

0:00:00.9 Nicole Antoinette: I'm Nicole Antoinette and this is Real Talk Radio, a podcast filled with honest conversations about everything. For today's episode I'm joined by Che Che Luna, whose work and in particular their Instagram dance videos, I am legitimately obsessed with. Just wait until you check them out, you can thank me for the recommendation later. Che Che is a holistic trauma-informed sex and pleasure educator that guides LGBTQIA plus folks back home to their bodies and personal liberation. They are a queer non-binary Latinx professional dancer who finds great joy in embodying sensuality and creating spaces for others to do the same. This conversation dives into pleasure, dancing, masturbation, how to feel present and more. Quick content warning that Che Che mentions sexual trauma at one point, although it's brief, it's not detailed, and they give another content warning right beforehand within the conversation itself. This whole episode made me wanna prioritize pleasure way more in my own everyday life. I've been thinking about it ever since we first had the conversation, and I hope that the same winds up being true for you. But before we dive into that, I would love to take a second to invite you to join our Patreon Community to help me keep making new episodes in the next few months.

0:01:19.4 NA: This is a 100% listener-funded show. You've probably heard me talk about that, I talk about that all the time. And what that means is that we don't have ads or sponsors. So all of our guests get paid and the money to do that, to pay everyone involved, right? So our guests, our sound engineer and me, all of that funding comes entirely from our sliding scale Patreon Community, where folks contribute at whatever level they can from within their means and that keeps the show going. Our Patreon, isn't just a funding source for this podcast though, it is so much more than that. We have a discord community so folks can chat with each other, we have small group virtual hangouts, I host a live reflection and journaling circle on the last Sunday of every month that's so much fun. And then there's a bunch of exclusive content to things both written and audio that I don't release anywhere other than in the Patreon Community. So if you love this show, if you find that you enjoy listening, you wanna take the conversations a little bit deeper and meet some like-minded people, I bet that you would really enjoy our community. And as I said we do operate on a sliding scale, with all tiers getting access to absolutely everything.

0:02:24.0 NA: And you can find us at patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. That's patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. So if you love this work, if it brings value, joy, laughter, opportunities to think into your life, and you have the ability to support what we're doing, even a small amount each month helps so much. So thank you for that, thank you, thank you for just making these honest conversations possible. And now let's dive into today's episode. Alright, here we go. Che Che welcome to the show.

0:03:00.1 Che Che Luna: Thank you. So happy to be here.

0:03:02.0 NA: Your dance videos on Instagram, it's become my favorite thing on that app, so thank you for that.

0:03:09.8 CL: Thank you. That's so sweet of you to say.

0:03:14.1 NA: It changes my whole mood sometimes, so... I don't know. The first thing that I

wanted to ask you is, do you post public playlists anywhere? Ever?

0:03:23.2 CL: I do. I have one public playlist that is called Dance as medicine on Spotify.

0:03:30.7 NA: Okay, well, I will be accessing that immediately after this call. Yep. Okay, that was... That was a very selfish question, so thanks. [chuckle]

0:03:37.1 CL: Perfect.

0:03:39.4 NA: Great. This episode is already a success, excellent. This might be, I don't know, maybe a strange place to start. But I was wondering if you could share potentially some words of encouragement for folks who might feel embarrassed or silly dancing more, because that's definitely a thing that I struggle with that. I'm not a good dancer or it has to look a certain way, and I've had to work to unpack that even when it's just me alone in my bedroom, so I don't know, I thought that would be a place to start potentially.

0:04:12.6 CL: Mm-hmm, yeah. I love that question. I think it's a great place to start. I think I wanna begin by humanizing myself and just sharing that I'm constantly working on how to feel at home in my body. And I think that Instagram can paint this picture of like, I'm always confident, I always feel liberated, I always know how to move, and that's just not my whole truth. And so this question hits home for me, and it's something I'm always asking myself. And then things that I have been landing in as of late are thinking about how our bodies have such somatic intelligence, right? And they know how to tell stories, they know how to unwind if we can give them a safe container to do so. I like to think about how context is really, really important when it comes to movement.

0:05:18.4 CL: Same as within sex. What is the context that allows us to drop into our bodies and land? Whether that's dim lighting or being able to close the door, being able to close our eyes, certain music, adorning ourselves in something. How do we finish the stress response cycle that our bodies are most likely in and be able to take a pause to see, What would help me come back to myself and my physical body. As far as beginning to explore movement, I tend to really like using certain prompts. So one that I use a lot is picking different body parts and exploring what would happen if I let that body part lead. So if I pick my hands, how can I allow my hands to initiate? How can they be in the driver's seat for a moment? And how does the rest of my body ripple and follow that? And I'll kind of shift from fingers to toes, to neck, to tail bone, to even using things that kind of shift and bring a playfulness and using my eyes, using my tongue, using my belly button. That's one of my favorites.

0:06:49.8 NA: I love that, I love the idea of leading with the belly button.

0:06:53.3 CL: Right? [chuckle]

0:06:56.9 NA: No, that's really fun. Tell me a little bit about your sensual dance workshops more specifically, is that something that you ever teach virtually? Or is it in-person only? Again, selfish question.

0:07:07.6 CL: I am actually working on a virtual version of a workshop. I've been really resistant to doing it because after doing years of in-person workshops, the magic that happens, the synergy, I was like, "Oh man, I don't know if I can capture this virtually, I feel nervous about it, I feel like it's not gonna give it what it deserves." And here we are, 2021, where I haven't been able or I haven't chosen to hold the space, surrounded and centered in sensual dance in over a year now, and I'm like, "Okay. Okay Che it's time. Just do your best. Just try this virtually." So I'm gonna be releasing that most likely within... Let's see, by the end of February.

0:07:56.1 NA: Oh okay, so by the time this goes out, it will maybe have just gone up. Well, that's good news for me. Yeah, that question of how to translate an in-person offering to a virtual version is something that I and along with a lot of other people have thought about in the last year, so I'm excited. That's... Will you talk a little bit about what your entrance point was to dance? When did that become something that was really important in your life?

0:08:23.4 CL: Yeah, so I grew up as a competitive gymnast. It was a really intense world to grow up in. There was a lot of beauty in it, and there was also a lot of challenge and trauma that happened in it too. So from the age of three I've been... I was in gymnastics all the way until age 18. It was my life, It was what I did every day. I ended up moving through a lot of injuries by the end of that time. I had fractured my back, I had had multiple knee surgeries, and I was... I had the goal of doing college gymnastics, and my body was like this... I can't keep going, this is too much. And so that's where I made the intentional transition into dance, where I was like, I really want something that allows me to use my body as communication, to be able to continue all the things that felt really good in the world of gymnastics and be able to translate them. And so when I went to college at UCSC is when I started dancing and exploring all different genres, and I will say that as I took classes and learned technique and performed and toured with a contemporary company, I came out of that time almost feeling like I had a lot of work to do to reconnect with, How does my body authentically want to move?

0:10:14.9 CL: 'Cause I had... From gymnastics to performing as a dancer, I had spent so much time shaping my body to be what my teachers wanted it to look like, or to be someone else's choreography. And I had spent very little time exploring how do I actually wanna move and what feels good to me, and what are my body boundaries? And so the last few years I've really been unlearning, doing my best to unlearn some of that technique, some of that perfectionism and be able to really find more of this intuitive flow. And I feel like that has actually been something that has held such a rich healing for me. So I felt like, yeah, I wanted to give a little bit of... Kind of where I'm falling now which is very different than dancing for someone else or for a director or for a choreographer.

0:11:17.4 NA: Yeah, what's one thing that you can name that's helped you with that unlearning and maybe relearning?

0:11:24.1 CL: It's been kind of circling back to your question around, Yeah when people feel silly and are not sure how to move. It's been finding ways that I can be curious with my body. Finding

ways that I can create containers. I can ask questions, How does my heart wanna move today? How would I move if I were embodying my sexuality? How would I move if I were already healed? Kind of coming into these more abstract ways of playing with movement. I'll also share that using elements has been really helpful for me. So being able to embody water versus fire versus earth versus air and... Yeah, those are some of the first things that come to me.

0:12:41.5 NA: Those questions that you posed like, How would my body move if it were already healed? Those are really beautiful questions. Yeah.

0:12:52.5 CL: Yeah. They elicit an emotional response for me, which then it's like, Oh, what happens when I move from more of this centered heart space versus I want to look a certain way?

0:13:10.1 NA: Yeah, or leading... Like you said, leading from yourself as opposed to mimicking or following what someone else is saying you're supposed to be doing with your body. And I think that that's perhaps differently resonant for someone who's not a professional dancer, but still really resonant. That... I feel in what you're saying that that applies to me, even though my circumstance is different.

0:13:34.3 CL: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I'm glad you named that. You know I'm like I feel that it's important to recognize my privilege, right? Being able to take dance classes, being able to grow up as a gymnast, being able to have opportunities to learn technique. And I am coming from that specific place of privilege to where it has informed and shaped my journey of like, Oh how can I be a professional dancer and still feel disconnected to my body?

0:14:15.8 NA: Mm-hmm.

0:14:18.1 CL: Yeah.

0:14:19.0 NA: But that question of feeling disconnected from your body is so much larger than just... Like it's not just answers, right? That experienced that. So I feel like what you're saying, there's a lot of universality in the heart of what you're saying.

0:14:33.8 CL: Yes, so true. That's like what I hear the most with clients I work with, with my community is, "I wanna feel connected to my body."

0:14:43.9 NA: Yeah. Well, you mentioned a little bit ago that part of this unlearning for you has been figuring out what your body boundaries are. Will you say a little bit more about that or maybe give an example?

0:14:56.6 CL: Yeah, I'd love to give a little trigger warning of just mentioning sexual trauma for folks listening, and just be able to weave in that I grew up experiencing sexual trauma as a child. And then also being in these worlds of my body being a vessel of someone else's vision is a lot what it felt like. I had such a lack of body boundaries. Growing up with coaches constantly manipulating my body literally with their hands. Like shifting, moving me, putting me in certain positions. I also

grew up in the era within the gymnastics world that was full of abuse and harm that now is starting to shift, right? And so when I'm talking about body boundaries, I'm really thinking about being able to track myself, being able to track my nervous system, being able to really notice what I have capacity for and what I don't, what feels safe and what doesn't, where I can stretch and where I break. What are these edges of when I start to disassociate versus when I start to get hyper-aroused and kind of enter into that fight, flight, flee response. And how can I work to be caring for my body in a way that I don't have to push, I don't have to go beyond what feels safe for me. And I spent most of my life living very beyond what I think was actually okay for my own pacing in my own body.

0:17:09.6 NA: Mm-hmm, yeah. Yeah, thank you for sharing that. Will you also share when along... Maybe the timeline that you were just talking about with gymnastics and dance, and then maybe a new adoration of dance. Where did the... I don't know if interest is the right word, but in pleasure, in sex education, what was the intersection point there for you?

0:17:34.3 CL: Mm-hmm. That came in when I left for college. Well, I'll backtrack a little bit by sharing that I grew up with a catholic father and was very afraid of my queerness growing up. I knew I was queer, I didn't have representation of what that meant, I just was like... I feel different. I have a lot of crushes on pop stars and authority figures and a lot of fun people in my life. And so that was something that I was like, I'm gonna put this on a bookshelf over here, I don't feel safe to address this. When I left for college, I watched a performance by a company called Flex, not knowing at the time that the members of that company were queer, were self-liberated, were doing so much work within themselves to center their own desire, their own pleasure. When I watched the performance I just remember thinking, I want that. I don't know what that is, I just... I want to feel that.

0:18:54.1 CL: I felt very magnetized watching their movement and watching also how the choreographer had all these different relational dynamics happening that were very fluid, very queer, very polynormative, not following a heteronormative script. And so I felt like I had stars in my eyes. I was just like, "Wow." And fast-forward six months later, I was a member of that company. So I entered that company and there was a period of about five years where I danced with them and I performed and we traveled and they became chosen family, and they taught me so much about who I was and who I was outside of who I was taught to be. I feel like that was where my sexuality really started to intersect with my, this feeling of aliveness, this feeling of, "Oh wow, I want to reclaim this."

0:20:01.7 CL: When I was dancing with that company is when I fell in love with a woman for the first time. And then it's also when I started dating queer folks of all different genders and it was just a really explorative time. And so coming out of that, there was so... I was going through a second puberty, right? It was like, Who am I? What's happening? I have so many questions. I have a lot of that excitement but also fear of feeling like, "Oh, I don't know the identity that I've carried for so long about myself." That was really a driving force for me to enter into the world of sex education and pleasure education and start to initially use that work as self-inquiry, and then start to... When I started to get that like, "Wow, this is information we all deserve." Like, "Wow, this has been so

missing." I started to have such drive and this overflow to share it.

0:21:13.1 NA: There's something so powerful in sharing or making or dedicating yourself in service to creating the thing that younger you would have really wanted. Which isn't exactly what you said, but I feel that in what you're sharing.

0:21:26.8 CL: Absolutely, 100%.

0:21:30.2 NA: Yeah, so I have to tell you knowing that we were gonna be having this conversation, a conversation that you know I assumed would be centered around pleasure, at least somewhat totally changed how I spent my day today. It was like having that in my mind, I took this quiet solo walk in the snow and a really long hot dance party shower with loud awesome music.

0:21:54.8 CL: Yes.

0:21:54.9 NA: Used my favorite almond and vanilla body oil afterwards, I took the time to make a much more elaborate lunch than I otherwise would have done on a work day. So what I'm saying is thank you for inspiring me today. [chuckle]

0:22:04.3 CL: Yeah. Fuck yes. That sounds so delicious. [chuckle]

0:22:07.8 NA: It was really lovely. What's your... What has your own pleasure looked like today?

0:22:15.2 CL: Ooh. I took a really beautiful warm shower. Before my shower I did some dry brushing, which I've really been enjoying lately.

0:22:25.5 NA: Me too.

0:22:25.7 CL: Yeah, I meditated. I ate a yummy breakfast, I did some movement. And here I am.

0:22:36.8 NA: And here you are. Do you have a particular meditation practice or app or what does meditation usually look like for you?

0:22:45.3 CL: I have lately been using the Calm app and also the CHANI app, those have been my two go-to lately. [chuckle]

0:22:54.7 NA: [chuckle] The CHANI app basically, when someone's like, "What do you remember about 2021?" I'm gonna be like the CHANI app, that's what I remember. It's like the best money that I'm spending this year. [chuckle]

0:23:00.5 CL: Right? Right? Life changing. [chuckle] So grateful.

0:23:03.7 NA: [chuckle] It's so good. Yeah, I did one of those too. I did the de-stress one from the little meditation section in the app today. So you and I are having a very similar day. [chuckle]

0:23:12.1 CL: Oh yeah. [chuckle] I'm feeling that. I wanted to really ask quickly or even just name that, I think it's so beautiful the way that you shared how you've been orienting to pleasure today and how there can be that... It's a contagious thing. Sometimes it's like, oh, when we can see other people choosing their pleasure, there's this permission, this urgency. And I also feel that there is this practice of orienting, of... There's always gonna be so many choices and so much to do, but what are those small ways we're orienting to pleasure.

0:23:57.6 NA: Oh yeah, and the reminder that of something that I know to be true, that what I surround myself with particularly content input or... I mentioned in Instagram before, really matters. And in getting in the headspace for this too, like I said, I was rewatching some of your dance videos and particularly, I know it's a short one but the one from inauguration day. And then that song was so good, so then I'm on Spotify listening to that song, having my own little dance party and all because of a very short clip on Instagram. And it's things like that of, oh, what I surround myself with and what... Like you said, what you choose to orient toward. And it's the reminder too that I also got all of the work done today that needed to get done, and sometimes I tell myself this false story that pleasure has to be really put off for later or a pleasure has to take a really long time, or it has to be a whole big thing, and so there was something in their reminder of like, "Oh, you know, I could take a two-minute longer shower and it feels just that much more spacious. I definitely have two minutes in my day."

0:25:00.3 CL: Yes, that. All of that.

0:25:03.8 NA: So let's dig deeper into that a little bit and maybe talk more specifically about building a pleasure practice. I know you shared some of the things that were part of your, I guess, pleasure practice today. But is there anything else around that that you wanna talk about? Especially maybe geared toward folks who are like pleasure practice, what? Question mark, question mark. [chuckle]

0:25:27.3 CL: Yeah. It's such a big conversation. The first thing that comes to mind is Pleasure Activism by Adrienne Maree Brown.

0:25:41.1 NA: Mm-hmm.

0:25:41.7 CL: And also this mantra that I learned from my teacher, one of my OG teachers, Rebecca Kimball, that is, pleasure not pressure. And seeing that we can have these subtle ways of allowing in pleasure, of engaging our senses, of slowing down. That those 1% shifts really change our whole trajectory often. And so I love that you already named this is like I think sometimes we can have this image that, my pleasure needs to be so grand and extravagant and luxurious and yes, that's beautiful but also in the day-to-day and in the busyness of life and all the things we're juggling, sometimes it's just a breath, right? Sometimes it's just staying in the shower two minutes longer, sometimes it's sitting down with my tea with some music on, and those micro-moments being able to allow our bodies to have these moments of calm, of joy. And I do think also about the negativity bias that is a part of our wiring, right? Our evolution of scanning for vigilance, scanning

for danger, especially with the climate we're in. It is effortful and it does take those intentional conscious choices to choose pleasure, to...

0:27:34.0 CL: And even I wanna say that if pleasure feels far away, if pleasure feels inaccessible, I like to be able to use it synonymously with presence. And just asking, How can I bring presence to my current experience? How can I notice the sounds, the smells, the flavors, touch? If being in your body feels overwhelming, How can I notice the support systems around me? The colors, the textures, the sounds and that there's always an opportunity for pleasure or for presence. How did that land for you? Is that making sense?

0:28:20.3 NA: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely, and I appreciate the invitation too if pleasure feels inaccessible, here's another road into that because one of the things that I was curious about and was gonna ask you, and I guess maybe this is a good time for that. It was about any limiting belief that you've had to personally let go of in order to live a more intentionally pleasurable life. And what you just described, the relationship even to the word pleasure, that can be something that's really loaded.

0:28:46.9 CL: It really, really can. Yeah, I had a lot of connection to it being frivolous. I had a lot of guilt around pleasure. I had a lot of connection to selfishness, but that selfishness being a bad thing. It was very binary. It makes me bad. And so starting to dismantle that binary, starting to... I'll be honest and say that in order for me to lean towards pleasure at the beginning of this work was... Not even this work but just this expansion, this healing, it was helpful to have a bit of a meta-view about it. It was helpful to realize that the patriarchy does not want me to choose pleasure, that I'm intentionally being disconnected from this part of my life force in order to purchase products, in order to be complacent, in order to be controlled. There was something about my pleasure being a form of activism and being a form of resistance to the systems of oppression that I was in, that actually allowed me to start practicing it. I actually couldn't quite source it from within at the beginning. And over time and with practice, I've been able to do that more and more. But often, I still come back to the truths of, how can I do the opposite of what capitalism and the patriarchy want me to do in this moment? [chuckle]

0:30:34.8 NA: [chuckle] Such a good question. Oh my God, Che. Can you actually take that a little bit deeper? Can you give some examples of... If you are asking that question on any given random day of your life, what is something that you might do differently because of that? 'Cause that's a freaking awesome question.

0:30:48.7 CL: Yes, absolutely. Take yesterday. I'm working on emails, my eye is twitching, [chuckle] I'm straining to keep my eyes open, I'm overworked, I'm tired. I pause to be like, I could keep going, I could keep doing emails, I could keep feeling this urgency of needing to work, or I can take a 20-minute nap. Or I can lay myself down and close my eyes and even just breathe for a couple of minutes if there isn't a 20-minute window available. That's the first example that came to me. Oh, they are so many. [chuckle] It's like those opportunities feel pretty consistent, and there's always the invitation to ask that question.

0:31:44.1 NA: Yeah, it is really wild when you catch yourself, like you mentioned the eye twitch. For me, it's when I realize that I'm not... That I'm withholding the break to go to the bathroom and pee for myself. Where it's like I have to get such and such amount of emails answered before I... I mean, and I work from home, before I go literally to the next room and pee which is gonna take me less than two minutes. Like that just... [chuckle] Oh my God.

0:32:06.4 CL: Yes. That's such a good point is having those basic needs being... Tracking, a way to track. [chuckle] Am I acknowledging that I... Am I acknowledging my basic needs. Have I drank water? Have I nourished my body? Have I gone pee? I do the same exact thing. I'll notice like, "Wow, I've been holding this for hours, I have to pee so bad. It's time to check in." [chuckle]

0:32:33.2 NA: And that really goes into what you were saying before about the associations with pleasure as something that was frivolous and all that you spoke to. For me, some of the unlearning that I'm still doing is around the associations that I have with pleasure as this... And this is probably a product of capitalism, but really lofty, not necessarily expensive, but maybe that's this fancy thing that you either have to have a lot of time or you have to have a lot of money, or... I don't know the disconnect that pleasure has to be this really big deal as opposed to some of these more really human and humane examples that you're giving.

0:33:12.4 CL: Yeah.

0:33:12.5 NA: Like it feels really pleasurable not to stand there having to pee for an extra half hour. It's very pleasurable to go pee when you have to pee. [chuckle]

0:33:19.1 CL: Yes, yes. [chuckle] And I really like that it's bringing up the question for me of what is pleasure? And that every person gets to define that for themselves. And also how... Have we actually... Have most of us actually paused to ask ourselves that. What is pleasure to me?

0:33:38.9 NA: Literally never one time. I've never one time asked that. [chuckle]

0:33:41.8 CL: I'm even sitting here being like, "This is my work. This is what I do, and I don't know the answer to that question." [chuckle]

0:33:48.8 NA: Yeah, I mean and wonder too, if that answer is evolving. 'Cause even just the different phases of your life that you've shared so far, a little bit about the answer to what is pleasure is... Would probably be different if you went back to 17-year-old you, 22-year-old you, right? Like that type of thing as well. That is interesting. That is an interesting question. Do you wanna give a stab at an answer for current you?

0:34:13.7 CL: I would love to. I'm gonna... I guess because this just feels like a way that I can answer in this moment for myself is, I'm thinking about pleasure as self... Well, I'll say, I'm thinking about one of the aspects of pleasure for me is self-intimacy. And so then I'm like, "Okay, what's self-intimacy? What does that mean?" And then I start breaking it down into, "Well, it's body awareness, it's the practice of accepting myself and the practice of loving myself, it's self-

forgiveness." And if I'm kind of going into those a little deeper, I'm starting to look at, "Yeah what's my emotional management, emotional vocabulary? What is my ability to even notice and be aware of my needs? Of my wants? Of my desires?" And that is... I feel like all of that feels like a portal to pleasure, right? It's like there's a lot of foundational stuff, and that creates the fertile soil to be able to open up places of pleasure, to be able to allow in pleasure. What are your thoughts on that?

0:36:03.4 NA: I'm just enjoying hearing you talk this out. Yeah, I wonder what my answer would be to that same question of...

0:36:15.5 CL: Yeah, I'm curious.

0:36:17.7 NA: I feel like the most honest thing that I could say is that pleasure is the experience of not wanting to be anywhere other than where I am.

0:36:27.7 CL: Mm-hmm.

0:36:28.3 NA: I struggle a lot with the forward projection and living in the future a lot, which has only been exacerbated during COVID. And that's a real practice for me of coming back, coming back, coming back. And if I think about really pleasurable things that I've done in the last couple of weeks, my mind goes to sitting or laying in bed under a cozy blanket, reading a novel for four and a half hours and nobody bothered me and nobody talked to me and all my needs were met and no one was expecting anything for me, and I didn't wanna be anywhere other than right there. Or even earlier today, having that little dance party, that was exactly what I wanted to be doing. So I think for me, there's... It's not a surprise that you mentioned pleasure and presence together, [chuckle] that... Those are really, I think, linked up more than I realized. And had you not offered those two words, I don't know that I would have made that connection just now.

0:37:24.0 CL: That's so beautiful, thank you for sharing that. I really resonate with that a lot.

0:37:30.2 NA: Yeah, so all of this we're talking about pleasure, presence, sort of the... Meeting your basic human needs. How do you feel like you understand the relationship between pleasure and self-care? Are they similar? Are they separate? Are they related? I don't know. There's something in that that I'm interested in.

0:37:49.0 CL: Yeah, I feel like there's a lot of overlap and I also get curious of how those things can be different. Pleasure, it feels like... I'm gonna... I'm kind of expanding to on what you've shared is... Yeah this... This yes. It's like this... If we're getting in tune with what does a yes feel like in my body? And what are the specific sensations that happen in that yes? Does my chest open? Do my muscle soften? Does my... Do my cheeks lift? Do I feel heat in certain places? Do I feel electricity? I think of pleasure as a very embodied, it's like this full body experience, and of course this is just my personal experience. Almost like a wholeness, a feeling of integration, a feeling of my spiritual, emotional, physical, mental, all these multi-dimensional parts of being, are synchronizing and landing in a moment. And self-care to me feels like that they can co-exist and also... I don't know, this gets me into the conversation of wants versus needs.

0:39:34.2 NA: Mm-hmm.

0:39:36.1 CL: And how nuanced that is. And how that is constantly evolving moment to moment, and how it is an ongoing dialogue with ourselves. It's like how do I identify my wants from my needs, not that it's always necessary to do that. But when I think of self-care, I'm thinking basic needs, I'm thinking nourishment, I'm thinking kind of building the tools, building the centering tools for yourself, practicing the tools. Kind of doing that like the work that is not the path of least resistance, right? [chuckle]

0:40:15.7 NA: Right.

0:40:17.5 CL: And then there's these moments of pleasure that get to start blooming from that.

0:40:22.1 NA: Yeah, it's funny that you use the word blooming. So I'm someone who... One of the reasons that I don't record on video, audio only, is because I really... I doodle a lot while on. It just helps me focus for some reason on podcast, and so it's when you're on video you wanna make eye contact, that kind of thing. And as you were just talking, the little doodle that I just drew was self-care as the soil and pleasure as the tree coming out of a soil. So...

0:40:47.5 CL: I love that.

0:40:50.2 NA: When you said blooming, I was like, Oh my gosh, it's true. It's here, It's right here on the paper. [chuckle]

0:40:54.5 CL: Oh wow. Yes, that's so... That's so beautiful. [chuckle]

0:40:58.6 NA: I really appreciate how many different examples and iterations of pleasure that you're talking about here, because something else that was a big unlearning for me was the strict association of pleasure and sensualities only with sex or sexuality, and of course, pleasure is part of sex as well. There is a connection there, but I used to see it in that really small box only. The word pleasure had very sexual connotations. And in being able to zoom out and think, I don't know, broader and more holistically, and obviously you've spoken to that a lot. I think even though I have unlearned that to some degree, it's always useful to re-hear it.

0:41:45.0 CL: Absolutely, it's this life-long living entity of this relationship we get to cultivate with ourselves, our bodies. And I love knowing that I can also resonate with like, Oh, I cannot be in these conversations enough, you know. They're just always novel in a way.

0:42:17.4 NA: And I'm not... I was just gonna say, I'm gonna contradict what I just said. It's certainly not a contradiction, but I'm glad that it has been broader than that. And I feel like I would be remiss if I didn't also pivot into something in a more sexual wheelhouse conversation. So I was hoping that we could talk about masturbation a little bit.

0:42:38.7 CL: Yeah, I would love to.

0:42:38.8 NA: So specifically, or I guess as a starting point, you posted something on your Instagram a while back that was a quick list of five masturbation myths. And I would love if you're down for it, that I will read them out one at a time, and you can give whatever amount of context you want on why that's a myth.

0:43:02.2 CL: Yeah, let's do it.

0:43:05.2 NA: Yeah, okay. Because this... Under this umbrella topic of finding fulfillment in solo intimacy, and obviously, like you said before, solo intimacy could be a lot of different things. But I wanted to talk about this as part of it, so I'm glad that you're down for that, thanks.

0:43:17.8 CL: Yes.

0:43:19.4 NA: Alright, so myth number one on your list was... About masturbation. It's pointless when I can just have another person do the job for me.

0:43:30.8 CL: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I really operated in this one for a long time. And it really dismisses that those are different... That the relation... The sexual relationship we have with ourselves and the sexual relationships we have with others are different things. I think that there can be a lot of trying to compare, also trying to... Why doesn't this feel the same? Why doesn't it feel as good? There are really different things, and I think that they have different benefits, and I think that they both get to feed each other, co-exist and so... Yeah, well I'm curious if you have any thoughts around this one, particularly that are coming up for you.

0:44:36.9 NA: Yeah, my experience seems like similar to yours and what you said that, that was an association that you made for a long time. Like, Oh, this is pointless, this is what a partner is for, right? [chuckle] And realizing that that's not true and that... I don't know. I think a lot of conversation and normalization happens around what it takes to make any sort of relationship with another person work, right? You don't just expect to magically have a really solid friendship or to have this really fulfilling sexual connection. I think we're all, at least for the most part, in agreement that effort and time and awareness and communication and showing up goes into building relationships with other people. And yet for some reason, I didn't think that applied to the relationship that I have with myself, right? Like, Oh, I don't have to show up for myself, I don't have to take myself on dates, I don't have to have honest conversations with myself, and I think that that applies also to nurturing a sexual relationship with myself. That there's something in there of, Oh, I can just have another person to do this for me that really... I don't know, erases the relationship that I could have with myself. Does that make sense?

0:45:51.5 CL: It makes so much sense. Yes, thank you for sharing that.

0:45:56.1 NA: Yeah, so that's... Yeah that's something that I continue to think about. Well, so number two on this list is sort of related to that, that the myth that masturbation takes away from

partnered sexual intimacy.

0:46:10.8 CL: So thinking about what you're saying. We're not taught how to build and have intimate relationship with our bodies, with our sexualities. And there's a lot of fear, I think, there's a lot of... Almost like insecurity, I think that can come from... When we haven't normalized masturbation. What are the things that we can... The limiting beliefs you can carry around how this could take away from partnered intimacy. And then I'm thinking about how two beings that have body autonomy or that are practicing it, or two or more people, right? People that are coming together to show intimacy when there is this relationship that's being fostered separately of, Here's what I like, here's what I don't like, here's what I'm learning, here's how I'm evolving, here's how I'm changing. These are the sensations that I am learning that feel really good, these are the ones that don't. Like how all of that gets to be brought into those relationships and gets to enrich them and gets to amplify the pleasure that happens when bodies and humans come together.

0:47:52.4 NA: Mm-hmm. Yeah, yes. And I... What came up for me when you were sharing that, for me personally as a straight sex woman, there was so much, not even a story, but really a lived experience of my sexuality is only valid when it's activated by male partners. And that felt really disempowering. And so this idea, like you said, of having that body autonomy, practicing that for yourself and being able to activate that within myself regardless of what my partner situation is, that that felt really impactful for me.

0:48:25.8 CL: Yeah, yes.

0:48:29.0 NA: So the third thing on this list... It's funny how everything you're saying is just leading one into the other. Is that it should be kept secret. The myth that it should be kept secret, talk about that.

0:48:39.9 CL: Yeah, I think this can bring up a lot of origin stories. It's like, what did I learn when I was... What did I learn or not learn when I was little about masturbation? Was it mentioned in the home? Was it talked about? Did it have language? What did I grow up learning about my genitals? About touching them, about being... Was there any language given around that? Were they just... Were they private parts? Was their sex education? Was there not? Was there very little? For me, I started masturbating very young. Not... Of course, not having language for what that was. And I wasn't given... I wasn't given anatomical language for my genitalia. I remember pee pee or private parts. And then I remember a memory of my mom catching me masturbating, and I don't remember what age that was that, but also that language, catching me, right?

0:49:58.5 NA: Mm-hmm.

0:49:58.6 CL: And there was like, I do feel grateful that I... There was a moment where my mom was like, You can do this in your room. Just like, these are the places that you don't do this. These are the places you do do this. What's interesting... I think that's such a great conversation, and...

0:50:22.1 NA: Yeah. I definitely never had a conversation like that, so yes. [chuckle]

0:50:24.7 CL: Yes, and what's... Yeah. And there's a... I'm wondering why that conversation sparked so much shame for me still. Maybe... I'm wondering if it was maybe like, I don't know, the initial reaction or body language or like, Oh no, kind of thing, right? Even how I explained it, I felt caught. And so I think it's interesting when you can get into the nuance and subtleties of teaching sex education to little ones. How there's so much more than what you're saying. What is your body saying? What is your face saying? I would imagine that my parents, my mom specifically, still was holding shame around masturbation herself, right? So then to witness her child experiencing that was probably uncomfortable versus... I'm imagining that when there is this normalization, it's like, Oh yeah, no big deal. [chuckle] That's a little bit of a tangent, but I think...

0:51:46.9 NA: No, it's great. It's not a tangent. It's all related, it's perfect. Yes.

0:51:51.7 CL: [chuckle] Yeah I realized that I don't remember having any other conversations after that. Pretty much when that conversation happened, it was like, Oh, I need to keep this locked in my room, I need to never talk about it. I need to make sure it's hidden. And so learning the ways that that time in my life really made imprints to later on of not talking about masturbation, and it's been this slow untangling of secrecy, which I think is also interesting that that can ripple into relationships, in my experience. Into sexuality in general. What do I feel like I need to keep under wraps? Versus what can I just openly say?

0:52:45.6 NA: And even the nuance within that of what's the difference between something being private versus something feeling like it needs to be secret. Those...

0:52:55.7 CL: Yes.

0:52:56.2 NA: Those can be different, right? What's the difference between it being intimate versus... There's just, I don't know, there's nuance here because not feeling the shame around needing to keep a secret, the... In a binary way, the sort of the opposite of that is you have to talk about it all the time to every one and do it in front of everyone, right? Which is like, that's also not it. [chuckle] And so finding the level of honesty and privacy and without the secrecy and the shame.

0:53:28.7 CL: So true.

0:53:30.6 NA: So the fourth one on this list, the myth of, I should wanna do it all the time. That was the one... When I read this list, I was like, Oh, huh, interesting. I don't know that I would have named that as... If you would have asked me what do I think the myths are about masturbation. That wouldn't have been one that came up for me. So I'm interested to hear a little bit about that.

0:53:44.9 CL: Yeah. I feel that there can be some unspoken shoulds and standards around, Am I masturbating enough? Am I doing this right? Should I be wanting to do this more? Why don't I feel a desire to do this? So my intention of including that one was... But there is just no standard to follow when it comes to frequency of masturbation, when it comes to masturbation at all. Like it's... And getting to include people that identify as asexual that are like, I don't have the sexual

relationship with myself and I don't want one. And that that's perfectly normal and healthy too.

0:54:33.4 NA: Yeah, and the fact that that wouldn't ping... Wouldn't have initially pinged for me is absolutely a blind spot about that specifically, so yeah. It's not even just the... I should wanna do like you said this more, this being masturbation. But zooming that out to sex as a whole or sexual relationships with others as a whole.

0:54:54.0 CL: Yes.

0:54:56.3 NA: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. And then the last one on this list, It's bad or wrong to depend on toys to orgasm. Love that we are busting this myth. Go for it.

0:55:07.0 CL: Yes. Ooh it's an important one. Yeah, well there are so many pieces here. I mean I'm such an advocate for toys, I'm such an advocate for resources that enhance our pleasure. And I think it's interesting to examine the ways that we think we should orgasm, if those exist for you. The ways that it should happen in a certain amount of time, it should happen at this frequency, it measures great sex, it should happen with penis and vagina penetration, with masturbation, it should happen with my own hands. And so really kind of pulling back to notice that with all of those limiting beliefs, there's this thread of, My pleasure needs to fit in a certain... Or and my orgasm, it needs to fit in a certain box, it needs to happen in a certain way. I need to not take my time in this process, part of it, maybe my body is of service. Like you mentioned earlier, feeling, that... Is our pleasure actually for us? Or is it for someone else? And so getting to start to reclaim like, Oh, my orgasm gets to be mine. And that's actually my responsibility, that's something I get to have, it's something I get to define, it's something that I get to explore in any ways I want to or don't want to. Those are some of the first things that come up.

0:57:04.8 NA: Yeah, yes. You mentioned that you are very pro-whatever resources that enhance our pleasure. Would you be open to sharing some examples of resources that enhance your pleasure that folks might be curious about or interested in?

0:57:21.7 CL: Yes, absolutely. To start, I would love to share that I think it can be important to have an understanding of responsive desire versus spontaneous desire, and Emily Nagoski talks about this in her book, *Comes as You Are*. There's a lot that we're oversaturated with around spontaneous desire, it's like what we see in movies and books, and it's passionate, it's intense, it's novel.

0:58:00.6 CL: Responsive desire is not talked about very much and it's interesting because it's actually very, very, very common, especially with people full bars, and it's going to be this process of us, it's like our furnace is slowly heating up, it takes time to allow arousal to happen, it's going to take something sexually relevant in a context that feels safe and yummy, in order for desire to arrive and to start unfolding, so I bring that up because I'm someone that operates mostly within responsive desire and...

0:58:46.6 NA: Me too. Yeah, definitely, me too. And also that I used to have a lot of shame around that, what's wrong with me? That I don't know XYZ.

0:58:54.5 CL: Yes, exactly. So then, yeah, in that, Oh, this is actually normal, this is actually beautiful, I started to be like, ooh, what's my toolkit? How can I build this big toolkit of what can bring me into my pleasure. So thinking about ethical feminist porn has been huge for me. A couple of resources that come to mind or even a few, there's lustery.com, which is real couples having sex, filming themselves, which I love. Dipsea, Crash Pad Series, PinkLabel.TV, Four chambers. Also reading erotica, I love thinking about... She Bop has a link... She Bop is a sex toy shop in Portland and they have an online link that separates their erotica into categories, which I think is helpful, and being able to be like, what kind of stories do I wanna be reading and starting to play with reading them out loud, reading them with a loved one, getting the imagination flowing, getting that erotic imagery, some new inspiration. Also bringing in elements, either if that's energetically, if that's literally, how can elements be inspiration for sensation play? What would watery touch feel like versus fiery touch? Things like that.

1:00:35.9 NA: It's like what you mentioned with dance and the elements too. I definitely see the connection there. Yeah, that's lovely. Resource-palooza I feel like that's gonna be a good Google fest for everyone listening afterwards. I think that is a wonderful place for us to start to wrap up, if you could leave folks with one call to action based on our conversation, what would that be? Maybe a question to ask themselves or a teeny action to take?

1:01:06.5 CL: I'd love to just give the inquiry of what is one way you can orient to your pleasure and/or to your presence today?

1:01:21.7 NA: That's a great question. What's the best place for people to find you? Say hi? Do you have a particular favorite way to connect with new folks?

1:01:30.4 CL: I would love to connect with new folks via my Instagram, which is @che.che.luna. Also my email, hello@checheluna.com and/or my website, checheluna.com.

1:01:50.7 NA: Yes, I will put links to those things in the show notes, please know that you are very, very invited back for round two. I would love to talk about being really slutty, sexual integrity, kink, there's just so many other things when I was reading through your work that I'm like, I wanna talk about that, I wanna talk about that. So you are always welcome back. But thank you so much for everything that you shared.

1:02:11.3 CL: Thank you, I'm shimmying, and that's finale shimmying for you.

1:02:15.2 NA: Yes. Finale Shimmying. Yes, yes, yes.

[music]

1:02:21.6 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 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. 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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