

**0:00:01.6 Nicole Antoinette:** I'm Nicole Antoinette, and this is Real Talk Radio, a podcast filled with honest conversations about everything. Hi, friends. Hello, hello, welcome. I'm very excited to introduce you to today's guest, James-Olivia Chu Hillman, who I've been learning from for the past couple of months now, first on Instagram, and then honestly, over and over again in this conversation. You will likely hear the points in this conversation where I basically turn into the mind-blown emoji, like the little emoji where the top of their head is just flying off in wonder. [chuckle] That's me in this conversation in the best way. James-Olivia, if you don't know them, self-describes as a facilitator and enthusiastic advocate of necessary, uncomfortable and life-changing conversations, which that sounds exactly like what we love to do here at Real Talk Radio, right?

**0:00:53.5 NA:** Yes, that is exactly why I invited them on the show. Our conversation is filled with good squirmy questions, the kinds of questions that maybe don't have easy answers, and we talk particularly about what it means to be in right relationship with ourselves and others, and what can be gained by practicing meaningful disobedience. I really hope that you enjoy listening, that it makes you think, that you learn something. I'm grateful that you're here, and I'm extra grateful, a huge shoutout, to the people in our Patreon community. There are over 400 of you in there, and your choice to fund this show with \$5 or more each month is what allows me to keep making new episodes. It allows me to have a transcript for each episode now and to pay each guest for the time, energy, love, expertise and honesty that they bring here for us.

**0:01:45.1 NA:** You've probably heard me say this before, I've said it a lot of times, that I believe that the way that we spend our money, how and where we spend our money is a real-time vote for the kind of world that we wanna live in, the kind of content that we wanna see and what we wanna contribute to. And each person who joins our sliding scale Patreon community here is saying loudly and proudly that they wanna help build a world that's filled with more honest and nuanced conversations, because that is exactly what I aim to do in this show and with all of my work. So you can find our community at [patreon.com/NicoleAntoinette](https://patreon.com/NicoleAntoinette). We do a lot more there that isn't even related to the podcast. There is bonus content, there are our live end-of-month journaling circles for end-of-month reflection and community, lots of good stuff. So come on over, poke around a bit, join us for a few months, come to the live events, check it out, see how you like it. We would love to have you. And now on to the show.

[music]

**0:02:49.5 NA:** Alright, we are rolling. James-Olivia, welcome to the show.

**0:02:53.1 James-Olivia Chu Hillman:** Thank you so much for having me, Nicole. Do you even go by Nicole? We don't know each other. This is our very first conversation, so this is super fun.

**0:03:02.1 NA:** This is our very first conversation. I get that question a lot for people who I predominantly know them on Instagram, because my Instagram is Nic.Antoinette, that was mostly just because NicoleAntoinette was too long. So yes, pretty much everyone in my life calls me Nicole, except people who know me from the long-distance hiking, through-hiking community,

where folks often tend to have trail names that are given to them by other people on trail. My trail name is Tinker Bell or Tink for short, so that's what my partner calls me because he and I met on trail, actually.

**0:03:35.4 JH:** Okay, this is so much fun to learn about you right off the bat.

**0:03:40.7 NA:** I know. So, yes, Nicole or Tinker Bell, I guess, but yeah. Yes, I love the opportunity to have a real first point of contact with someone be recorded on a podcast. I think it's a really neat and strange and very like 2020-2021 way to get to know someone. So I'm glad that you agreed to do this. Thank you, thank you.

**0:04:01.7 JH:** Thank you.

**0:04:04.0 NA:** So here's where I would love to start. Drop me into your real life in terms of coping mechanisms, self-soothing. Basically, what's helping you get by right now? What's working for you?

**0:04:18.2 JH:** I knit. I knit a lot and I... Oh God, this could be a lot of things. The more embarrassing stuff is I eat and play video games on my phone, and the more wholesome stuff is, my partner is very, very sweet and affectionate, and we touch each other a lot just in passing, and that's... I find that very, very soothing. And also we have a dog, and so I touch my dog a lot in passing. I find it very soothing, she's less soothed by it, I think, because she's really independent and she's like, "Why are you always touching me?" But when you say coping, coping with what? I think I have different coping mechanisms for different things.

**0:05:11.4 NA:** Yeah, I don't know that I had a specific type of coping in mind, maybe intentionally a vague question, but the answers you already gave, it's... I'm just interested in what people find soothing and what helps them regulate.

**0:05:26.4 JH:** Yeah, it's so funny, I think that this is a... Oh wow, I love this question 'cause I'm thinking about the way that the medicine and the poison are the same thing, just depending on the dose. And so my phone is a really big tool for me for self-soothing and self-regulating, and also it can be very dysregulating in too big of a dose. All the apps and the scrolls and the way that I pay attention to it. And just like food for me can be very, very comforting, emotionally soothing and also nourishing, and also I can get out of control with it. I can hyper-fixate on things and get a bit obsessive and forget that I have a life outside whatever it is I'm doing in the moment. So I think it might be a dose and regulation thing.

**0:06:36.8 NA:** Yeah, specifically with the phone, because, spoiler alert, you're not the only one that that is true for, what does that look like? Do you have any set either boundaries or practices around that? Or is it more of just a continual returning to center of, "Oh, this is gone from the medicine to the poison. It's time to put this down"? Is there anything that you do intentionally to have it be more medicine than poison?

**0:07:07.1 JH:** The timing of this question is really wonderful because I'm not super embarrassed by the answer now, and I would've been four days ago. I don't have that mechanism of like, "Oh, this is turning from medicine to poison." I don't have that sort of self-modulating thing. And so I was on my phone in the middle of the night, and my partner texted me a news article about blue light and sleep and health issues and phones, and I was like, "Okay, I am getting the hint." And so about four days ago, I started sleeping with my phone in a different room, and so that's a boundary that I have with it now. It's like I go to bed and if I want to read something... I use the excuse, "Oh, I'll just read something on my phone," and what I end up reading is not really reading, it's scrolling or playing or distracting or indulging in too much news. So yeah, just not even having it in the same room when I'm supposed to be asleep, or when I want to be asleep, or I want to be attending to something or someone else.

**0:08:27.6 NA:** Yeah, the difference that I feel when my phone is within sight of me and when it's not, and obviously they've done studies on this, I'm not sharing anything that people probably don't already know, but is really wild. I've noticed it particularly with writing. If I am sitting down to have what I hope will be a deep and focused writing session, if my phone is anywhere on the desk or the table or anything near me, even if nothing's happening, if it's not lighting up, if I'm not reaching for it, there's just sort of like an awareness that it's there and that doing things on the phone would feel easier than sitting at the blank page. And so I have found either moving it to a different room or putting it behind me where I can't see it. And at first it was very, "Okay, Nicole, what's wrong with you that you have to micromanage it in this way?" And finally realized literally nothing. We do whatever we have to do to get by.

**0:09:21.5 JH:** [chuckle] Yeah, that's a really... I love that perspective on it. Like, "I'm not a problem. Whatever I'm drawn to, I'm not a problem. I can just work a process around this and the process can fix it. I don't have to fix me."

**0:09:38.8 NA:** Yeah, which I would like to say that that is always my approach to things, but it's definitely not. That idea of compassion is really a continual practice. Actually, that makes me wanna ask you, a phrase that I have seen come up in your work multiple times is relentless compassion, and I'd love to ask you about that, maybe to share more about what that actually means and looks like for you. 'Cause I think just... I guess some context on the question, compassion to me is one of those words that we do and don't know what it means. It's a really big word. It's like love. What does love look like? It might be really different for you than for me than for somebody else, and so this idea of relentless compassion is really interesting to me, and I'd love to hear about what that means for you.

**0:10:25.3 JH:** I'm so curious about where in my work you've seen this, because that might be old stuff. I don't know that I've used the word compassion recently, because I don't know what it means.

**0:10:35.3 NA:** Interesting. Yeah, I think it was... I did kind of a deep dive on your website, so whether it was in a product offering or there were a couple of places where I saw that phrase come up.

**0:10:45.5 JH:** Oh, wild, I need to update my website.

[laughter]

**0:10:49.1 NA:** There you go. You're welcome.

**0:10:50.3 JH:** Thank you. That's so funny. So I guess what I'm thinking about compassion now is I don't know how to separate that from how we think of sympathy, and I'm not interested in sympathy. Not to say that I'm not interested in compassion or that they're the exact same thing. I think there's definitely nuance there, but I'm more interested in regard. And there's something about both compassion and sympathy that feels like it requires... Well, one, it requires suffering. It requires someone's suffering for us to meet them there, and I don't know that suffering is required. I don't want to always meet people in suffering. I want to meet people in their ability, I wanna meet people in their like... I'm gonna use a word that's kind of weird, but where they are powerful, where they're capable and competent and able.

**0:12:10.2 JH:** And that's not to say that that's the only place I wanna meet people or that I don't want to have compassion for people, but I don't want that to be the focus of like, Oh, the only way that I can meet you relentlessly, I'm gonna go for your pain or where it hurts the most and where you're suffering. That's not to say that I don't like to go for pain too, 'cause I like that. But I just think there's more. In the full spectrum of being a human, there is much more than our suffering.

**0:12:43.6 NA:** Yeah, what does it look like then to hold space for the suffering, but to maybe not use that as the North Star of where you're meeting people?

**0:12:57.4 JH:** Oh, I'm not even sure I understand the question.

**0:13:04.7 NA:** So I think your answer was really interesting, focusing on ability and meeting people where they're powerful and everything that you just said, and I think it's such an interesting example of the both/and. Because it's not like either you are suffering and I meet you there, or you're feeling great and powerful and I meet you there. This idea of wholeness is most of us are both of those a lot of the time, in different ways. And so I guess... And maybe there is no answer, maybe this isn't the right question, but what is it... It sounds like you're consciously not focusing on the suffering, and I guess I just wonder how that works.

**0:13:46.1 JH:** I think... Okay, thank you for the both/and bit, 'cause that really helps me frame it up for myself in my mind. I think it means meeting them... For me, meeting people in curiosity and not assumption about whether they're in suffering or in power, not that those two things are diametrically opposed, but not making assumptions about who and what and where people are, but finding the questions in me that want to know them better. They might be in suffering and I don't want to assume that they're not, and so maybe that's where the relentless compassion comes in, and more so the relentless regard of, "And if that's not where they are, am I open to understanding them and knowing them in the fullness of what they are?" Whatever that is. If they are all about the suffering right now, can I set aside my... Even my assumption that like, "Hey, as a full spectrum,

whole human being, there's more to you than this," and if they're like, "No, there isn't," then meeting them there.

**0:15:02.3 NA:** Yeah, that part about going in without assumptions, it's almost like the blank... Curiosity as a blank slate. Yeah, that's super interesting. So that word regard that you used a couple of times, can you say more about what that means to you? Or what you mean when you say that?

**0:15:17.6 JH:** At its most literal, I'm gonna say consideration. And that is, I think, coming back to what we were just talking about, like consideration for what actually is so. And... Oh, okay, so Katie Meadows says... Uses a different word for it: Prizing. And I love that.

**0:15:48.5 NA:** Prizing. I don't know that I ever heard that before.

**0:15:51.9 JH:** Yeah. So not just consideration, but honoring, deeply, deep consideration. Profound consideration. Prizing.

**0:16:03.6 NA:** Yeah, for wherever people are and what's true for them. Yeah, this is so interesting. Something else that I wanted to ask you to maybe set the scene a little bit, in your bio you share that you have a passion for asking questions that make us squirm a bit, which first of all, that's just great languaging and can very relate to that. What's a question that's been making you squirm lately in your own life?

**0:16:31.0 JH:** Oh, it's been the same question for several years. That's... I don't love to admit it. It's like it's one of those questions that I don't know I will ever have the answer to, because I talk about right relationship all the fucking time. And then the question for me is always like, "Okay, well, what is that right now? What does that mean? What is right relationship with..." This is so funny, a question popped up from two years ago in my Facebook memories today, and it was, What does it mean to be in right relationship with people and systems and institutions that seek to oppress us? And that is a question that makes me squirm constantly. Like, what does it mean for me to be in right relationship with people or institutions or systems that actively benefit from harming me? And also, what does it mean for me to be in right relationship with these same systems and institutions where I benefit from the harm of other people? That makes me squirm all the time.

**0:17:47.4 NA:** Yeah. The squirmiest questions, I think, are the ones that there isn't a neat and clean answer to. Yeah, when I was reflecting on that, knowing we were gonna have this conversation, a squirmy question for me, I was gonna say lately, but I think not lately, always, is the question of, I guess, a two-part question, do I wanna actually be a good person, or do I just want people to think that I'm a good person? But then what even is a good person? And that for me is a very squirmy question.

**0:18:17.1 JH:** You know, I run this thing called disobedience school, and I love the question about what it means to be good, and I also don't care.

**0:18:32.8 NA:** Okay, say more.

**0:18:35.6 JH:** The question about what it means to be good brings up other questions for me, like, who determines what good is? And in what context is this good?

**0:18:50.0 NA:** And then is that even a model that we want to follow? But that's why I think it's a squirmy question, because it brings up for me just so much social conditioning, and what does it mean to let go of maybe a more mainstream narrative of goodness? And how do I allow a less binary lens where it's not you are either good or bad, which I don't think is ever true, there's some wholeness that encompasses all of that and... Yeah, I'm interested in that. So the disobedience school that you mentioned, disobedience as a topic is something that I wanted to talk to you about, that and right relationship, which you already mentioned. But perhaps we can start with disobedience. Can you tell me how you got interested in that as a topic or what made you wanna develop a program around it?

**0:19:40.9 JH:** Specifically, disobedience school was born of people coming to my other program, Regard, and I was not getting what I wanted out of those conversations. I wanted to have really, really deep dive conversations about right relationship. What does it mean? And I think people would come in with this idea of the binary of right relationship and wrong relationship versus... Or having this idea of there's one right way to be in right relationship. And a lot of folks would come in with these ideas of wanting to be a good person. And I don't care. Not because I don't care about people getting what they want or being the person they want to be, but I don't have... I don't care about other people's goodness.

**0:20:44.9 JH:** And it became a conversation that came up over and over. It's like, Okay, you really wanna be good, and I don't really care about that. Can we have a different conversation? 'Cause we're not having a conversation about right relationship, we're having a conversation about your conditioning. And if you can't show up as yourself in a relationship, it's gonna be so hard to be in right relationship 'cause you're not there. Like, who's in this relationship?

**0:21:18.4 NA:** Yeah, meaning if it's your conditioning that's showing up in the relationship essentially instead of you or as a costume on you, that that is a barrier to intimacy?

**0:21:28.8 JH:** Exactly, yes.

**0:21:31.3 NA:** Okay, yeah. Well, then I wonder, it seems to me that part of the process of getting in right relationship, which I definitely wanna talk more about, is addressing the conditioning and maybe it is the desire for goodness that acts as an obstacle to that. Yeah, that's interesting. So then maybe pivoting to this idea of right relationship, because I think potentially there's folks listening that that's a term that they haven't heard before, will you, I don't know if define it is the right question, but provide some context on what that phrase means to you?

**0:22:10.0 JH:** Yeah, I will definitely not define it, and I will offer some Google-y directions. The Quakers talk a lot about right relationship, right relationship shows up in social justice a lot. And also the Buddhist eight-fold path, talking about different rightnesses, I'll say loosely. That's

probably not the way that anybody would want me to talk about that, but right livelihood, right intention, etcetera. I don't have that there's right relationship and wrong relationship, I don't have it in a binary, and I don't have that there's this one right way to do right relationship or be in relationship. I have, again, questions. So I don't have a definition, I have questions about relationship that point me toward what right relationship is for me. And so those questions are, is there room for you in your relationship with yourself or someone else or whatever it is that you're in a relationship with? Is it just? And by just, I mean is their consideration for everyone? Is there regard? And the other question is, is it sustainable? So given what is happening in this relational ecosystem, can everyone thrive?

**0:23:54.9 NA:** How did you come to those questions?

**0:23:58.5 JH:** Oh, Lord. [chuckle] Slowly and painfully, and with a lot of really great teachers. I would say the first person who pointed me in this direction was probably Desiree Adaway. That was the first time I had heard the phrase right relationship was being in one of her classes. And probably not the first time I'd ever heard it, but the first time it ever landed on me as something really, really important. And since then, I've been digging around in what it means, and those are the questions that I have now. I don't know that they'll always be the questions that I use to point me in the direction of right relationship. I keep refining, I keep learning what it is that I'm saying with my words. And it's not always accurate, it's not always precise. So it's in progress right now. I'm in progress.

**0:25:00.1 NA:** And I think we always are. There's not necessarily a finish line of like, These are the ultimate most perfect questions. You will never need to ask any other questions. I don't know that that place exists.

**0:25:13.7 JH:** Oh, but I really want it to. Okay. [chuckle]

**0:25:16.3 NA:** Same. I know. Same. I take it back. It exists. We'll get there. It's like three days away. Don't worry, it's coming.

**0:25:19.0 JH:** Thank you.

**0:25:23.3 NA:** So I'd love to hear, maybe you can ground this a little bit in any personal stories that you wanna share of maybe it's your relationship with yourself or relationships with others, or like you said, relationships with institutions or systems, it sounds like there was a turning point for you where this concept really started to land and where you started to unpack and look at this more for yourself. I'm interested in the what's next or what does it actually look like in real life to do this work?

**0:25:57.2 JH:** Which work?

**0:25:57.7 NA:** The work of asking yourself the questions that you posed. Is there room for you in this relationship? Is it just? Is it sustainable? So you ask... It's sort of like you ask the questions, and

then what? I'm hoping maybe you can, I don't know, this might be a silly ask, but take it through the arc of an example. 'Cause I find that sometimes with topics like this that are big and juicy and can potentially stay a little bit above the head or a little bit, for me anyway, over-intellectualized, I find that it's really helpful to have examples of what that actually was like for you to either evaluate or change or evolve a particular relationship based on these questions. Does that make sense?

**0:26:41.1 JH:** Well, I think the first most obvious example to me probably looked like... Oh, there are so many and they all involve disobedience. This is the thing. One of them looked like divorce. Like, Oh, this is not just. There is not consideration and regard and prizing of everyone in this relationship. I'm not prizing everyone in this relationship, including myself. It has looked like leaving a religion that I grew up in. I was raised Southern Baptist, both of my grandfathers were Baptist ministers. And I knew as a teenager that that was not my spiritual path or any... There was no devotion there for me. That has looked like leaving a corporate job, and then returning to it and then leaving it again, and then returning and then leaving for good. I don't know that there are very many relationships we have where it's so easy, where the stakes are high and it's easy to see like, Oh, I recognize that this is not right relationship, and so I'm going to change it. I think it comes in little revelations and little decisions, a lot of times. The big ones are very, very impactful, like getting a divorce or leaving a career, but I think we often get there in slow and uncomfortable ways.

**0:28:32.6 NA:** Well, yeah, particularly things... I'm divorced as well. So like divorce, it's easy to talk about it in retrospect of, "And then we got divorced," as if it was this one thing that happened. And I guess in certain ways it is because there is the physical signing of the paperwork and that being finalized, and there's a clear before and after point. On this day you were married and then on this day you weren't. But it was, for me anyway, a very long lead up of many conversations with myself, with him, that it wasn't just a, "Oh, this is not right relationship. Goodbye." That was not the experience that I had, and I can imagine that's the case for most folks.

**0:29:17.7 NA:** But that first question that you shared, "Is there room for you in this relationship?" that phrasing, that wording is not a question that I had ever asked myself. And thinking back, particularly using the divorce example, I think that was a lot of the reason that we uncoupled, was because there wasn't enough room for the truest version of each of us. The amount of compromise that would have been required for us to continue in that partnership, in that shape, it was too much. It was asking for too much change. And the question that we used that helped us get there was, "What would have to be true for you to feel really excited to stay married?" And that led to a really interesting conversation that we realized everything that would have to be true for me was really completely the opposite of everything that would have to be true for him, and it was a very clear way of, "Oh, okay, this version of this relationship is no longer right relationship."

**0:30:22.1 JH:** So you found that what made it... What could make it good for each of you were opposed. Like the criteria were opposed?

**0:30:30.9 NA:** Yeah, and would require the other person to essentially become a different person or abandon more of themselves. That's not ever what I want for someone. I don't want someone to have to abandon themselves to be in relationship with me. That feels very icky and horrible. It

was... And obviously, this is distilled. What I just shared with you is distilled down into a couple of sentences. There were, of course, other factors at play, but that was really the heart of it, was seeing the solution for him is X, the solution for me is Y. Huh, X and Y are not the same letters. Interesting. [chuckle] So that's part of what it looked like for me. But that question of, "Is there room for you?" I think is an incredibly useful question.

**0:31:13.9 JH:** Yeah, even now when I say the questions out loud and I hear them back like, "Is there room for you? Is it just? Is it sustainable?" They're all yes or no questions, and those are kind of like, Oh, okay, well, the answer to some of this or any of these questions might be, no. And then the then what, now part of it, I feel like a lot of what we learn in at least the culture in which I've grown up is disposability. And so it often looks like the now what is, Okay, well, then I want out. And I don't know that I learned a way to get past the yes or no. So even my initial questions, "Yes or no, is their room?" I like to think about them differently than the way that I say them, and perhaps this will be reflected in my new questions going forward, but "How can there be room? How can this be sustainable? How can this be just?" And I think what it sounds like what you got to was the only way that there can be regard for both of us is with distance, because there won't be room if we're in such close proximity as marriage, there won't be room for each of us to be who we are. And so it doesn't necessarily have to become a... Disposability and the uncoupling can be right relationship.

**0:32:57.3 NA:** And that's absolutely what it was for us. It was choosing a container of friendship and a chosen family relationship instead of a domestic, romantic and sexual partnership. And that for us was not easy, but it was simple. Yeah, will you talk a little bit more about what you were just saying about disposability? Because I do think that there is that gut check of, "Okay, so the yes, no, this isn't right for me. Goodbye." And maybe sometimes that is what freedom looks like, or that is what the right path is, I'm certainly not one to tell people what their path is, but what does it look like for you, and maybe you can provide an example, of doing, honoring what's true for you and what your needs are without a perspective of disposability?

**0:33:52.8 JH:** I think I'm still learning this one. I really wish I had a much better, more developed answer to this question. For me right now, it looks like... This is one of the questions that makes me squirm, that I am still learning how to... I'm still learning how to relate to difference that I'm not okay with. And to be competent in the face of that and know that like, Okay, I have the tools I need to be okay, even in a relationship where I don't feel okay all the time. And I think that this is a really big thing, especially for people who have grown up in deep co-dependency or trauma, where you're like, "Oh, I don't necessarily know how to trust myself to be okay in the face of something that doesn't necessarily feel okay." I know we can't see each other, I'm just sitting here staring off into the distance thinking. That's what these long silences are.

**0:35:12.0 NA:** I like that. That's a lovely image, I'm into that. Yes.

**0:35:20.0 JH:** Okay, I am developing an answer to this. Thank you for this question. It's for me right now, learning to befriend myself and trust myself so that I know the difference between feeling threatened and being threatened. And not every difference is a threat. It feels like a threat

sometimes, but often when we have not befriended ourselves, things feel much more threatening than they actually are.

**0:36:03.4 NA:** Yeah. What does it look like for you to become more of a friend to yourself?

**0:36:14.1 JH:** Oh, I'm gonna give away my biggest secret. It's not actually a secret, and it's not that big. It's this exercise that I give to people that I love, and I give it to myself too. It's called "I Want a Pony." I know I just took this into some really silly direction, but the idea of befriending myself to me is listening to what I want, no matter how ridiculous or unreasonable it might be. And that isn't to say that I'm gonna go after everything I want, and I'm also not going to judge it.

**0:37:00.8 NA:** Yeah, even if the thing that you want is a pony? [chuckle]

**0:37:02.4 JH:** Even if the thing is a pony, and I live in an apartment and obviously cannot have a pony. I call it "I Want a Pony", 'cause I think about if you ask a five-year-old what they want, they will tell you the thing that they want, and it doesn't matter if it's not reasonable.

**0:37:21.3 NA:** Right. Like, "I wanna be an astronaut, I'm a princess. I want a pony." Yeah, exactly.

**0:37:26.6 JH:** It's like, there doesn't have to be a logical path to that thing, and they will regard their own want in ways that, as adults, I feel like we get deeply conditioned out of.

**0:37:42.0 NA:** Yeah, I think this is a really interesting little mini left turn in the conversation perhaps, just talking about wants and desires and the practice of not shaming yourself or making yourself wrong for the things that you want. Like you said, maybe you're not gonna run out and do those things, or maybe the part of you that wants it isn't stronger than the part of you that wants the things that you would have to sacrifice to have it, and that's all valid, but leaving room for those desires to exist without judgment. Yeah, that for me has been a lot of unlearning. And still is continual unlearning. Yeah. What do you want right now? What is your pony currently?

**0:38:37.9 JH:** [chuckle] Oh, I want so many things.

**0:38:44.6 NA:** Same. Same.

**0:38:46.7 JH:** I have a long, long list of wants. One of them is... And this may or may not ever happen, and I guess that's the I want a pony part, but I want to be in... I'm gonna use some loaded terminology here. I want to be in good health, and that's not... I am currently able-bodied and very, very privileged and blessed and grateful for that, and also I live in a body that's very uncomfortable for me a lot of the time. So one of my wants is to be comfortable, to not have so much of my energy and attention drawn to physical discomfort, which is luckily not pain. I'm not in pain a lot of my life, and I'm grateful for that, and I'm also uncomfortable. Oh Lord, I want to not judge people so much of my life that takes up a lot of my energy.

**0:39:43.8 NA:** Oh my God, take me with you. Take me with you. Can I tell you that 2020 was the

most judgmental year of my life? I don't know if it was the pandemic or I'm sure it was a combination of a lot of things, but it just... It was not a cute look, I will tell you. There was so much... I would watch myself be so judgmental of other people, of myself, and it was just... Yes, so very much head nodding. Take me along with you on the journey, please.

**0:40:18.9 JH:** I would like to, I would like to take a lot of people along this journey with me. In my same breath where I'm saying I would like to not be so judgmental, I also love judgment. And it's not that I want judgment to go away, I'm starting to understand judgment as... Or the root of judgment as places where I'm not regarding my wants and I'm not picking up my responsibility. And so the more that I regard my wants and the more I engage with my responsibility, the less I have judgment outward.

**0:41:05.5 NA:** Can you give me an example of that? Particularly the responsibility piece.

**0:41:11.2 JH:** Yeah. Let's see, can I? I just said, yeah, and then I sat here and thought about it. Where I tend to have the most judgment pointed outward is where I do not want to look at the responsibility that I'm not picking up for what I care about. And I'm trying to think of an example. Who have I been judging lately? Do I wanna say this in a recorded conversation?

**0:41:46.8 NA:** I was gonna say, you don't have to be that specific if you don't know.

[laughter]

**0:41:55.3 JH:** I'm kind of like... I don't know if I'm actually drawing a blank or if I'm shutting it out so that I don't have to share. Who knows what I'm up to right now?

**0:42:06.7 NA:** Both are valid. I will share for me, a lot of my judgment and anger in the last year was around other people behaving in ways that I didn't think was safe and in service of the collective good. And there's definitely... Just on the whole, I think that that's... I'm not gonna make myself wrong for feeling that way, I think that that's valid. And there's definitely the responsibility piece too, because I'm not perfect, everyone's actions exist on a spectrum, there will always be people who are doing more and less of whatever a given thing is, than me. And so that reframe of where can I pick up my responsibility? What's within my sphere of influence? And not beating my head against the wall of what other people are doing. But yeah, that was how judgment came up most prevalently for me in the last year.

**0:43:08.4 JH:** Okay, so I share that, I share that one. Thank you for that example. And I don't know if you are saying this, so I will throw my... Just project all over this and call this my own judgment. Folks who refuse to wear masks in public, that kind of thing, or refuse to receive information that would possibly change their minds. I don't know that I judge... I want something different, I want people to wear masks, and I also don't know that I'm judging it as hard as I would probably judge or do judge people who are willfully ignorant about public health. And so I guess where those judgments are showing me my own disregarded wants and my own... Like, where I'm not picking up responsibility, I would say overall, I have a judgment of myself that I don't learn enough, know

enough, do enough for the collective.

**0:44:32.0 NA:** Yeah, I share that for myself as well.

**0:44:34.1 JH:** Yeah. And so my external judgment, my like, "You don't know enough, you're not doing enough, you're not learning enough to take care of the collective," is really me not wanting to focus on where I have that for me, where I have a desire to do more, learn more, know more, and I don't engage with that.

**0:45:01.8 NA:** Also, for my experience or from my experience, that sort of righteous indignation or righteous anger, it feels really good at first and then it doesn't, because it doesn't actually get me anywhere. And something... I don't know how much I've communicated this out loud before, so let me see if I can try to articulate this. Something that feels related to what we're talking about, that I've been thinking about in the last couple of months for myself is practicing not mistaking rigidity for safety. So what I mean by that is, there's a part of me that's really drawn to if I do all of these things right then I'm not gonna mess up. Or if I do this, if I have the perfect morning routine, that means that my day is gonna go well. Or if I just operate in these whatever specific ways, whatever this rigidity is, or this formula, that it's gonna keep me safe, it's gonna stop me from getting disappointed, it's gonna stop me from causing harm, all of these things. And that's of course not true, because I make mistakes and cause harm and get disappointed, as we all do. And so it's for me been loosening up around, yeah, not mistaking rigidity for safety. Not if I follow these specific rules, then I'm doing everything right and everything's gonna be fine.

**0:46:22.3 NA:** And I see that echoed in the judgment piece as well, that it's really easy to latch on to something, like you said, like mask wearing, because that is a relatively clear binary, you're either doing it or you're not doing it, that it's easy to feel rigid and right about that. And there's a lot of other things that are a lot more nuanced that I am not necessarily picking up the responsibility for in the way that I would like to. So thank you for providing that clarity for me.

**0:46:49.4 JH:** Oh, okay, I love this. So this is getting into what I really, really, really like exploring, and that's, again, disobedience. There's this certainty of form, there's this idea that I know how to make everything be not shitty. If we follow... If we... And I say we, like, if I follow these rules or if you follow my rules, then we can protect ourselves, we can protect everybody from everything bad. And the how becomes more important than sovereignty, and more important than thought, and more important than relating and responding. And so there actually is even less responsibility there. It's like, I can discharge some of my own responsibility. I don't have to respond if you're obeying the rules and there's certainty there, there's nothing for me to respond to.

**0:48:00.5 NA:** Yeah. And maybe this is widening the lens a bit, I wanna follow that thread of disobedience 'cause you just circled back to it, and this can be related to anything we've already talked about or something totally different. Can you share some ways that you feel like you have been meaningfully disobedient?

**0:48:26.5 JH:** I hold that inquiry is the first disobedience, that questioning authority, questioning

the rules, questioning the context and systems and these certainties of form, that that is in and of itself a disobedient act. And so for me, asking these questions like, "Okay, who's in charge here? What does this mean? What do I want? What do you want? Who are you?" These are disobedient ways of being. And I think relating to people as they are is ridiculously disobedient in these contexts where we are supposed to... And I say supposed to, should, whatever... Where we think we should know one another based on whatever external signifiers we get, like race, class, gender, ability, size, citizenship. All these things, all these identities and identifiers that should tell us about each other to relate with folks as they are and as who they actually are beyond those things, it is disobedient to the systems that we participate in to not assume that we know people and treat them based on our assumptions and ourselves too.

**0:50:23.3 NA:** Yeah, I was gonna say that I think that everything you just said applies also to the relationship with the self.

**0:50:28.8 JH:** Yes, yes, yes, yes. And so there are so many... I run in this coach-y world, and there are so many coaches who are teaching and coaching people on worthiness and belonging and going after what you want and confidence and etcetera, and for the most part, who are they coaching? They're coaching women and non-binary folks. And they're not... The worthiness and belonging circle of coaches is really, really focused on... It's really gender-specific. Not cis men. And so when we're looking at how we are taught to make assumptions about worthiness or belonging, that is a very gendered thing, it's a very racialized thing, it's a very... All of these external identifiers come into play. And so to question, "Is that true? Is it true that gender actually means this much about who's worthy?" Well, under patriarchy, it is. But really, is it? I might be rambling right now. Got off on a little bit of a...

**0:52:03.8 NA:** No, I'm into it. I know we said this at the top of the conversation, that this is really our first non-Instagram, non-email experience of each other, and I am finding that I could just listen to you talk about stuff indefinitely. I just looked at a clock and I'm like, "I want much more time. Just keep talking, your brain is fascinating to me." Just much head nodding. Yeah, I love this idea of disobedience, meaningful disobedience. I know I said that before, but doing it intentionally, doing it on purpose, starting, like you said, with inquiry. Why? What's happening here? Who benefits from this? All of those kinds of questions. And I think something that... I was just gonna say something that isn't talked about that much, but maybe it's just that I don't talk about it that much and other people do, is both sides of what's gained through this kind of disobedience, and then also what's lost through it, 'cause I think that both exist. And I'm interested if that's something that you would wanna speak to for you, things that you feel like you have gained and lost through living with this lens.

**0:53:21.9 JH:** Oh, hell, yeah. This is such a big part of my inquiry around disobedience, is what are the risks and what are the consequences?

**0:53:35.0 NA:** Exactly.

**0:53:37.8 JH:** And so if we're doing these deep examinations of the rules, what are the rules that I

hold to be true, or what are the rules that I'm following? I don't have that everyone should be disobedient. That's just another rule, that you should disobey. Is just... That would be a weird lens to take on disobedience. But everyone has risks and consequences for every disobedience, and so the risks that I carry into my disobedience might be very, very different from the risk that you would carry for the same disobedience. It's very obvious, I think, in... It's 2021 in the United States where we're having this conversation. I'm assuming. I don't know where you are actually.

**0:54:36.9 NA:** Yes. Yeah, I am in US. Yeah.

**0:54:38.1 JH:** Okay. But it's very clear that... So we're recording this the day after MLK Day. It's January 19th. I know you said it would air in February. But here we are, a couple of weeks after an insurrection at the US Capitol, and we've seen over and over that the risks for disobedience for a group of white people is very, very different than the risk for a much lesser, more restrained disobedience for a group of black people. The risk of disobeying social norms is very, very different for women than it might be for men. It's very different for non-binary people and trans people than it is for cis people. It's very, very different in our legal system for a poor person to commit a similar infraction to a rich person, based on what punishments are meted out or purchased away. So it's not just a matter of like, "Hey, this is unjust. I don't... There's no room for me in this rule. My relationship with this rule is not sustainable, I'm going to break it." It's not like, "Hey, just break every rule." It's, "Am I to break this rule, I will have risks and consequences that are not necessarily unique to me, but not universal. And I get to choose how I want to engage with that." So I know you asked me about me and I kind of skirted it.

**0:56:37.0 JH:** I think I'm trying to still do it. But the risks for me breaking the rule that I was supposed to be in a 9:00 to 5:00 job with health insurance, and that it's scary to start your own business and be an entrepreneur, my risks were heavily mitigated by having tremendous support from my partner, both emotionally and financially. We just have... Oh, you asked what I'd lost, though.

**0:57:15.4 NA:** Yeah, but again, any direction you're going, I'm going with you, so feel free to keep going.

**0:57:21.0 JH:** Every once in a while, I circle back to the real question and realize that I have not answered it, and this happens regularly in my life. I have lost intimacy with people that I really wanted to be close to and grew up being close to. I have lost a sense of belonging with both sides of my family being like a bunch of Baptist ministers. There's a sense of lineage that feels broken. I've lost language. And there are some things that I've lost that I'm happy to lose. Depending on who you ask, what context I'm in, I can be white presenting or not. It all depends on who's looking, whose gaze it is. And the more that I speak about things that I care about, the more I lose a proximity to whiteness or the more that I lose a proximity to certain privileges. And those are also gendered and racialized and wealth-based, and those are... That can be a loss of privilege, and also there's gain and benefit and joy there as well. So it's not an either/or, but things go away, things fall by the wayside. I've lost... In doing this podcast interview with you or other people, I lose a certain amount of privacy. And I'm not famous or anything, but you lose a little bit of privacy. And also, there's the

benefit of speaking truth out loud in public.

**0:59:33.7 NA:** Yeah, it's another example of it's not the either/or, it's the both/and. Some things can just feel like lost, we don't have to silver lining things to make them more comfortable. Something can just be a loss. And I have found things very rarely are 100% loss or 100% gain.

**0:59:51.2 JH:** Yeah, I would say the most important losses for me are relational, that they are the opportunities to be close with people that I would rather enjoy knowing and having more time and opportunity to be with in this lifetime.

**1:00:15.4 NA:** Yeah, and I think about my own examples of that, and pretty much all of the instances that come to mind, what I'm gaining is more right relationship with myself, even if it's losing intimacy or a belonging or those relationships with other people. And sometimes that's worth it and sometimes it's not. I appreciate this focus that you brought up on risk and consequence, and the fact that that's up to everyone to determine for themselves in each of these situations and that, like you said, it's not... You don't exist in a vacuum with this. Your race, your age, your gender, your wealth, all of these different things play a role in how risky or not risky something is gonna be. And potentially that's why it rubs me the wrong way, or where I kind of cringe about times in my past that I have said things like, "Well, I did this so you can too," or anything along those lines.

**1:01:16.7 NA:** And it's the idea that what I really mean is, I changed my life or I made this change, so change is possible, maybe. But it might... Just because someone else has done something, it doesn't mean that I'm gonna be able to do that same thing, and vice versa. So maybe the last question to ask is, when you think about, I don't know, the next couple of months or the year ahead, is there a way that you are hoping to evolve in your disobedience? What do you hope that that looks like for you this year, being disobedient?

**1:01:46.9 JH:** Oh, oh, oh, that's such an exciting question. I don't know if I have an answer. Part of it is... I am this year, my biggest exploration that I'm aware of right now is around responsibility, like how to engage my responsibility, engage with my responsibility. And I don't know if that was at all related to the question. Okay, here's the real answer. Being more and more, and more and more and more and more infinity, self-referred, like less and less to the point of not necessarily not caring, it's not that I want to give zero fucks about what anybody else thinks, I actually do want to attend to my wake in this world, but it feels so disobedient, it seems so disobedient to be one's own authority and to have... This is a wild paradox, to have a deeper, more devoted relationship with spirit seems disobedient to the worldly systems that we're in. And that is the direction that I would like to... Okay, let me just... I am fucking around with the language. Sorry. That is what I want.

**1:03:38.6 NA:** Yeah, I think that's beautiful, and is a good place to wrap up, I think. If you could leave the folks who are listening with maybe... And maybe this is too action-based, but like a call to action based on the conversation, what would that be? Maybe a question to ask themselves. What would you love for folks to do or think about?

**1:04:04.0 JH:** What do you want? I would love for folks to think about what they want.

**1:04:13.0 NA:** What's your pony?

**1:04:14.4 JH:** Yeah. What is that pony? I think that what we desire is so sacred. And that which is sacred will move us toward, I think, a world that I'm more interested in living in.

**1:04:31.2 NA:** Yeah, there's a lot of permission in that, that I feel even personally a little bit of a sense of relief and exhale, even just hearing you say that. So thank you for offering that for me and for everyone. What's the best place for people to say hi to you who are new to you and your work?

**1:04:48.6 JH:** They can go to my website and drop me a note through there. It's [inquisitivehuman.com](http://inquisitivehuman.com). Or I really, really like when people DM me on Instagram, I think it's super fun, or leave comments so that I can have conversations with you and comments in public. So Instagram is Inquisitive Human.

**1:05:10.2 NA:** And I will put links to both of those in the show notes. James-Olivia, thank you so much.

**1:05:14.8 JH:** Thank you, Nicole. I really did not get nearly as nosy as I wanted to be in this conversation, so I hope this is just the first of several.

**1:05:22.9 NA:** Absolutely. Yes.

[music]

**1:05:30.7 NA:** And that's our show for today. Our music is by Adam Day, who also handles our sound editing. Thanks, Adam, you're the best. And a huge thanks as well to every single member of our Patreon community for making this honest conversation, this entire podcast, and so much of my other work, like my twice-weekly personal essay newsletter called Good Question, possible. Your monthly funding allows me to keep creating resources and gatherings for folks who crave honest conversations, both with themselves and others. And I fully believe that these conversations can change our lives, our relationships and our world. To join us, just come on over to [patreon.com/NicoleAntoinette](https://patreon.com/NicoleAntoinette). Our community operates on a shame-free sliding scale, so you can feel good about supporting this work from within your own means. So I'll see you over in the Patreon community, yeah? And until next time, I want you to know three things. First, that you are enough. Second, that you are not alone. And third, that I'm totally rooting for you.

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