

LOVE IN A F*CKED UP WORLD PODCAST
EP01 ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN

[00:00:00]

Dean: I'm Dean Spade. For over two decades I've been working in movements to build queer and trans liberation and to end war, borders, police, and prisons. Love in a F*cked Up World is my new book and podcast series. It's based on the idea that our resistance movements are made of our relationships and are only as strong as they are.

Things are so hard right now and we have to stick together and cultivate radical solidarity, care, and courage. Love in a F*cked Up World offers tools that can help us align our everyday actions with our liberation values.

Welcome to the first episode of Love in a F*cked Up World, featuring my conversation with adrienne maree brown.

adrienne is a writer, performer, facilitator and podcast host. Her most recent book is Loving Corrections.

Welcome to the podcast, I'm so delighted that you are willing to be part of this conversation because your work has, influenced me for so long in so many different ways.

adrienne: Aw, thanks.

Dean: And, I'm so grateful for that.

I sent you a few ideas of things we could talk [00:01:00] about, and I wanted to start with this question about how anarchism informs the work each of us are doing.

adrienne: Great.

Dean: In general, but also in questions of interpersonal conflict. I'm thinking about your most recent book, Loving Corrections, but also your long arc of facilitation work of interweaving questions about how we treat each other in all aspects of our organizing and community work.

You publish your books with AK Press, which is an anarchist press.

adrienne: Yeah.

Dean: But I don't always hear people talk about you as an anarchist. I don't quite know what your relationship to that word is, or that set of ideas. I'd love to just hear you talk about that.

adrienne: Yeah. it's interesting. Part of how I ended up with AK was Walidah and I, were working on _Octavia's Brood_ and we had landed with this small press that ended up going under. And then we were like, we'll publish ourselves. And then the Institute for Anarchist Studies reached out to us.

They had an imprint at AK and they were like, can we publish you? And the book ended up being too big for what their imprint did, but it opened up this relationship. And it felt really right to me because [00:02:00] I'd always been really aligned with this idea that we don't need to hand this over into a hierarchical system where we, a lot of the ways I have understood and critiqued hierarchy is that there's a way that we're like, Oh, I'll just bump that up to be someone else's responsibility.

And I was always like, my work as a facilitator is to help redistribute responsibility so that we all really feel like we're all holding this and whatever happens is going to happen because we all choose to operate with integrity, with a sense of shared value or a sense of divergent values that can be compatible.

So I always had that alignment. I, at the same time have never been a joiner. I'm just really interested in like how those ideas flow through the mycelial thread of my system.

Our teacher, Mariame Kaba has talked about this a lot with abolition that we don't want to tell people it's going to be like a direct transition from like this prison industrial complex to some other [00:03:00] hierarchical system of, punishment or justice or something else.

It's actually going to be letting go of that system and then taking on more of the relating to each other that allows us to process through conflict and recover from harm. And to me, _Loving Corrections_ feels like it's in that river, that it's like, what is an anarchist way of holding accountability, holding justice?

What if we are not assigning it to the state? And we're not believing that like some government will be able to do this well. And, you know, a lot of the belief that that can't happen is rooted in reality. We've lived in this particular system for almost 250 years, in the US experiment for almost 250 years. And what we can see is a really high level of dysfunctionality in the government, a really high level of dysfunctionality when it comes to how we protect each other, how we care for each other.

And I think that's where all the ancient technologies of indigenous communities come into the modern, you know, we call it mutual aid, we call it the things we call it, and it's like, what we're actually talking about is the oldest ways of [00:04:00] doing community, which

are not top down, but relational.

Now, that said, I've always believed that there are moments and times when hierarchy is really helpful and particularly can help us survive. And we're entering a period of crisis where I really see the need for discerning hierarchy, right, where it's like, I don't know how to build a composting toilet. I want someone who knows how to build the composting toilet to be in charge and to tell me what to dig and what to do and how deep and all that. And I think if you can find those places of balance where it's like, there's some places where I'm the one who knows what to do. There's some places where someone else knows what to do.

That's always felt like the healthiest way to engage hierarchy to me. So. Yeah. Those are some of the ways for me. What about for you?

Dean: Yeah. I mean, what I call what you just described is legitimate authority versus illegitimate authority.

adrienne: Yeah I love that.

Dean: You've been baking all the bread for us for years as you teach new people to bake the bread, it's okay that your view on the proportions of the ingredients is strong. That doesn't mean you're the boss of us. [00:05:00] That's just honoring legitimate wisdom, which is different than you're the oldest person, so you get to be the boss of our crew. You're the whitest person or even just that you were here first.

You were here first needs to not be enough. So then groups can ask themselves, what are forms of legitimate authority? Authority may be too strong word. It's hard. It's hard. You use hierarchy, I use authority. Both of these words are so tainted.

adrienne: Yeah.

Dean: So it's like, what's the way to be like, yes, there's wisdom.

I also, did not use the term anarchist for most of my political life. I didn't come to my politics through an anarchist subculture. I came to it through like subcultures, political cultures, most influenced by like women of color feminisms that I think are also overlapping in your work. And those are very critical of institutionalization, you know, heavily critical of the nonprofit industrial complex, the hospital, the school. Like seeing not just the quote unquote bad parts of government, like the cops and the military, but also the controlling nature of the welfare system, the family policing system.

So that's how I landed on anarchism. I was like, Oh, all the parts of the state are violent and racist and patriarchal and capitalist. And,

then also [00:06:00] through those same genealogies, I was learning about creating groups that were flat, you know, collectives rather than groups where somebody is the boss.

Again, these are anarchist technologies. They're anti-state. But I didn't get there through, either through reading the kind of whole European anarchist trajectory. That's actually something I've been just catching up on now. Or through a particular, Black anarchism or another particular, labeled anarchism.

But in recent years, I have felt it very necessary to name the word anarchism, both because it's such a buzzword for the right that I feel like we need to be like, yeah, we are anarchists. Instead of that thing that some people will do in our movements of being like, oh, I'm not that, like it can actually help throw people under the bus.

So that's one reason of solidarity. I feel like it's important. And also that I think it's important to name our anti-state politics because there are actually a lot of people out here with a fantasy about building some kind of United States or some kind of state that is going to have centralized, hierarchical, authoritarian decision-making, and just redistribute everything correctly. And it's like colonial - often the framework is not [00:07:00] anti-colonial - and it's, about domination. So for me, it's been really important to be like, yeah, if we're imagining a world without borders or prisons, that cannot be a state because those things, states have those.

adrienne: Yeah. Like part of what I always say, I call myself post-nationalist and I think a lot of times part of what I'm trying to do is figure out like how do these rivers combine in my own lived experience, how do they combine in my own life. So there's anarchism, socialism, there's these big terminologies that have like tons and tons of history entailed to them.

And I'm like, all that's fine. And some of it filters through, some of it, I read some of it I don't. But the thing I do understand is the way we do "nation" is not compatible with living on earth. And so we have to figure out other ways to do it.

I think one of the things that's really intriguing to me -- and I don't have a solution, I don't have a solve for it -- is I think there are some of us who are really interested in the processes of community, interested in the conversations, the meetings, the minutia work [00:08:00] that it takes to actually live outside of the state. And it's like, oh, if I don't have the state to turn to and rely on for all these things, then I have to do it in community with other people.

And there's a lot of people who are not interested in that. And I don't know if that's nature or nurture. I've really been sitting with

this question of do we create state level institutions? Because most people are like, I don't want to deal with that. Or because people are like, I want to know exactly my place in it.

Or because people are like, I just never knew that there was another option. And like this other option is actually really rewarding. One of the things that's been so fascinating to me is the less I am a part of existing institutions, the more I'm able to do all that institutional work in my own life day to day, right?

Like I fix things myself. I grow things. I cook things. Like, I'm in relationship with people who help me tend land and tend place. So I think for a lot of people, while we're still in capitalism, trying to keep our heads above water, I think it's very hard for people to [00:09:00] imagine taking on the labor of living beyond the state.

And so part of what I'm trying to do at all times with my fiction, with my nonfiction, with other stuff, is just point in that direction. Imagine what it would be like if you weren't inside of systems that were created to oppress and divide and hoard and deny, and rooted in genocide, rooted in enslavement. Imagine what could be different in your life if you were living in a world that the root system was the earth, the root cycles were the earth's cycles, you know? I know you know this.

Dean: Yeah. Well, it links back to, what you said about your aim in facilitation is to help everyone find their responsibility.

What I think living under states and so much institutional control does is it's like incredibly disempowering. People can't imagine that they could ever have what they need without being dominated.

adrienne: Yes.

Dean: And that is so heartbreaking. And so a lot of the work is like, wow, could we decide things together? Like we're also told that people are naturally [00:10:00] greedy, people are naturally bossy, people are bad. And so then you can't trust anyone and you have to have your life mediated by the cops and by the institutions.

And you're saying a lot of people like don't want to take up this work, and I see that. A lot of people are like, I don't want to have to, figure out food with my community. I don't want to have to figure out healthcare with my community. But it's like, on the one hand, we're living in a moment where it's it's that or nothing for real. Like it's every moment.

adrienne: We really actually have to do it now. Yeah.

Dean: So that's important and I think hopefully, awakening for the

possibility of imagining that actually it would be more free to be co-responsible, co-stewarding with everyone I love instead of that freedom is I escape into entertainment. I think there's like a kind of feeling of I don't want to do anything.

adrienne: Yes.

Dean: That comes from living under coercive systems, but then it becomes, I also don't want to do things that are collaborative and beautiful and relationship-building because everything sounds bad.

adrienne: Everything feels like work.

Dean: Yeah.

adrienne: Right? Like when you have a lens where it's like everything is work, everything is monetized, every moment of your time has to be accounted for.

Everything is [00:11:00] too much. You're literally getting too much information. It's just overwhelming. I keep thinking about after the hurricane in Asheville, you know, I'm in community with different folks there, and people kept being like, we wouldn't have wished for this hurricane in any way, but there's something really beautiful happening in this space where the government isn't showing up for us and we don't have wifi and we're still, we're caring for each other. Everyone's showing up every morning to this place to find out what we need to do each day. And it just feels like what happens very quickly in crisis is you have to hone in on the very tangible. And then you suddenly have something that you're doing that has much more satisfying returns immediately.

It's like, Oh, I'm going to hike this oxygen tank up this mountain because Susie needs it and she'll have it. And then I'll get to see that she has what she needs and either someone else will walk it up tomorrow or we'll figure, you know,

I think so much of what's [00:12:00] missing for people are the real tangible experiences of living a life that has purpose to those people around you. And I think that the internet, I don't judge us at all for being caught up by this explosive access to information and entertainment and everything else, but I think we have to be really careful, like the WALL-E path is unfolding where we just sit somewhere consuming and not experiencing nature, not experiencing anything.

And I think we really have to, in our own lives and in our own communities, pivot ourselves back towards the earth in whatever way we can. And that includes pivoting towards each other.

Dean: Yeah, what you're saying too about your facilitation, I've thought about you a lot because one thing I noticed is when people get into conflicts in their communities, they often really want that outside facilitator. And I think that they're thinking of you, often.

adrienne: They're like, 'if only adrienne could be here'. I know they are. I get a lot of requests from people and I'm like, y'all can do this. Like actually you have to be able to do it. And I've grown a lot with this because I used to be very like, you [00:13:00] need an outsider. And part of what has shifted for me has been like, there's a different way you put yourself together for an outsider.

There's a different way you communicate for someone outside. And we've lived in a privileged time where I could fly in for a lot of things. And a lot of people could fly in or whatever for a lot of things. I think we're heading into a different time now where there's not going to be the same amount of resources.

There's not going to be, it's just not the same infrastructure. the nonprofits are under attack. So much is under attack and the systems by which we care for each other, the systems by which we reach each other and hold each other are under attack. So I keep referring people to Mariame Kaba and Shira Hassan's book, Fumbling Towards Repair, as here's an actual process that you can walk through.

I point people towards Holding Change because I'm like, what I know about facilitation I put into those pages, I invited other people to put into those pages. But there is something about, we're having to figure it out for ourselves. And it's a little [00:14:00] scary. And I think there's a lot of opportunity in it. And, I think the thing we're gonna have to be very careful of is that community can get very small very quickly and how to stay, even if it's local, it's like, you can just ask someone who's in a different section of movement to come and hold space for you.

You can ask people, who are in the spiritual community. There's ways to do it so you still get that experience of someone who's not in your daily life and can hold space. But just like with doula work, facilitation work, mediation work, the older I get, the more I believe that's supposed to be work that's just done in community.

I remember a long time ago Mariame Kaba, I'm glad that she's coming up so much because I love whenever she's just on my mind, that's a good place to be. But I remember her talking about some work she was doing and she was like, you know, I don't take money for that. I'm just doing that as a member of my community. And I was like, what girl? How do you survive? And she was like, through community, that's how I do it. And now I understand that in a really different way. It's so different to answer the call to [00:15:00] support people, because you're like, they're my community and I want to help them.

And I make my resources in other ways so that when my community just needs help and they're in their most vulnerable place, that's not the time that I'm like, let's negotiate the bill. And a lot of times, when you show up that way, then people are like, afterwards, how can I honor the time that you just gave?

And I love that culture too, like 'dana' or whatever it is, but just gift economy way of moving where it's like you give, because it's what comes authentically to you. And when people compensate you in some way it's because it meant something to them. I would love to live my life that way, where if I did something that gave you meaning and purpose or helped you, then you can give something back to me that makes sense to you. And it might be eggs. And it might be, horseback rides and it might be cash and it might be something else. I'm really curious about economy. And I'm really curious about, as these systems fall away, you know, I come from a people that have always made a way out of no way. For the majority of history of the United [00:16:00] States, there has not been a viable path for Black people to have anything. And still we have had things. So I'm like, I know we know how to do this with or without government.

And I'm really curious as we're looking, you know, these next few months for trans communities, for immigrant communities, where I'm like, there's very real threats from the state and there's very real, tangible shifts that happen when medicine's not available and other things.

What's the work that we do to: A. Protect what we can protect, but also how do we need to adapt and transform? So we're like, okay, this person doesn't have medicine. They still are what they are. What do we do? This person's being threatened with deportation. Do you have a room in your house? What are we going to do? It's all getting very, like, what are you actually going to do or not do? And I think this past year of being in the fight for Palestine has been so elucidating. I feel prepared that a lot of people are not going to do as much as they say that they will do.

But there are other people who will do more. And then as conditions change, you know, a lot of times people are like, I'm not doing anything, cause they're like, that's never going to touch me. And [00:17:00] that's the sad reality of what happens with American social shaping. Right. It's just like, "it's not my problem." It's almost just entertainment. I'm just seeing this is happening. I think as time goes on, more people are like, "Oh, this touches me. It touches people I care about". And that's when change really starts to happen. When people can feel like, 'We're all one and It's interacting with me too'.

Dean: Mm hmm. Yeah. The example you're giving too about like getting

supported by our communities makes me think, I met these really interesting tenant activists in Bozeman, Montana. They've got like a fight there against, a lot of Airbnb economy type of thing, lot of questions about can people afford to live.

Nobody was paid in their group. They wanted to do all this research about how have different people in different movement formations gotten by doing the work, and what if you don't do the work all the time, and what are all the downsides of bringing money into your group, what are the upsides, whatever.

And one of the parts of research they did was really deep around SNCC, and how SNCC had a system where there was like a set of people who got paid like \$10 a week, which was still not very much money then. And then, people would just be living in community. Like people would just put them up as they were organizing throughout the South, feed them all their meals.

And I think one like [00:18:00] real breaking point for us that maybe is about to change at a next level under the new conditions is housing people. If people are worried about trans people's survival, the number one threat to trans people's survival is being unhoused. Every other problem you have is a zillion times more dangerous if you're unhoused. People coming out of foster care, people coming out of jails and prisons, immigrants, being unhoused. That is an area where people are really afraid to share in our culture. And historically people have shared that a lot as a fundamental in kind of every movement.

Dean: And I'm curious about, you know, people just doing even like a spreadsheet of can offer a couch for two weeks', then you. And I mean, I've done this with people coming out of prison, of course, but like, it's hard. There's a kind of isolation we're living under where people are very de-skilled about sharing space.

Part of it is like, relates to your current book too, people's fear of giving basic feedback. Like, if you come stay with me, am I going to say something about the dishes? Am I going to say something about not leaving the bathroom that way? if I felt more confident in direct communication, I might have an easier time imagining it's okay to have a roommate. Yeah. [00:19:00] It also relates actually to what you were saying too about facilitation.

Like, I think when people call on the outside facilitator, one of my fears is that what they want is someone to come in and do fact finding and declare who's right, which is not what facilitation is. But so how do we become, yeah, how do we become people who give the feedback all along instead of waiting to try to have a trial with an outside facilitator?

So much of this is about what you're calling 'loving corrections' or,

all the different words we could use for actually telling each other how we're impacted by one another.

adrienne: Well, a couple of thoughts just came up as you were saying that. I do think there's a big piece around conflict and just sharing space and sharing time and sharing community.

I also think we have to just think more creatively about how we use the spaces that we have. I mean, it's always the people who have the least, who are like, I'm going to share what I've got. And then the people who have the most, who like struggle the most with that. I think there's something there about figuring out like, what do we actually have and how do we share it and protect the quiet, protect the introvert, protect all the different needs that everyone has [00:20:00] in community.

But every time I dream about the future, people are living collectively. There's not many pathways that I can see in the future where people are like, able to maintain a high degree of isolation. Isolation makes it hard for us to understand each other as a community and a collective species.

So I think that's a piece of it. I also think there's something around, and I think Loving Corrections gets to this too, there's something around being able to be honest about needs and about what we're all putting in. So for me, I'm like, it's not just that you would be coming into my home. It's that we would be figuring out what is the relationship that meets the different needs that are happening here?

I also think, you know, so much more of this is going to be private and I think that's going to be one of our biggest challenges is that we've gotten so used to doing good for the sake of other people seeing it and clicking 'like', and being like, wow, you're so good. I love what you just did there. I'm like, there's so much private goodness that we need to cultivate in ourselves, which I think we've done the other way, it's been like [00:21:00] privately, I'm going to secretly order from Amazon or whatever it is.

I'm like, I think you have to cultivate this like private capacity to be generous and be like, I'm being generous, not because I want public accolades, but because it is a tangible way to contribute to my community. I'm being generous because I, even if it's selfishly motivated, I'm okay with that. I'm totally okay with people being like, I'm generous, and then I need people to be generous with me.

Great. That's the reality of the situation, is that we all at times will be the one who needs and at times be the one who has something to offer.

Dean: Yeah. When you're saying that about accolades and wanting attention when we do good. I was just having a really intense conversation with Kelly Hayes about this because we're in a period, where people are going to need to break a lot of rules and laws, right?

People are going to need to be like the nurse who's like, I'm going on my break, you watch my back. I'm going to go give this abortion care or this trans care. And in moments like this, where there's this kind of crackdown, people go in one of two directions. A lot of people might be like, I'm going to extremely follow the rules because they made an example of someone in my workplace. And now someone trans walks in the door with a broken arm and I'm [00:22:00] not going to treat them, There's a danger.

adrienne: That's right, That's right.

Dean: Or the other direction of like, I'm going to figure out how to keep secrets with my coworkers. My coworkers are case managers or nurses or teachers, and we need people to, basically what Kelly described, like form an underground. You know, we really, really need an underground right now.

We need to be able to get meds to people. We need to be able to hide people. And that work is not for Instagram, you know, and that is a really big skill. I think part of what's gone on in our culture is the extreme criminalization of social movement work, especially for the last 50 years has made underground work, people don't even know it exists. People think it's legitimate that people are criminalized who fought back against the cops or landlords or whoever, or, people who fought back for the, environment, whatever. So there's not enough valorization of the underground and of doing, you know, work that breaks criminal laws in order to support our survival as a species or to support individual people surviving right now.

What's happening this a lot of the reason I wrote this book, is we need to become people who could form trusting relationships, [00:23:00] including with strangers and including people who don't agree with us on everything. Trusting enough to take big risks together.

Whether that's the risk of letting you sleep on my couch and being like, Oh g-d, is this going to work? Or the risk of like, breaking the rules together at our job or, you know, sabotaging the pipeline, or whatever it is. We need a kind of relationality that is not, just on a level of doing stuff that's okay to post.

adrienne: Yeah. And I think there's something, here that feels really important to me, which is I always love to remember that throughout history, most of the harmful systems, the most harmful systems have

always been legal in the time that they were being practiced. And that it was like, this was a law. Someone made it a law for them to be able to kill people in this way, oppress people in this way, take people's land in this way. All of that was legal when it was happening. And a lot of it is still legal. It's slow to change. And so when you think of it that way, where it's like, who takes the biggest risk?

You know, one of the reasons I always uplift Catalyst or uplift SURJ or uplift efforts when I see white folks [00:24:00] or men or other folks who have positional power and privilege in our current system, who are like, we're going to train ourselves to take the risk. Because I'm like, the underground needs to be heavily populated with those people who have the most privilege.

That's like, you walk into the Monopoly game with the biggest stack of cash to spend, to get yourself around that circle and to get out of jail free and all the things, right? It's literally like, you just have more privilege. So I keep thinking about that, that I'm like, okay, there's a underground level, but it also has to be something where we learn to welcome people who have privilege, welcome people who don't have it all correct yet, welcome people who don't have their language all right, welcome people who have a slightly different manifesto than ours or whatever it is. But that's where the loving corrections piece for me comes into practice is can I recognize that you are different than me and that we need each other?

And can I act as if I need you? And possibly what I need is the divergence between us. Right? That you have that capacity. You have that privilege. I think that's especially going to be important in the [00:25:00] first phase of things because those of us who are in targeted identities are going to be locked up anyway.

We're going to be struggling anyway. We're going to be passing everything we can amongst each other anyway. And that's how we've always done, right? But it's the people who currently experience privilege in this existing system, I think, that are going to be the ones who have to really wrap their minds around making different moves.

And then I think we do have to be honest with each other about the moves we make, right? Like I'm really trying to be rigorous with myself about not promising anything I'm not actually planning to do or able to do. I'm trying to be rigorous with myself about saying like, what can I do? What can I change? What can I give up? What can I survive? Can I survive imprisonment? What could I survive? What risk can I take? And I think we all need to have some of that assessment happening in ourselves.

And then I keep telling people also like, get ready for the unexpected, because a lot of how these changes roll out, I don't think

we understand the privilege we've [00:26:00] been living in. I think for most of us, because we're so oriented to being like, here's what's wrong with the system, I think that there's a lot of ways that we're not noticing, like, here's everything that has actually been working. Or we have figured out, let me say it that way, 'cause it's not like the things have been working, but we have figured out how to survive in these conditions. And some people are surviving very well in these conditions. And so I think there's a way of saying like, I don't want to say it's what we deserve. Right? But there is a way that like, you cannot live in the belly of the beast and not expect to have consequences when the beast collapses necessarily. And that's what I think we're in, we're in a beast that is collapsing and we're all going to have to feel the impact of that.

And the only way I know we survive that is holding on to each other. The only way you know that we have done it in the past and that we will do it now is holding on to each other. And that might mean we let go of so much else.

It's been really hard for me to go online since the election. I'm just like, y'all, can we just admit that we don't know, there's so much of what's [00:27:00] happening right now that we don't know. We have to put on our adaptation shaping, we have to be willing to say, in the past, humans have done this by adapting to the conditions of their time.

We're in new conditions. We're more globally connected than we've ever been. We have a lot of people who have a lot of resources. We are in touch with each other, but right now, most of the ways we're in touch with each other are owned by our enemies. So that's not going to last for too long. So how are we going to contact each other?

Just like figuring out what are the small but necessary moves to adapt in this time for these conditions.

And then I'm like, listen and read more books. Kelly Hayes, the movement, podcast that she's been doing has been really great and really helpful. Daniel Hunter has been really great, really helpful. I just feel like we have a bookshelf unlike anything we've ever had before for this time, bookshelf and podcast shelf, and there's so many resources available.

Dean: And I think a lot of people are just need help moving from a frozen overwhelm. [00:28:00] Wow, things are really scary and it is okay that we're scared and that there's unknown uncertainty towards what would feel on purpose.

Is it reading or learning about historical brave acts of people who've survived? Is it learning about projects people are doing right now that are really brave?

adrienne: Yes.

Dean: What makes people move from this important moment of, it is important part of all of our emotional picture to feel how really bad it is and can that motivate action, rather than getting too stuck with overwhelm.

adrienne: I think that's the scale thing. I'm always trying to, part of why I work with fractals is because I'm like, when I'm overwhelmed, I need to shift my perspective to a fractal level. Right. And sometimes the fractal is me. I'm like, okay, can I be less capitalist? Can I be less patriarchal? Can I be less transphobic? Whatever system it is that I'm like, fuck! I'm like, can I actually transform? And then in every relationship I'm in, can I bring that transformation into real time and real space?

And then on my block, not the whole block, but can I make four [00:29:00] friends on this block who, you know, I live in the South. I'm like, it's really important to know how to build relationship with people who you don't share values with, who you're like, I'm pretty sure based on the signs in your front yard that we don't share values, but I can also see that you care about land. You have some dogs, and you are my neighbor, just period. You are my neighbor. And I want you to have a connection with me as a human being. Whatever that looks like.

But there's a fractal aspect of this if you are overwhelmed by the big picture, make the picture that you're looking at smaller. And I have been recommending to a lot of people, like get off of social media, even if it's just for a little two week break. Getting off of social media immediately brings your awareness and your worldview back into your own life a lot more.

I'm like, okay, then what are my technological needs and relationships and how am I meeting those, and how intentional or not intentional am I?

I don't know why, but the idea of recovery and 12 step, all that is coming up for me because I feel like we are [00:30:00] addicted to a culture of death. We are addicted to empire. We are addicted to this cycle that leads us to isolation and harm and loneliness. So it's like, Oh, if I try to take all of that on that, I'm never going to drink again. I'm never going to shop again and I'm never, you know, then it's too much.

But if I'm like just today, can I unhook myself from the matrix? In what ways today? In what ways can I be a neighbor today? In what ways can I, give without expecting anything to come back to me today? In what ways can I articulate my needs today? And who do I love today?

There's just something about bringing it back into the scale of your own life.

There's just something there that feels like that's the medicine. It's like recovering from this massive dominating colonizing worldview back to the scale of being a human in community.

Dean: Yeah, that's all we have. I actually want to bring us down to that scale a little bit because there is a question that I've really wanted to talk to you about. You're very [00:31:00] much a, theorist of the relationship between resistance and pleasure and survival.

And one of the struggles I had with writing this book is that you know, this book is about sex and love and relationships a lot.

adrienne: I'm so excited about this book, Dean.

Dean: Thank you.

adrienne: I'm like January 14th is like, I have it on my calendar. Like I'm like, doop doo. Yeah.

Dean: That is very sweet. Very meaningful to me.

But you know, one thing that's really challenging is like those relationships are the ones that are most likely to get you killed or locked up. Sex and love and dating are where people act our worst, and where we really hurt each other. Like literally, that is the most likely person to kill most of us is our lover, or someone who wants to be, or whatever.

And at the same time, I like you I am a queer who believes in the power of pleasure and does not want to orient in this area of our lives solely towards fear and restriction and containment, even though those are reasonable responses that people have to the dangers in this realm. And even trying to write about sex and love and relationships and write about the conflicts there, in a way that [00:32:00] both acknowledges that a third of people are in a DV situation, straight or gay.

adrienne: Yes.

Dean: And also that this is a cutting edge of creativity and aliveness. I'm just curious about what that brings up for you. How you think about talking about pleasure in a society where pleasure is so mediated by violence, and where violence is pleasurable for so many people in really horrifying ways. And just like how you hold that and be responsible to all the different pieces of that knowing, you know?

adrienne: Yeah, I appreciate this question and I really love that you

have taken this on, written this book. In Pleasure Activism I started touching into, you know, at that point I was thinking of it as like pleasure in the #MeToo era, really starting to understand what it means to still experience pleasure as we're just starting to pull the threads and unravel the culture of sexual harm that we actually live inside of, which is inside the culture of gender harm, inside the culture of dominance and [00:33:00] supremacy, and which is just harmful. So I feel like the thing that it brings up for me is thinking about how I have saved my own life myself and that there was something about unlearning the pleasure of being, owned or possessed by another.

It feels really at the root, for many of us, I think we're a transitional generation for this, right? That for many of us, we were born into a world where the understanding was still very much that love meant possession and ownership. And that you were owned by your father or owned by your family in some way, and you were looking for love, someone else to take over that ownership.

And then somewhere in that process, you came across the feminist and you came across these other ways of thinking. And so then we're like, Oh, wait, hold up. Like for me, it was in college where I was like, I don't want to be owned. You know, I don't need to be no man's woman. You know, it was like, it all starts plopping in and I'm like, Oh, I actually want something very different from what my parents wanted when they fell in love and when they were forming relationship.

So it makes a ton of sense [00:34:00] to me in a possession model that everything leads to violence and harm, right? That I'm like, Oh, eventually a human doesn't want to be possessed. And so the snap might happen that way. Or a human doesn't want to be possessed, and so the harm might come from the person who's like, I'm going to put you back in your place. But it's very rare to me that you can move through a possession-based relationship without a pattern of harm developing. Because I don't think we're meant to be possessions of each other. I do think we're meant to deeply love each other, and that can happen one to one, or one to many, or different formations or like I'm doing, you know, many soulmates in a lifetime.

And I feel like what I have learned in my own life: the most harm has come when I have been succumbing to a possession-based relationship. And the most liberation has come when I have been like, You are your own person. And I am my own person. I don't seek to possess you. I don't want to be possessed. I want you to be you. I want me to be me. And I want to see what emerges between us.

And then I let form follow function, you know, like that's how I approach relationship. So [00:35:00] I'm in relationships that I could have never imagined or foretold that are so fascinating and pleasurable for me. And part of the pleasure of them is the non-ownership. I love being out in the world and being like, I could do

anything I want to do right now. I am totally free and I'm in right relationship with all the people in my life. So I know I would come back and be like, I did this or I want to do this. I love confessing a crush to my sweethearts and being like, I've got a new crush and here's how I'm going about it.

And feeling from them a sense of like, whatever they, you know, sometimes they're like, Oh, I feel a little insecure about that. I feel excited for you. They feel the full range of emotions, but none of the feelings are 'I own you and you can't do that', which then the violence sparks in that place, right? The idea that their recognition of my freedom is fundamental to the relationship. I think if more relationships get rooted in that kind of soil, again, they can be monogamous or not monogamous, right? 'Cause I see this in a lot of my monogamous friendships where I'm like, you may only choose to have sex or [00:36:00] emotional connection with that one person, but you're still a free person.

You're still moving around the world. You're choosing that every day. it still needs to be in your agency. And, I think you and I agree on this, that like what we learn and practice in this realm of pleasure and intimacy spills into every part of our lives and vice versa. So I feel like I really learned about non- possession in friendships.

Like it would never occur to me that like, I own that friend and she can't tell you that secret. Like, it just would never occur to me. And I had a lover point that out that she's like, you would never have think that you could be the only person who gets to be friends with that person.

Why when you add sex to it, why, when you add commitment, why does that change those things? And I think it goes back, it's like we don't realize this, but almost every aspect of how our society is structured right now is about ownership. Men owning women, white people owning Black people, everyone owning each other's sex or gender, owning the babies that come out of them.

Like it's so capitalist. And I think so often when people are like, capitalism is just about the [00:37:00] competition of money. I'm like, no capitalism is about owning. It's about who owns the land and who owns the labor and who owns each other. And that's what I'm trying to jailbreak myself out of in this lifetime.

And pleasure, I will say, I think I have rewired myself pretty successfully. So I don't feel pleasure from non-consensual possession anymore. Like it used to be hot, you know, like a person's like, I'm going to just make you want me so much that you belong to me or whatever. It doesn't get me anymore.

It doesn't do much for me anymore. I'm really turned on by people who

like my freedom and who move towards that. It shapes all of my work relationships, all of my friendships. That I'm like, Oh, that's the green light. That's the green flag that I want to move towards.

I think this way of doing relationship, it takes a little bit more work I think on the front end, you're saying, I'm not just jumping into assigned roles of possession and ownership. You and I are going to have to figure out together who we are and how we like to make decisions and how we navigate this stuff.

But I love that, you know, to me, it's like you put in a little bit [00:38:00] work there and you end up in this liberated space where you get to do what you want to do and be yourself and experience all the freedom available in this lifetime. And I'm pro that.

Dean: Yeah. I really appreciate what you're saying. I think also the horizon of that possession of owning land, that way of owning people that way is actually a fantasy about --

adrienne: -- forever.

Dean: That's what the nation believes. That's what capitalism...it's if I could just rigidly lock you down, I could be safe and we all know that's just, you know, nothing is forever, but that, that belief and that, that unwillingness to let relationships change or to let you change as my friend or partner, how do we experience belonging that isn't about rigidity? And how do we experience a different kind of safety? That's the safety, to me, the only safety is the safety in having a lot of people in our support system.

adrienne: That's right.

Dean: Not just one.

adrienne: That's right.

Dean: And so it's not about, could I just get adrienne to never pay attention to anyone else but me, or to always answer my call, or whatever. But instead, if adrienne doesn't pick up, can I have a lot of other people...

adrienne: I love that.

Dean: ...who I can rely on and lots of different kinds of friends who I do, and for me, this has been [00:39:00] really important to be like, Oh, a lover doesn't have to be everything. Like maybe this person is the one who I want to go to this funeral with. And this person is the one I want to tell about the thing I'm writing. And my lover is the one I want to do this with. And that kind of promiscuity, that kind of non-exclusivity.

adrienne: I love that. I keep telling people, I'm like, almost everyone I know is actually poly, but because we have relegated to being like a romantic distinction. I'm like, no, if you have a co parent and a kid, you're navigating multiple big, important relationships.

If you add to that, any living parents or siblings, if you add to that your closest friends, you're already living a life that has multiple intimacies that you're navigating. And the things that help are, yes, having a lot of options or not a lot, enough. Right? For everybody it's a little different.

I have friends who are like, I'm hyper introverted, like three people is a lot for me. Great. Okay, cool. For me, I find it's about 20 people between family, friends, partners, and you know, when I look at who am I in touch with over the course of a month in a [00:40:00] deep, meaningful way. Who I'm like, you need to know what's going on with me. If I have news, I want to make sure these people get it. If I need support, one of these people will catch me. That's what works for me. And for some people it's more, right?

I wish people oriented more towards that way of understanding themselves. So that when you're dating someone, you're like, I'm a small circle person. I only need a few people. So the role that you'll play in my life would be a relatively large one in my circle. Or I'm like, I'm a medium circle person. I have a lot of people. So where you'll fit in, the amount of time, the amount of energy that I can give to this, which will be more at the beginning.

I just find that being honest has cut way down on the labor I have to put into relationship. Cause I'm like, I'm not flitting all about the thing. I'm just like, here's what I need.

Dean: That's so healing to have the experience of having a crisis and having people show up for you in a way that is really about your autonomy. Like what do you need? Whatever you need is right and whatever you're feeling is right. [00:41:00] Most of us did not have those experiences, in formative moments in our lives. So it's huge to now be able to establish whatever kinds of relationships we need where we could feel met when things are really bad.

adrienne: Exactly, Dean. And you know, I keep thinking about that quote. I can, I'm sadly, I've forgotten the name of the person who said it, but during Covid, it was one of those viral meme quotes that it was like, everybody needs more right now than anybody has to give. And I think keeping that in mind too, that when I'm having that crisis, it doesn't mean that the friend I called or my sweetheart or anyone else is not also in some level of crisis, right?

It really is this kind of whack-a-mole, it's like at any moment, I'm like shifting from being the person who needs support to the person being supported at bat. I think we need to get more fluid and nimble in all of that.

I'm realizing I don't want to keep taking more of your time cause you gave me an hour, which is so generous. And it's so much fun to talk to you.

It's so much fun to talk to you, too.

Dean: I'm actually sitting here like, while I'm talking to you I'm thinking of other things you said over time that have influenced me. Like I'm thinking about when you were talking a lot about whether we're [00:42:00] satisfiable. That is in part of what you just said about, can I accept support from people in my community and not be rigid about how I receive it.

adrienne: That's right.

Dean: Or be like, oh, she can't call me back right now. Someone else can. I You've given us so many

really memorable marks across the years for me. Similar to Mariame Kaba, people who I'm just like, oh, they just put that so well and then I just can return to that.

As this, clear, tool. And now I'm looking at another thing through that lens. And I just really, I'm so grateful to you for all of your work.

adrienne: I'm really excited about the things you're tackling and thinking about. So let's keep doing it, underground if need be!

Dean: Yeah. I'm really grateful to be in it with you. Thank you.

I'm so grateful to adrienne maree brown for talking with me. Her work has helped so many people imagine new ways of being with each other in the face of overwhelming conditions. Her unflinching commitment to pleasure and liberation, her own and everyone else's, is a source of inspiration to me, a counter to the places where I can get too serious and too rigid.

Dean: adrienne helps me remember the vital connection between bold resistance, courage, pleasure, and joy.

Thank you for [00:43:00] listening to the first episode of Love in a F*cked Up World. This podcast is based on my new book of the same name, which is out now from Algonquin Press. I hope you'll pick it up

from an independent bookstore in your community.

You can find a full list of resources mentioned in this episode in the show notes. I'll be traveling around talking with people about this book for the next year, doing events both in person and online. Please check out deanspade.net for dates and come by and say hi.

Love in a F*cked Up World is hosted by me, Dean Spade. It is produced and edited by Hope Dector. Thank you to Derekh, Kelsey, Lindsay, Jessica, Raindrop, and everyone else who helped with this podcast. Special thanks to Nicole Georges, who encouraged me to make it. Our theme music is "I've Been Wondering" by The Ballet. You can reach us at [loveandafuckedupworld\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:loveandafuckedupworld(at)gmail.com). The U in fucked is a zero.

We're living in harrowing times. We need each other badly. No one is coming to rescue us. We're all we've got. I wrote love in a fucked up world and made this podcast because I think it's possible for us to work together to break harmful patterns and stop acting out toxic scripts we've [00:44:00] internalized. We can treat each other and ourselves better. We can build abundant support systems and help each other face the uncertainty of our lives, taking bold risks together.

I hope that you will keep listening, subscribe, and share this episode with the people in your life.