

LOVE IN A F*CKED UP WORLD PODCAST
EP02 HARD FEELINGS

Dean: I'm Dean Spade. For 25 years I've been working in movements for queer and trans liberation and to end prisons, police, immigration enforcement, and war. Welcome to the second episode of my new podcast, Love in a F*cked Up World, where we talk about how to build and sustain strong connections to each other, because relationships are the building blocks of all of our movements.

Over the next few months, I'll be releasing a new episode of Love in a F*cked Up World every two weeks. In some episodes, I spend time talking to some of the people who've inspired my thinking on these topics, like in the first episode where I interviewed adrienne maree brown.

In addition to the interviews, I'll be releasing shorter episodes that focus on particular tools and ideas from the book that I think can help us align our values with our actions. One of my dearest friends, Morgan Bassichis, offered to talk through these ideas with me for the shorter episodes. Here's the first one on dealing with hard feelings.

Welcome back to the podcast. I'm here with my beloved friend, Morgan Bassichis, who is an anti-Zionist and abolitionist organizer, an artist, comedian, and a Somatics coach, someone who has taught me so much about these kind of overlaps between our political values and our interpersonal connections and relationships.

And today we're talking about difficult feelings – possessive, jealousy, control, envy – the kinds of feelings where we can like, say really mean things to ourselves about how these feelings don't align with our politics. And I was partly inspired 'cause I had a really fun conversation with adrienne maree brown on the podcast, and in one part of the interview she spoke about how she's feeling a lot of liberation from possessiveness and like, seeing others as property, that whole kind of romance myth narrative, in her intimate relationships. And it was really fun to hear about, very beautiful to hear about that kind of freedom she's feeling.

And it also made me think about how many of us might not be there, and I don't want us to judge ourselves if we're not. So I wanted to talk about this, about those moments when we feel strongly possessiveness, jealousy, control, envy, these kinds of like, feelings that may feel politically taboo as people who are committed to each other's autonomy and who want each other to feel enjoyment of our lives, and then these feelings creep up that we might judge.

Morgan is someone who I've talked to about these kinds of feelings a lot over the course of our multi-decade friendship and who's always

encouraged me to think about them with greater gentleness and also to be playful with them. So I thought we could talk about that together today. Welcome Morgan.

Morgan: Thank you, Dean. I'm really happy to be here to talk about this juicy thing with you.

Dean: I am so glad we're together.

So, Morgan, first I just wanna actually ask you, what do you do with that? The idea that like, I'm feeling something that feels really at odds with my principles and maybe my community's attested politics when I'm feeling jealousy, envy, control.

What do you do with that? How do you think about that?

Morgan: I feel like I struggle with it. Like, most days, I feel like often I feel something in my relationships that I wish I didn't feel, and I feel something about myself, about the world, about other people that is not a perfect lining up with my politics. And I think, over the course of my life, there's been different moments where I'm like, I've had different approaches to that of sometimes more like I have to fix these parts. And I think on a good day I get to say, you know what? This is me being human again. Oh, look at us being human again. We're so convinced that we're so deeply wrong and different and bad that we think the rules of being human don't apply to us.

And humans are inherently contradictory, confusing, multiple beings that have so much contradiction and ambivalence. And so why shouldn't we? And as political people, movement people, we don't want to confuse aspiration with a kind of fantasy of control, that we can control ourselves perfectly and our thoughts and our actions and control others.

And instead you and other people have been like, okay, well the jealousy first of all is a human emotion. And also it's reminding me that something I really care about is being touched right now. Like it's actually, there's a lot of sweetness in jealousy that if we can kind of like, soften the immediate tendency to shame it, there's like, oh, there's something, someone, some bond, some connection, you're feeling super-protective over. And when someone's feeling protective, you know this is easier said than done, we're not like, why are you feeling protective? We're like, oh my god, wow, you're feeling protective. You're trying to protect something.

On a good day, I can notice, oh, I'm scared. There's fear. So let's proceed with gentleness instead of proceeding with shame and how dare you be scared.

Dean: Yeah, I love that you said that. One of the things I noticed

about a lot of these hard feelings is they're very outward. Like jealousy says to me like, this is intolerable and you need to make Morgan do something different.

You know, you need to make the person you're feeling jealousy around do something different. And if I can instead slow down and be like, wow, I'm feeling a strong sensation. What's under there. And for me, fear is often under these ones, oh God, I'm really scared Morgan likes someone else better than me, or that our relationship will be diminished, or whatever the story is being told.

But just, a lot of times it's just like a fear I feel it in my chest, and just then being like, oh, poor you. Oh, sweet Dean. That's hard. Just that's hard. Or you're scared Sometimes I can't access like, kindness to myself. That's too much, but just like, wow, you're scared. Just even noticing the physical sensation instead of the like, I gotta go out there and stop Morgan. Like that already is a massive coming into reality, coming into myself, caring for myself. It's a big healing for me if I come back to like, taking care of myself some. And then even though I ask a friend for help, or any of that is like, wow, a real direction towards love for myself, even though I can't say like loving words explicitly, but just even that I care at all what's happening in here, feels like a big victory, like bringing a little bit of curiosity, and then slowing it down a little and being a little bit like, Ooh, ouch. Like just even mirroring the feeling like you would with a little kid. Like, oh, you're scared. You know? That has been a big one. I'm curious about envy, if you would talk about that at all.

Morgan: Oh, will you? Okay. Envy is, I want what you have?

Dean: Yeah.

Morgan: What's the difference between jealousy and envy? Jealousy is...

Dean: Jealousy is like, I'm afraid that something's gonna be taken from me because of that other connection. And envy is, yeah, I want what you have. You're getting attention, or you're getting the kind of sexual relationship that I wish I had, or whatever.

Morgan: Right. Well, this is another one that we have so much shame about, and that supposedly, somehow having radical politics or anti-capitalist politics or anti-racist politics means you don't feel envy. And that's just like, that's a setting ourselves up to feel horrible! Of course, we feel envy. Of course we do.

And of course we feel it in places where we wish we didn't. And there's that saying that people pass around of like, what you resist persists. And I really find that to be the case with both envy and

jealousy, that if I put so much energy into being like, you have to be happy for this person. Instead of being like, oh, of course. Yeah, makes sense. There's a feeling of envy. Oh, will I get mine? Then it can kind of disperse again.

And it's the same with jealousy of like, sometimes all it needs is just a little bit of time in the sun, of saying, yeah, we all feel those feelings that we wish we didn't feel and that are not quite lined up with our abundance politics. And my experience also is that when I share with my friends, which I've done with you of like moments of insecurity or jealousy, it actually brings us closer because people don't feel like we have to treat each other like we're on pedestals, but we're like, oh, of course you're human just like me.

Dean: And I would say too, for me, like envy might be a sign of something I want.

Morgan: Yeah.

Dean: Like I might be like, oh, Morgan's getting a lot of attention for this. And I didn't realize, oh wow, it turns out I have a desire for attention from that and I didn't know it. Like, 'cause sometimes we don't even let ourselves know what we want because it feels risky emotionally or whatever. So envy is like a creative opportunity to want something, that maybe we didn't know we were allowed to want. And to be like, happy when envy arrives. Ooh, fun! I just found that something else I wanna pursue or I'm curious about. Instead of shame around it that, you know, why don't I feel just happy for Morgan? You know, like that I think can be a problem.

The other thing I also wanna add to this conversation too is, I really believe in like, the delight of playing with these sort of difficult feelings. And I think something that I don't hear people talk about enough these days and um, that I want people to more is like, using role play, kink, BDSM, like using these brilliant queer technologies to satisfy some of this.

I can keep thinking of examples that are sexual in using something like bondage or using something like a roleplay in which you're telling someone you're mine or I'm yours, or submitting to someone or possessing someone as a really beautiful way to get out those experiences, have those very like, emotionally satisfying experiences of wanting to control others or be controlled, wanting to belong to others or possess others. And like that, when we do it as play, can mean that we're also keeping on board a commitment to consent, instead of only seeking to get those drives met and then getting ourselves into situations that are getting those drives met, but that are not ideal. Like where we're now actually in a relationship where, where we're telling someone that we belong to them and we are doing things we don't wanna do, you know, like the part where there's no kind of

conversation around it. So I think that kind of stuff is really amazing, the sexual stuff.

But I was also thinking about how just recently I had this wonderful experience of my friend Zakaria coming over and like, going through my entire closet with me and dressing me. And being like, I love being bossed around in this way by like this older sister figure. Our relationship is nonsexual, but it's so much fun to turn over myself to this person and totally trust them.

And I think we were both having a really great time and it was a very deeply trusting, intimate thing to do. And I was like, this is another chance at like, totally consensual play around control and being controlled that I think, people do this stuff in friendships. And there's all these ways, I think a lot of us wanna be held or hold others, like care for others in those kind of dominating roles for a moment or for a certain circumstance that like I... I mean actually Morgan, I feel like you do it with humor a lot in our relationship. Like you use humor to like, make one of us or the other one the boss for a moment. You know, things that are just like...

Morgan: You are legally my boss. So that, yeah, exactly.

Dean: Yeah. I'm curious if you have examples of the, I mean, also you're in theater. I mean, just like the ways people use play and roles and humor, very seriously or very lightly, to be in some of these spaces that are emotionally very compelling.

Morgan: Oh, wow. I mean, I feel like you're, you said it. Um, I mean, I've never had sex. I'm a virgin. Wait, don't include that. Don't include that in the podcast. Um, is that shaming?

Dean: I think it's just funny.

Morgan: Okay, Hope you can include that.

I feel like this is the problem with disavowing things that are built in us is that we don't get to use them. We forfeit all this good stuff if we don't compost it into something else, if we disavow the parts of us that we think are bad, no envy, no jealousy. It's like, what are you gonna do in sex? What are you gonna, what are you gonna write a play about? What are you gonna, I mean like that's the stuff of all our creative drives is like, plugging that back into something that we have choice in.

And that's what's so brilliant about all the examples you mentioned of sex and humor and art is like we get to – with choice – reclaim and reintegrate the parts that we think are bad.

I also feel like, around like couples and being like, I want to watch

my partner do this, or I want my partner to watch this happen to me. I feel like these are all examples of getting to lean into jealousy or lean into envy, and do it differently or do it with choice or do it with agency or do it with consent. So yeah, we're not angels.

Dean: I mean, I think pop culture shows us that people have an enormous amount of these sensations. Like this is what most songs are about. I'm thinking about there's just like this huge genre of romance novels. And in those novels, there's a really big straight narrative of like, women meeting like, the perfect, dominating man who can read their mind and control them perfectly. And like, deliver these incredible sexual fantasies of domination.

And I think people feel really awkward about having these drives. Is it okay to have them? But they're so widespread. And then I think if we don't let them have any attention, we either are suppressing them and kind of numbing out to some of the really intense, beautiful stuff that we could experience, or we're pursuing them in a sideways way and getting them met, sometimes in like non-ideal options. Like, I really wanted to feel dominated, so I'm with somebody who also is actually controlling parts of my life that I don't wanna have controlled, but I, we aren't talking about any of it. It's not explicit. So I'm just now like, in this thing. I feel like I see that a lot. Or I want to have this experience and I can't name it. And so I'm having like, a not as good version of it, but it's kind of scratching the itch, you know?

So I'm, I'm just like, how can we all be a little bit more like, oh yeah, I'm interested in actually pursuing intense and strange and taboo fantasies and doing it in a way where I, at least to some degree, know I'm doing it? And like, recruit other people who want to do that with me, so that there's some level of intentionality around it.

Because also, of course, intense things like you might wanna put some guardrails around it or make sure you've established some safety plan or talk to some friends or whatever. And so just the more we like, think it's okay to play with, then the more likely we'll have experience playing that meets more of our needs, I think.

Morgan: I think, yeah. I think this is... I'm thinking about times in friendships even, when I've kind of taken the risk to say, oh, I, I feel jealous. Which is like everything in my system...

Oh, there's balloons! If you're listening, somehow the, my screen keeps showing balloons. So you're not seeing this, but I hope you feel the balloons.

Like, we're scared we're gonna lose the connection. Again, this is like the theme across all your chapters. It's like we're so scared of

losing the connection if we kind of share, before we were talking about boundaries, but now we're talking about insecurities, desires. We're scared we're gonna push the person away, that someone's gonna be like, oh my God, you've been holding jealousy? Like, I don't wanna, I can't tolerate that in my field.

And I feel like if it does become this, what you're describing, this muscle of how do we work with, in a playful, intentional way, these drives? Not make other people responsible for them. Not disavow them. Not be like, because I'm jealous, you need to now reassure me in the way that whatever, but also maybe I get to ask for reassurance and that gets to be a playful thing.

So there's a paradox. I feel like there's a kind of like sweet spot paradox that we're talking about of like when these things feel compulsive and drive us, versus when we disavow them, and then this kind of sweet spot of, oh, I'm getting to almost do alchemy. I'm getting to do alchemy with the parts of me that I thought were supposed to be thrown away.

Dean: Yeah. Thank you for that. I love that image. Thank you, Morgan, for talking with me about this juicy topic. Really nice to be with you as always.

Morgan: I love you so much and, and you're the only one who loves me and I'm the only one who loves you. And, um, remember that. Okay?

Dean: I could never forget.

Morgan: Thank you.

Dean: Thank you for tuning in to the second episode of Love in a F*cked Up World. This podcast is based on my book by the same title, which is out now from Algonquin Press. I hope you'll pick it up in an independent bookstore or buy the audio book through libro.fm, rather than using Amazon or Audible.

Enormous thanks to my beloved friend Morgan Bassichis for working on these short episodes with me. You can find a full list of the resources mentioned in the episode in the show notes. 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, Ciro, Eugene, 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 loveinaf0ckedupworld@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 F*cked 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 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.