



Episode 16: Sex Wrap Up

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[Upbeat intro music]
Disarming Disability

Sarah:

Hello and welcome to Disarming Disability Podcast I am Sarah and

Nicole:

My name is Nicole Kelly and we are so excited for you to join us in this wrap up episode. If you have missed it the past three episodes have all been about sexuality. And yes that means literal sex but also the idea of intimacy and closeness and what that means from some different perspectives from some different really really cool experts who have looked at or worked in disability and sexuality for a really long time.

Sarah:

Fantastic, all fantastic episodes all fantastic perspective and and really helped us along this journey of really sort of deciphering what sexuality is and why it is a particular particularly important for people with disabilities. Right now- I think there's sort of the well not right now, but I think we have a very long history of people with disabilities being considered asexual -in that they just don't engage in any type of sexual actions and and intimacy interactions and like you were saying that you like that could be actual sex or that could be holding somebody's hands or armor or being able to like, you know touching cuddle. Those are all forms like sexuality and intimacy and I think it just like over and over and over again that this perception that people with disabilities don't want to engage in those types of things.

Nicole:

Yeah, I mean totally I feel like out of it ties back to I mean, of course what's reflected in - my brain goes right to like media-type spaces, which I know we kind of talked about a lot here, but I feel like with the media is reflecting as what they kind of think about different certain groups. And I think in this particular realm literally not thought of that all right, and so we are not seeing people with disabilities in any kind of Yeah, any kind of I'll call it promiscuous, I'll you know use that word - that like any kind of like owning your sexuality and being proud of your sexuality because it's almost looked down on.

There is still the stigma that were fighting against so even if you know a body like mine is to show up in support of Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition. Probably the reaction. The assumption of that reaction is that it's going to be "oh that poor girl good for her for putting on a swimsuit" coding right? Like I mean, let's be honest. I got waves of that from doing Miss America stuff, but but so it's weird because it's almost like we haven't been put in those positions because of the just like societal stigma. I feel like I said all that in a really really weird convoluted way -so hope you understood what I was trying to say.

Sarah:

When I think that it's just like this us thinking and trying to process everything. When you're saying that like just being on the cover of like Sports Illustrated or like when I was competing for the Maximum Cover challenge like that that's why it was important to me to be there. And of course, I mean, I thought my own thing about being like, why would you want to be on the cover of something that is so sexualized like that? Would you want to work with children? Like what does this how does this impact your ability to work with kids and Whatever? But over and over again, it's like no this message if people with different bodies being seen as beautiful and having that be the norm versus some like different subsets fetish space because I do feel like our bodies are sexualized in like a fetishy-type way and that's real. Let's I mean, I wether we want to talk about about that or not, but there's there's the groups and it's are there individuals to who I'm not sure the right way to sort of catogrizize that-

Nicole:

They are called devotees

Sarah:

Devotees right? Yes. And so they have like sexual fetishes on people particularly with amputations, right?

Nicole:

Yeah. Yeah. Sorry. I guess we're talking about our own world

Sarah:

Yeah, but it applies it does are can't mean just just because it's in amputees doesn't mean that it doesn't exist in other groups as well. Like I can't imagine that there aren't sort of like subcultures of fetish-y type spaces that are also in you know like that fetish-shizing? Is that a word?

Nicole:

Fettish- fetish-schizing? I think you are right?

Sarah:

Turning various forms of disabled bodies into fetishes.

Nicole:

Totally. This is right. Well, I think I think what so so deeply sad about that is the fact that again that's any kind of chance that we're having to try to express our sexuality- right now the way that it's being caught or the attention is kind of receiving lots of times really is from those fetish spaces. And that obviously is something that is kind of a black hole of nastiness. And so again, that's just another layer on put on top of us. Oh, well, we can't be sexualized or do anything sexual because if we are, you know being proud of our sexualities the messages I receive into my Instagram account immediately are from people fetishizing. What's the word again fetishiizss-zing? Fetishizing.

Sarah:

Yeah

Nicole:

so that just feels really that feels really evil and dark and not good. And so it's just another layer another barrier for us to jump through and kind of process and work through where we can be proud of who we are and what we bring to the table.

Sarah:

Right?! Yeah, I agree and I feel that we as a society in general really struggle with with talking about sexuality and intimacy and "we as a society" meaning this Western like christinay Americany world where just like don't talk about sexuality in general and sort of and I feel like sexuality. I think it's assumed this like XXX-rated thing and and that's all that sexuality is. So therefore we can't talk about it, but I feel like sexuality just as I'm learning, and I feel like this is sort of a fun thing that I'm learning, is like every single thing is a spectrum.

So I feel like there is such spectrum of sexuality and I just feel like not having access to information not having access to like correct information really harms us as a whole. So then if we add disability on top of that like or suppose if they come back that like if such sexual education and like intimacy and relationships is being taught anywhere it absolutely doesn't have the disability chapter. So we're like further removed from that where the disability section of the disability topic which is so much for the removed even if sexuality is brought up in any type of learning space.

And I'll throw this in that like I'm so fortunate for growing up in Northern California that even in my I went to a public school I went to private school in Northern California. And even in my like private religious school, like every spring we had family life and it was these workbooks and I was pulling them out through my parents house last week or when I was there a couple months ago. And just like the level of just information that's in these and we talked a lot about just all of the different things related to sexuality and intimacy and like, you know closeness and Partnerships and relationships and sort of like a this was so amazing. I'm just so thankful that I had that every year from 3rd grade to

like 17. That all of these things are so normal for me or my baseline that I did realize that other people didn't have like this well-rounded of a sexual health curriculum.

Nicole:

No- In the middle of public school Iowa mine was - you're supposed to get the sex talk in the fifth grade and it was a big deal like you you waited for that day all year long and like nobody had talked to me about sex but like you knew what was coming in the fifth grade. It was known and then I was so disappointed because all we talked about instead with puberty and how to shave your legs and and well that's very important to talk about them get me wrong. I wasn't actually told how to have sex. So I literally learned how to have sex from another classmate after our teacher walked out of the room and I was like "wait, we didn't, nobody told me how you have sex" and then in middle school health class we had just some pretty obnoxious "we giggle as we talk about the anatomy of your body" and move on.

I actually am somebody who was never in a space with adults where they were actually talking to me about about sexuality in a normal way or in a way that also was kind of tying it to this idea of identity and also intimacy and that the fact that it is all kind of well-rounded together. Yeah, which yeah, I assume that sounds like you had the -we are Spectrum. I probably am on the opposite other end of what yours was then.

A big part of kind of my my spring awakening and kind of walking into my adulthood and my relationship with my body and and as it related to like partners, but I wanted to have and boys but I wanted to date. For me it was really hard because and you're my age so you probably felt this to dating apps were just becoming super duper normal when I was in college. It went from being like you creepily find people on the internet to like know a lot of us are on this and it's like actually It's actually a place where you can find people who aren't creepy to go on dates with.

And so a lot of my friends and college were you know on all of these different dating apps and trying to meet people, you know, I went to a huge big university. So there were 40,000 people just on campus, you know, lots of people to meet. And I remember that was the last thing that I wanted in the whole entire history of the universe and as I was talking about that with some of my best closest friends they were like, well, why wouldn't you want to be on there? Like what why not like, we know that maybe you want to go on dates you want to search and meet people.

And I realized it literally was because I could not put pictures of my body up onto an app where that's all people had to go on. Like if I am in a space where you're judging me purely by the fact I have an appearance that also includes having one hand. I know I will be looked past every single time and I I could not subject myself to that space and to that that like known rejection. I knew that it was going to be known rejection.

So I'm curious if I was alone in that feeling or were you kind of in the middle of dating up. Have you tried dating apps? What has it been like if you have? Because I still never I never have I've always dated people that I've met actually met

Sarah:

Agreed- I really love that you brought this up and similarly I have never opened, I've never downloaded a dating app. I've never completed any type of profile for anything like my friends have for exactly the same thing that you were shared and sort of that. Like do I want to put myself? like do I put pictures of my hand up there. Do not want to put pictures of my hand up there?

I was sitting on the jump seat with another flight attendant and she was talking about how she went on a date with this like really cute guy, you know, she was like really excited for the date and then he shows up and he didn't have any teeth. And she's like what's like, she was flipping out at the fact that this man didn't have any teeth and was throwing a tantrum. She's like, "oh my God, I can't believe that" like he went put- like so she clearly did not continue going on a date with him.

But when she went to look at all these pictures and he's smiling at all this pictures but isn't showing any of his teeth. So she just was like, "oh my God, I can't believe that this person would show up like this and cheat me."

So then I was like, oh my God, like if I were to put myself there, I would be the girl that showed up at didn't have fingers if I didn't put that in pictures.

Nicole:

Yes! Yes!

Sarah:

Even if I did put myself on the pictures, I think in my head if I had if I had opened up a dating app and then put pictures of myself on there and then people were like, "hey, what's your name?" I would be like, "oh your - get out of here. Like there's no reason why you would actually want to date me after seeing my hand like you are not real. I don't want to date you."

So I feel like there's lots of layers of internalized ableism and shame, right? So I viewed myself as somebody that was Un-dateable. So then I proceeded to not put myself in situations like that, because why would someone want to date me?

Nicole:

Yes yes yes!

Sarah:

So I feel I've all the people that I've dated have been people that I've met and and that I had like some type of -- but even meeting them like I assume that nobody wants to date me. I assume that people are just talking to me be nice but it takes a long time for me to get over that which is real. This is a very real part of having a disability.

I think and thinking that I'm worthy enough to have real partnership. And that then that we had to get over that hump by meeting in person several times before I felt comfortable enough to invite them into my spaces.

Nicole:

And interestingly so I do have a good friend who has one hand who met her husband on a dating app, but but similar to us, I know that the profile that she set up was intentionally. Yes intentionally showing her arm, but she had done some really cool photo shoots for some really cool kind of brands. And so she was able to kind of use these model shots as a way to say like "no I've been able to like use use this difference in to I am to do some really cool things in here like the beautiful ways that I've done this" which I think is really clever, but also, I think that shows also to like, it's unfair that we should have to show those professional shot and a profile where other people aren't having to show their professional shots. Right? Like that's that's not fair either and I mean her husband is neat and they're so happy and so like the greatest thing ever. But like it just yeah, it just has never been of interest to me because I just understand the stigma that were up against.

Kind of a step away from that but one that I feel like is is pulling it in this stigma world whom when I meet people who don't know me who have babies. I said, that's weird because I know you're not like randomly walking into a space where like hello mother this is you baby. But like for example I went with this was a long time ago now but like when I first started dating Nate I ended up in a situation where we were we were with adult people and one of the couples had a baby. And so everybody of course was passing the baby around. Obviously, this was also pretty COVID and and when it came to my turn to hold the baby suddenly the mom was like right by my side. And we like kept, like right away like wanted to take the baby away from me and very clearly wasn't comfortable with her child being in my care because she thought I was going to drop a baby. I mean that's what it came down to. And that's that's not the first time that that has happened to me and I feel like with our experts we have a little bit of that start of layered conversation where society looks at you and thinks how are you ever going to take care of a child and that because I haven't had one yet. I have an encounter doctors really being like Now, are you sure? how you going to do this?

But I have encountered the mothers like that and that tells me those message that the messages I'm receiving in that moment is all the people around me don't think that I am fit to whole even hold a baby- let alone take care of one. Have you ever been in situations like that?

Sarah:

I hear you. I hear you so many thousands of percent and yeah, but that is real feeling that stigma. I don't I don't have enough. I don't think I have enough people in my life who have babies. So I don't know that I've had like that specific example, but it's still accurate in in feeling that that the that those are absolutely the messages that are that are being had. And then I will say to myself like, how could I have a kid like I do so much of my life. How can I lose my one hand if I'm holding a kid with that hand? Than how do I interact with the world or one arm or one body part or like can't so so again, I know there's several of you know of our friends and people that we know that have lived different is have kids and I love watching their videos and and all those things that are great. But but again, yeah that that is the the baseline message is that were sort of like unfit for living let alone having children.

Would they think if we want to go into the deep dive into that a little bit further- I think it's important to touch back on Eugenics and how we as a Euro-Western Society. Maybe those aren't the right words. But we a sort of this western society in the United States have a long history of forced sterilization and that is called Eugenics. So Eugenics is is the practice of for sterilizing people because we deemed them as being unfit do reproduced and there was a big case and the Carrie versus sorry Buck vs Bell case where it was three three families or three generations had had child children with at the term. I think it was feeble-minded their children with developmental delays, and then the state was saying Virginia? Maybe I was saying that they were unfit to be parents. So they were trying to force sterilize the daughter to and no longer have children anymore because they're like three generations of people with intellectual disabilities is enough and we don't need to have any more.

Yeah and just this idea that that we assist for people to not reproduce because we don't think that they're fit for society or the needs that they need in order to be, you know, effective parent or in order like the things that they in order to be parents are not acceptable needs. And I feel like all parents need things in order to be parents. No one parent is taking care of children completely by themselves, right? We're all massively interdependent whether parents are raising kids and I just feel like the needs that individuals who have a variety of different disabilities are those needs are like not okay, you're not allowed to have those needs and because you have this different set of needs and what normal society

Nicole:

Quote unquote

Sarah:

Yes, "normal society"
has said like you're allowed to be parents because we don't want to have to change the way that we think or care for or provide resources it or be able to support those needs. Right?

So and it just makes me think of the story that Amanda was telling us and that what first got her really interested in sexuality begin with when she was on her clinical placement and the woman that she was working with was put on birth control and didn't know what that was.

So that's form of sterilization. Right? Like it wasn't going in and like medically alter her anatomy, but it still was putting her in a space where she could not reproduce and whether or not that was the best choice still like those are other people that have made that decision for her without communicating to her whether or not that was a decision that she wanted to make on her own.

Nicole:

Yeah, totally. Yes, absolutely and and this stigma that we're talking about again, you know between between our awesome three experts. I feel like we talked about it with with all of them. This idea is Sigma this idea of parenting this idea of this different set of needs being - to the world feeling so outlandish because of the stigma that it's just not even comprehensible. You know, almost as is the feeling I'm putting a word in people's mouths there. But it really kind of across the board even though we were talking about different things with all three of these people I feel those are things that really shines through in the conversation as well as really for me that the what we started with the idea that you know disabled bodies are just not sexual and they can't be sexual and what a travesty that is. We should fix that.

Sarah:

We should

Nicole:

The other piece that I think is important to touch on is again this idea of intimacy and that that people- people just everybody blanket statement people they need touch and they need closeness. And and that closeness - yes can be in the form of sex but also is so much more than sex and I feel like we talked about that that gap that exists in intimacy also with all three of them. And I just want to highlight the importance of that feeling of closeness whether it be just with touch or cuddle or good conversation or you know baking an awesome cake and eating it together, food can be sex, you know, but that's so important. And it is something that I think people are again the stigma are almost scared to touch a disabled body and that sucks.

Sarah:

It does suck. It makes me think of any of your experiences to but I remember in high school. I went to freshman orientation and they had a sending into concentric circles. There's people on the inside and people on the outside and then they wanted to turn our shoulders so that then you're sort of like shoulder to shoulder of the person on the inside circle, I was on the outside circle and then we're facing each other.

So the idea was that we were just march along in our circles and then you know, we would high five everybody in the other Circle and of course it's on my left side, it could have been on my right side. But it was on my left side. And just this like over- and then beginning high school- and this is my first day at this new school, and how over and over and over again, just everybody seeing my hand not wanting to touch my hand seeing that this was me like and I it was so hot. I didn't have a sweatshirt to hide in and it was just so exposed that face people would skip my hand they would clap my my forearm like they wouldn't even touch my actual hand so that those are messages at what 13 that is telling me that the world wants nothing to do with my hand.

So why would somebody, who like I am opening up the deepest scariest parts of my life do like right intimate relationships are that whether they're really close friend or somebody that you're having like, you know a partnership in sort of the add and the layer of at and whatever but someone you're like in a relationship with and close friends like why I open up myself so much more to these faces when already the world wants nothing to do with me. Right?

So those are things I had to sort out as I entered adulthood and and that like, I know I received the messages that my body is gross like over and over again, which is this so Sad.

Nicole:

I had never heard that story before Sarah that breaks my heart. That is such a like that is the worst possible in the history of the first time for that to have happened like first day of high school. I my heart breaks for you in that like I'm sure it felt like it was like three hours long that you did that and it probably isn't like 15 minutes. But like, oh my gosh.

Sarah:

I left I went to the bathroom. I cried and I did not return to freshman orientation. Like I went I hid somewhere until the day was over and then my mom came to pick me up.

Nicole:

I just wanted to scoop you up and give you the biggest hug in the history of the universe. Of course, we can't be sexual like right now literally these are-

So mine isn't directly related to entering high school. But but parallel experience for me, of course the because of course we in my hometown every April we had a Civil War reenactment like for real like you see into a Home, Alabama we had Reenactment and it actually was really great.

Sarah:

Side note- you know that my dad and I did that?

Nicole:

I did, which is also why we are friends. Every year in the high school gym, which is likely the same space yours was in they have this civil war ball, which was the most fun because you were learning like how to do the Virginia Reel and all these really really fun cool dances from back in the 1860s. And they had an old school band on stage and everybody dressed up in beautiful hoop skirts, like you see in Gone With the Wind for real and it was the best night. It was the best night.

But as I started to get older and I can't even tell you exactly what age it was. I suddenly like, I remember I remember the year but like I don't want I suddenly realized that I didn't want to do the partner dances where there's a lot of dances in those times where you like passed between people and you change Partners a lot and I suddenly stopped.

And all of my friends were like, "What are you doing? Nikki like you love this dance. We know that you love this dance." And it was because I was at that age where suddenly I was like, I don't want to deal with people's reactions. I don't want to deal with every single new stranger grabbing for my left. And instead going oh and having like a bad reaction to the fact that I was there with one hand or awkwardly not knowing what to do.

And yeah again, that's like my parallel. I'm sure that was when I was entering that Middle School space that that happened but I remember very distinctly my friends being like "but you love this dance" and having to be like "I'm not doing it I won't do it." Yeah, which is so real.

Sarah:

Which is SO real! and and similarly any time dancing, like I can't I mean I can't tell you the number of times that I've been dancing and that like people would want to hold my hand and they're like looking for my fingers. They think I'm just holding my hand and like a fist so they'll like take their fingers looking for my fingers and then they will look at my hand and the amount of like shocked, drop, and release that happens and then they're totally freaked out there totally uncomfortable and then they leave like the amount of times that's happened is like so uncomfortable. So the point where like I will hide my hand like people will try to reach my hand, I'll be like you don't want my left hand. I know it. I know that you don't want that and you will only touch my right hand.

Yeah, and and and it's fun and it's cool. There's this some I do feel the need to share the story and I was at a- where was I was? at a bar in Budapest a couple years ago. I took my sister to Budapest which is so fun. And we were at this cool bar. There was like games and drinks in one area and then there's like a little dance room, they had on you know, like Latino music. There's also like salsa things. So there's this guy who I met who's very cute and we had been talking but and he spoke German. So we're trying to like translate with each other because he spoke English but like not super great. I don't- "I can say I have a sister and 1235 in German." That's the extent of my German and so I sort of were

talking and try to figure your each other what we're saying with the loudness of everything that was happening and we didn't talk about my hand, but there was an opportunity for him to like see me – I was wearing tank top. I found them again in the in the salsa room. And like I like, you know, all that have dancing's fun and he just reached for my hand and it sounds like such a silly thing, but he just reached for my hand like that- he had seen it- he had acknowledged it and he still wanted to hold onto it. So he reached her both of my hands as if it was not a problem in the world. Old and then we just dance and it was like the most beautiful most magical thing that like that happened when I was 27 years old.

Nicole:

I was just about to say the fact that you remember it so vividly says everything says everything it is beautiful and absolutely a beautiful but the fact that that was the odd experience that to you is the on experience of just the acceptance and the beauty of you having a different total acceptance from a stranger. We don't feel that we do we never feel total acceptance from strangers and it's F this up man.

Sarah:

Amen. So yeah, I mean I was I think I was 28 29 when I had that and just that that was the first experience that it happened at gone almost 30 years of my life and that it never happened that have been once one time is is powerful.

So yes, so let's talk about sex. Let's talk about disability people being sexual beings and Let's talk about people with disability seeing themselves as sexual beings because there's a lot of nonsense we have to get through in order to even do that. And then I didn't start dating anybody like for real dating anybody until it's like 19 -19 with my first Like official whatever like serious boyfriend because I struggled so hard having friends in high school.

I was like, there's no reason anybody would want to be any why would they want to date me? Like I'm the like clearance item girl like you could have any girl in the world like why on earth would you want to talk to me? Like what do I have to give?

Nicole:

Saaaame!! An million percent same a I mean a big portion of it is I also grew up in Purity culture. So I don't know which to blame more to be honest, whether it was Purity culture or whether it was a disability. The honest truth is that it's a huge mix of both and I would like to think I've done my homework on both to understand and deconstruct now kind of what those ideologies were and why they did not work either one of them when it came to dating as a young person and what I wish people would have talked to me about instead.

But I oh, I absolutely like I notoriously into all through high school and into college would not touch boys would not be around them would not be alone with them and had

nothing to do with the fact that I didn't like them or I didn't want to hang out with them or be special to them. It had everything to do with the fact that I did not know how to be confident or ask for the acceptance and respect that I really needed in those spaces. So to the to be cute boys in high school and college who were kind to me that I never dated or kissed still appreciate you you were important.

Sarah:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, and I also I also want to address that I know that we are do what like we are in our 30s. We are white women. We are also straight women. and I feel like that's a really important thing to acknowledge that then you have disability then if you have sexuality and then you have there's a sort of "Baseline air quotes expectation" and I just want to say that I recognize that both you and I fit the Baseline expectation in that we are both here and acknowledge that there's a lot of our friends and a lot of people with disabilities who do identify as parts of the LGBTQ communities as being real right now in expressing themselves in different ways and like absolutely those so much more layers and they have

Nicole:

your what you're saying is that those are huge every time you add another layer and sexual identity and sexual preference. That is another identity that is oppressed right now. And that just adds a whole other layer of you're exactly right like we are talking about it from our our privilege to stand point. And yes, I think it's important that we acknowledge that in also say to the like people Who are listening who maybe have some sort of different sexual preference or different identity in future Seasons, hopefully maybe season 3 we can throw in a lot more intersectionality episodes and just because we are acknowledging of course who we are as people and if we can pull in these experts from other areas and really focus in on these other intersectionalities, we would love to do that. So know that that is something that's been talked about and it's something that hopefully we will bring you very soon.

Sarah:

Yes, yes agreed.

Nicole:

So I think we probably should wind ourselves down here, but we certainly hope that you enjoyed the three experts that we were able to bring to you for this chapter. We really respected speaking with them and and we really respected the knowledge that they had and the work that they do and hopefully you felt the same.

Yeah and stick with us. We actually you guys we only have one more episode left in the season. Can you Believe it?! So stay with us because our next episode it'll be our final season to wrap up. And what you're going to hear about is kind of what our journey through this season looked and felt like and maybe some of the things that we are dreaming about in the future because in case you haven't picked up on it there and I are

big dreamers and we have a lot of plans a lot of big plans and so we would love for you to join us and listen in and get some ideas on what's coming next.

Sarah:

So excited!

Nicole:

We'll see. Bye!

Sarah:

Thank you for spending part of your day with us. We want to give thanks to our Network Public House media. And for intro beats Jason Barnes with cybernetics for logo art. We want to remember Patrice. You can find his work at [normal person's.com](http://normalperson's.com).

Nicole:

Be sure to follow [disarming disability](#) on Facebook and Instagram. and lastly be sure to check out our website [disarming disability.com](http://disarmingdisability.com) where you can find all 13 Episodes of Season 1, links to resources, transcriptions, and discussion questions for each episode. Check out our blog where we feature amazing Disability Advocates.