everybody deserves to orgasm.

But if we had these side quests, I think the pressure would be kind of taken off or if we really enhanced different forms of release with our partner and with ourselves.

You know, then it feeds into all of that because I do think that, you know, in terms of cultivating authenticity, it's almost like the orgasm is just one note, you know, of release and one strong note.

Orgasm, Release, and Redefining Success

But what if we were able to play chords at the same time where we're experiencing release on different levels and then also that begs the question of like, what does that look like outside of the bedroom with my partner?

Can I make my partner release in different ways, you know? Because ultimately, I do think that is relieving to our nervous systems, our body, our chemistry, and it does build, it builds a lot of connection, trust, and satisfaction.

Well, yeah, I think how I define a sexual encounter, and I would love to know what your definition of a sexual successful encounter would be, is Yeah, I love to use the words where we both feel met, but what does that mean?

I met, I love to feel met at my edges of intimacy. So at the depth, like how deep can I go within myself and how deep can I take that other person to themselves?

Like it's almost like that infinity, right? Where you're both experiencing me at a deeper level. Whether it's like a new Kama Sutra position where it is edgy and it's horrible.

And you're like, okay, we're doing this together. Wow, I didn't know. I didn't know I could experience pleasure in this way. Or it's, yeah, like being brought to a feeling that maybe I haven't experienced in my body before.

And it doesn't have to be a climax. It could just be, you know, profound pleasure. I guess where we both feel met and fulfilled in a way that, not fulfilled by each other, but the experience of ourselves is what's fulfilling alongside each other.

Yeah. I always feel like it's sort of an exchange of energy. It's like when we hit this point and we're exchanging our energy and it revs up our energy, it sort of like recharges our batteries.

You know, we can go through the week and just be like, Kind of like, you know, life is kind of just getting us down and then we have this incredible intimate session and I feel like the batteries have just been recharged.

Love that. A life-giving experience. Yeah. Yeah. It's not always about the orgasm, you know, I mean that, you know, that's usually happens, but it's not.

It's been around one moment. Yeah, yeah, it's definitely more about that really intimate connection on that emotional feeling kind of level. Yeah, I love that where it's almost like a circuit where you're recharging each of those batteries.

Like, yeah, that makes sense even on a nervous system level that the two halves of the nervous system are interfacing in a way that's very attuned. Yeah.

Love that. Awesome. Well, Dr. Maria, thank you so much for joining us on the functional edge. I can't tell you what

a pleasure it's been. If any of you found value in what you heard, don't forget to hit the subscribe button and share the podcast with somebody who needs it and leave a review.

It's the best way to support our mission of bringing powerful health solutions to more people. I'll put some references in the show notes for everyone, including Dr.

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