

LOVE IN A F\*CKED UP WORLD PODCAST  
EP07 PRENTIS HEMPHILL

Dean: I'm Dean Spade. Welcome back to Love in a F\*cked Up World, the podcast, where we talk about how to build and sustain strong connections because our movements are made of our relationships. As I mentioned in the previous episode, and you may also have got an email from us, we have launched a Patreon to support this podcast and the kind of conversations we wanna be having about all of these ideas.

You can find a link in the show notes for how to join. And I really hope you will. In addition to conversations and resources there and meeting other people who are listening and talking about all these ideas together, there's also gonna be events and opportunities to help shape future episodes. Right now, you can submit questions for the 'Ask Me Anything' episode with Jessica Lanyadoo that I'll be recording soon.

You can also get tickets for our upcoming book club event on September 21st, where you can gather all the people you read the book with and other people in book clubs, and we can all talk about the book and also about what it's like to read books together and why that's so useful. So please head over to Patreon and check all of this out and join us there.

One of the first questions that I asked on Patreon and the discussion boards was who people thought I should have on the podcast next. And the first answer that came in was Prentis Hemphill. Lucky for all of us, we had already recorded an episode with Prentis, and that is what you'll be hearing today.

I've learned so much from Prentis over the years and I'm so happy to share with you our latest conversation.

I'm so happy to be with Prentis Hemphill today. Prentis is an embodiment facilitator, a political organizer, a therapist, the founder of the Embodiment Institute and the Black Embodiment Initiative, and Prentis is author of this already well-worn copy of this book I have in my hand, What It Takes To Heal, a really beautiful book that not only is full of immense wisdom, but is also, um, really clearly written and grounded in examples and stories. I was saying to someone that so often when people talk about somatic healing specifically, it feels very abstract to me. And really people when they talk about it or write about it, I'm just like, oh, I couldn't give that to like someone who hasn't actually worked closely in it. They wouldn't know what was meant. And your book is literally the first thing I've read that I felt, oh, this actually shows what it is. And you know, the use of storytelling to show what you mean is so effective. And then just also the prose is so readable.

And so not only is Prentis all of those things, but also has been my teacher in generative somatics, one of these spaces of learning about somatics that's been very important to both of us, and who has just really transformed a lot of things for me in that teaching.

And so I feel a lot of gratitude and admiration all the time, and really happy to get to have this conversation today.

Prentis: Can I say something back to you?

Dean: Please.

Prentis: Just that I received that. Thank you. And also what a delight it is to be able to talk to you. I also consider you one of my teachers. You're one of the people I love to just listen to and read and just understand how you think. I feel it always takes me somewhere else. And I find you to be one of the most generous and kind people that I have met. There's actually an imprint. I feel like you have imprinted on me just a certain kind of warmth and generosity, so I wanna reflect that back to you too.

Dean: That's very sweet. I'm very moved by that. Thank you.

There's so many things I wanna talk about from Prentis' book and the ways it overlaps with Love In A F\*cked Up World. So I'm just gonna dive into some questions. The first thing I was thinking about was two concepts in Love In A F\*cked Up World, and I loved, I really just enjoyed, because we have similar spaces of learning, seeing how you approached some of these like foundational ideas, and so I thought we could talk about some of those ideas, for like, people who haven't read either of the books or who just wanna think about them more.

The first one is projection. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what that term means to you and why you thought it was important to put it in your book, how it relates to trauma or healing, or the kind of main concepts that you're pursuing in your book.

Prentis: Yeah, and I'd love to hear how you're also holding it in your book too. I think for me, it begins in this space of what's unresolved to us, or what are we unaware of that's operating at a level that's difficult for us to proceed. It's what kind of pattern are we locked in, what kind of questions are we holding that we're still unclear of? And how do those questions emerge almost as a filter over our reality and relationship.

So to me, projection begins in that unresolved place. Then it's like you literally project something onto a person, a relationship, an encounter, that really is about, in a way, trying to understand something that has happened before. You're trying to understand it

through this situation.

It's tricky because when you're in the present, it's like things don't bend themselves exactly to the past 'cause it's a totally different encounter, a relationship or moment in time. But projection is that insistence of overlaying this encounter with something else that you don't quite understand. And I think it, it shows up in therapeutic spaces all the time.

It's fully operating in any sort of, in any kind of relationship, but also in, in healing spaces. And I think the really useful thing is to have a space where you either have enough room or someone is working with you to understand what it is that is being projected.

Dean: Yeah. I love that you use the word 'filter'. I've been really thinking about visuals for some of these concepts, and I didn't end up getting to put this in my book, but my sister was working with me to draw some visuals and we collaborated on an image that was like somebody whose head is actually a, like a film projector and they're looking at somebody else and they're projecting upon them an image.

And so I'm looking at you, but I'm seeing a teacher who really hurt me when I was in first grade, or I'm seeing my mom, or I'm seeing the way my siblings treated me when they teased me or whatever.

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: Something else is happening and I also love that you use the word 'liberate' because to me I think liberation fundamentally is being with things as they are.

I want to be with you as you are, who is unknowable to me in many ways, and find out about who you are, and I want to be with me. I'm having a reaction where I am feeling like you're my sibling or my mother or whatever happened.

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: Like I want to be with all that. And actually know that's happening as much as I can. Like obviously we are not transparent to ourselves instead of just – my book is so much about the ways people treat each other poorly in our communities and how it's impacting our movements. Also, your book to me is entirely about that. And that's what big question we're all in right now. But part of what I'm really thinking of is how can –oh, I'm having a strong feeling. Prentis and I are in it, and we're having a disagreement about our activist group, or our love affair, or whatever – our roommate situation. I'm overcome with a strong feeling and how can I not assume it's about Prentis?

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: How can I be like, what is this about? How is this about me? My history, stuff I've felt before, things I'm afraid of. And it's interacting with Prentis. Something-

Prentis: Yes.

Dean: - About Prentis is bringing it up. You know that phrase, people say "if it's hysterical, it's historical". There's more here. So it doesn't mean nothing happened. Yes, Prentis left the dishes in the sink and I'm sad, but also I am having these other pieces, and if I can even have one millimeter of perspective on that-

Prentis: That's right.

Dean: -I might treat you differently or care for myself with more focus while I'm dealing with this-

Prentis: Mm-hmm.

Dean: - Strong feeling instead of just, I don't know, maybe impacting our relationship.

Prentis: Absolutely. Yeah. When I was training to be a therapist, my supervisor would talk about how...I can't remember what had happened. Actually, oh, I do. I dunno if I wanna tell this story, but my first potential client called, and we had an initial conversation and they said that I sounded gay and they didn't want me to be their therapist because I sounded gay.

And I was like, it was like one of my biggest fears that people would come in and be like, I can't work with you, you're not safe for me, or whatever. My supervisor said, "Therapy, even when you get in the room with someone, a lot of times people are just throwing things at you. It's like weapons or shit or whatever. They're just throwing it at you and your job is not to get hit, but to let it hit the wall and point to it and go, what was that about? What was the reason for that? Or what does that mean to you?" That's the other side of projection. Sometimes we get involved in the dance too, and our, my job was really to - and continues to be as much as I can - and get out of the way. But sometimes things stick and then we end up in a whole tangle together.

Dean: Mm-hmm.

And usually the people with whom we have the really hard conflicts has some kind of matching wound. So the thing I'm saying to you is the exact thing that hurts for you to hear and that you have a hard time feeling compassion when someone says to you.

Prentis: Exactly.

Dean: That's who we choose to be our lovers or our best friends or our closest collaborators frequently. And so it's, yeah, we get in the dance.

The other concept that I wanted to lift up is practice, which you talk about a lot in your book. Can you tell me a little bit more about like what that term means to you and why thinking about things as practice is helpful for transforming our lives and relationships in the way that you've dedicated your life to?

Prentis: I think for me the word practice, and this is a relationship that is developed to the word and the idea over time, but it reveals to me both a commitment to coming back and when you come back to a practice over and over, you start to then be able to confront and understand the barriers, the opposition, everything that exists in you that makes the practice hard.

Returning gives you an opportunity to understand those more and more, so that's why commitment is so important. Not because it's easier, it feels good or all these things. It just allows you to know yourself more and more. I think the other part of practice is that in a way it necessarily builds in a certain kind of compassion – or can – to revisit means to stay in practice is to have days that nothing feels like it moved or transformed.

If you miss a day to crawl back to the mat and try again, it's like being in that softening the edges of 'I should have something figured out'. Is the ongoing process of transforming. Once you are committed to a practice, you realize that the practice is the practice. The returning is the practice. The understanding is the practice. You may develop skills along the way, but what's inside of practice is the opportunity to know yourself and to grow. It's deeply important to practice in order to live into what it is that we value because we are well practiced in a whole lot of other things.

I think your book really points to that, that we get well trained and we practice a lot around certain ways of loving or being in relationship, that it becomes completely unconscious to us what those relationships require or limit, or how they shape our relationships to other people. That takes a lot of practice. There's practice on Valentine's Day. There's practice when you like check 'yes' or 'no' when you're in middle school. There's like all this practice around relationships and if we wanna practice something different in love and in relationship, we have to risk and step into the unknown and return and return. So that's why practice to me is so important. That's how we actually grow and change.

Dean: I love what you said about that. I wrote down the word

gentleness, like we're not ever finished. I do think there's a dynamic in our culture because we don't have enough circulating good wisdom about feelings and behaviors, that people are like, "as soon as I identify something I should do differently or feel differently, I should just be able to feel and do that".

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: Now I'm bad every time I don't. So let's say I don't wanna say that word to my partner anymore, or I know I shouldn't have this relationship to my screen time, or whatever the thing is I'm trying to change.

If there isn't a sense like that, it's okay, that it takes a lot of practice, and that you got there through a well worn groove that probably you didn't even choose. You probably inherited that feeling or behavior from cultural settings or things you were made to do at school or your family, and you might find yourself doing the thing you wish you weren't doing again even years later, after you didn't for a while. And just like that kind of like healing, being a very gradual, non-linear experience, and we just are so perfectionist towards ourselves.

Prentis: Absolutely, and it's, I, I think about the other side of this in a way. It's if I'm in relationship with people who are also practicing, what do I need to be practicing in order to hold that?

Because if people do mess up and say something, it's, you have to know your own – we have to realize in a way, or come to understand your own capacity. Is there room actually to receive as long as there's commitment? Maybe there's not. Maybe there is. Maybe it's too tender. Maybe there's more space than you thought there was. But it also, there's that other side of relationship where it's like, oh, if I allow you to be a process, I have to then assess how much room do I have for the mistakes that are gonna necessarily exist between us.

Dean: What you're saying is the exact opposite of the vibe in so many relationships. I think especially like family and love relationships where people are like, "look, you just said the thing"! And you know, even people I know who like go to therapy with the other person or whatever, and then they're like, "we established in therapy that you shouldn't act like that and you just acted like that". So like, it's almost like a, like, I've got like scored one against you.

And none of that is like the compassion of, "oh wow sweetheart, when you're in pain, this thing comes up for you and you doing this thing that I don't love actually just means you were in pain". It's like the level of compassion we could put around other people's supposed mistakes or moments of acting out or being, yeah, like letting the stuff spill over.

Prentis: Yeah. Yeah. That's so hard and it's, yeah, it's so hard. I'll leave it there.

Dean: The other thing you said too about our well worn practices: I, when we were in, in generative somatics classes together, people are always saying over and over again, "you're always practicing something". And I found that phrase really helpful because it's like...the example for me is, I'm always rushing around, making myself not late, but like not really exactly on time. Yeah, what's the emotional dynamic that is, you could call like adrenaline addiction or you could call like a lifetime history of packing too much in, that comes from early childhood. Like trying too hard to make things okay that weren't, or having more responsibilities and things to do than I could, whatever it is. But I think then it's, it's Sunday afternoon and I'm going to the park. How am I making this feeling happen again? Just like, what am I practicing?

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: What am I putting over and over again in my life unconsciously? And not to judge, but just to be like, what would it be like to just do it the other way? Or one thing I talk about in the book too is people switching roles in relationships. If you always plan the dates or if I always do the food or if you always buy the plane tickets or whatever it is, could we just, what happens when we try the other thing, and can we allow it? Oh, you're not that good at buying plane tickets, so there was a mistake. It's cool. How to loosen up. How do we get some liberation and choice?

Prentis: I've really been studying homeostasis in the body a lot and how the body comes to experience homeostasis. All these systems and processes in this dynamic balance. It also produces a way of feeling that we identify as 'the way I should feel'. And so no matter what environment we're in, we'll create and shape conditions so that we produce that sort of feeling in our bodies. And I'm really fascinated by that. And we know that we create patterns around us, but I'm interested in how we undo that. I know in order to undo it, there'll be the destabilizing, which was in somatics called the opening.

I'm curious about the anxiety that produces, and what can address that, comfort that, because that's gonna cause an anxiety in order to stop that, because this is the way things are supposed to feel. And I believe that we can undo that and shift into a different dynamic balance. But I'm super curious about what the role of relationships, the role of habits, all these things, and readjusting our homeostasis.

Dean: Yeah. 'Cause it's like those dominant feelings also, I think they're very intergenerational. Like the feeling I have, maybe the feeling that was the feeling of my household, or the feeling in my

primary caregiver's body that person was feeling, or a major coping mechanism feeling.

I'm just thinking about some ones that I observe in people I know. Like I know people who are, no matter what happens, they're steady. It's almost like they learned, trauma taught them to be –

Prentis: Oh that's me.

Dean: Yeah. And that, and the liberation for them might be able to be more moved by things more. And some people who are like, everywhere they go, they feel left out, unseen. And then encounter all the people in movement, they join our movement groups, and no matter how loving people are, they're still living a real painful history of never being included. And so they cannot get satisfaction. And sometimes cause drama around it, and need to truth-tell about it in a way that is disruptive or disorganizing for the group.

Or I think there's so much avoidance in our culture right now. Like most people are like checking out, and like heavily involved in entertainment, and substances, 'cause there's so much pain. And because there's so many forced activities like school and work and stuff. And so –

Prentis: Yeah, absolutely.

Dean: The feeling of just, I don't want anything and I don't even want other people or friends or connection. Or, I don't, "nothing sounds good to me" I think is like a culturally practiced feeling right now, which can make it hard for people to get politicized. 'Cause it's, it's like, I'm pissed about all this stuff, but I don't, the idea of going to a meeting with other – everything sounds bad.

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: You see that a lot in people much, much more than even 10 years ago.

Prentis: And I think even the way people engage with, you know, what they consider political or what's going on in the world. I think the way that they consume that also checks people out because it's, when you're talking about going to a meeting, it's, in a way that's the ideal place to contend with everything that's happening. But for most people, engagement looks like a lot of online, rapidly witnessing horror alone and driving them deeper into a sort of isolation and numbness and, yeah, I'm thinking about that a lot. It's like the numbness makes so much sense to me and engagement has to...I actually struggle to figure out how to make engagement feel really compelling in this time because it's just, it's a challenge. It's a particular challenge of this moment.

Dean: Yeah. There's a pacifying feeling of individual, like I'm individually consuming the media about – including the inspiring media. I'm also individually including consuming really cool images about resistance, but it's all just me consuming it and not a lot of me making it or me –

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: – Collaborating with others or me moving towards it and maybe I feel sometimes great satisfaction just sitting there consuming it. But I think that, yeah, there is a real way that our media experiences are shaping, I think, what feels possible.

Prentis: Yeah, absolutely.

Dean: There's so much in your book that's about healing in relationships and the possibility of healing in relationships of all kinds, and also how relationships are where we like, see where our wounds are, where things turn up.

You talk beautifully about trust, boundaries, authenticity, safety, belonging, dignity. Like you bring these concepts to life and really move them out of being abstracted. And I'm curious with what you're focusing on in this work and in...I know you're also a couple's therapist and that you, you do this work in so many different ways.

I'm curious if you'd talk a little bit about the particular ways that romantic and sexual relationships can be places for healing or particular kinds of difficulty. Obviously that's the focus of Love In A F\*cked Up World, and I'm just like, I also wanna read your entire future book on that, so give me a little preview.

Prentis: No, I was so excited when I got to read some of the advanced copy of your book because it, I don't know, it's one of those books like, oh yeah, we really need this. 'Cause you're just, I think showing what is possible at the site of relationship. And a lot of what I've been considering in the last bit is that relationship is really the place that we're going to heal. We're talking about healing. I think it is all about relationship, which I think why relationship is honestly so terrifying to us is that it's encountering the unknown. It's like this vulnerability, being with the unknown, being with the other, being with ourselves in a way and being committed to...I mean, you talk about in the book, like knowing ourselves, knowing our own emotional terrain a bit more.

That's why it's so terrifying. That's why we wall ourselves off to it. Or I think we both talk in our books about the scripts that we inherit and how we just move in those scripts rather than get to actually know ourselves and each other.

So yeah, I think relationship is just this really profound place of practice. And I have to say, I've been in a romantic relationship with someone for 13 years, and I think when I was at another point in my life, I would've understood that as a totally different thing than what I realize it is now. I think you talk about this in the book too, but you think that you're just gonna be in love forever and you're just like moving down this path. But it's actually, it's like commitment and practice. It's committing to finding a way back. It's committing to your own transformation. It's finding a way to listen. It's...I am a different person than I was at the start of this relationship, and that is both through my experiences in life, but also through being loved in a way that allows me to change over time.

I think all relationships can do this if there's that level of commitment and returning and moving through things, and...I was talking to a friend recently who was, has been going through a really rough patch with their partner, and she said to me, "oh, I just really appreciate how you and your (my partner Kasha) how you work through things. How do you do that?" And I was like, "painfully, often", but also it's... I think what we know is that sometimes our projections are in the way. Sometimes, even though we can feel so very certain and clear about how the other person is a villain, the villain of all time, there's something in me that has gotten somewhat used to the idea that I can be wrong about what I'm perceiving, or the meaning I'm making, actually, of what I see. And that little tiny kernel of knowledge, which I often reject, is what has allowed me to continue to change and transform in this relationship. It's like I can be so sure, I can see everything. I can be, it's like you're entering into a whole world of what this is, what it means. What you always do, what's happening now, how it's like this. And it can just find a way to slightly be like a two degree shift of perspective and you're like, oh, this is a whole other world than I thought it was.

I feel like that practice of relationship in particular, and some of my relationships with my friends, has done the deepest healing work possible. When I, my stories were so rigid, that commitment that we've both shared over these years has humbled me and allowed me to leave some patterns behind that really had me in a chokehold, to be perfectly honest.

Yeah, I think in that way, my romantic relationship has been really healing to me.

Dean: Yeah, I really feel that some of the strongest projections we have will come up with sexual and romantic partners. And that's why people act the worst in those relationships. Like so many people I know are like, on in the movement, great friend. And you're like, they did what to their partner? Like that -

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: And that's the history of our, we live in a society where over 30% of people are in domestic violence relationships and where it's a really dangerous area of our lives. And I think it's because we get really deeply stirred and we do see people as the villain like, very severely, and we have very few tools for that. And then also inside that we're living inside the romance myth. When you said the thing about you've been together for 13 years and you have changed so much, and that it wasn't just the fixed experience of the first falling in love, that you just get to last –

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: – Exactly in that for 13 years, that is the romantic fantasy of our culture: it's that you'll meet Prince Charming and have this experience that will be static. And that is what the concept of marriage, like that it'll be forever and that you'll be exactly the same forever. And then people's accusations of each other are things like "you've changed!"

Prentis: Right?

Dean: I certainly hope so. But that I think for us as people who want radical transformation of our societies, and as queers and as feminists and as anti-racists and anti-capitalists, where like, we want people to choose what they're doing. Like fundamentally to have these conversations, do I still wanna be with you? I wanna be choosing that every day. Not because any, like the government signed anything or whatever.

I've had a therapist say to me before that if you stay in relationships a long time, you're actually having like multiple relationships.

Prentis: Oh yeah.

Dean: Including like major crises where you decide again, do we wanna still be in this? And I think that's true with all kinds of relationships, but it's just really particularly visible in our society with romantic and sexual relationships. Yeah. You're not the same person. The terms are new, either logistical things –

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: Like we're doing this with a kid, or we're doing this and one person really wants to move to another place or begin a new spiritual inquiry that changes their time or whatever. Or you've encountered something in yourself that's opening the possibility for either greater intimacy or split. There's just the layers.

Prentis: Everything can change. Everything can change. And I think this point of choosing is so important, 'cause I think it's another way that we try to block actually knowing each other. And I think that's what happens all the time. I don't wanna give you the option to choose because I don't want to know that about you, actually, I don't wanna know if you choose me or not. I can't open that question. I can't tolerate it because of what I've decided it means about me and my fundamental worth, et cetera. But I do think, to your point, yeah, I think relationships must change. Do change. We come to choice points all the time.

And to allow that is to actually allow us to be in real relationship. That is what relationship is. It has to allow that breathing room to go, oh, I choose this, or I'm recommitting to this. I wanna be here, or I don't choose this anymore. My desires for my life have changed. And that's the honest truth. And to know me is to know that everything changes.

And 13 years. A million things have changed. Mm-hmm. And it's been so challenging to talk about those at different times. But it's also eventually when we get there, it's, oh, now I know I can see more of you than I could see before. And that's another gift: I can see more of myself. I can see my clinging and my desperation. I can see what I've been avoiding and how I've been so dependent on this relationship to fulfill everything in my life. I can see more of that now at the point of rupture too.

Dean: Mm-hmm.

Prentis: And so then I can address it in a different way.

Dean: And being more interested and being in reality –

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: – Than in having the fantasy of the romance myth. I think that's really,

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: People want the security, and for good reason. We're told it's the only thing that'll make us happy or well or safe. So it's like a really big deal just to try to let go of it even a little, but to be like, I'm more interested in knowing who you are and who I am now than in having that comfort of that, and trying to force you into that. I think a lot of conflict in relationships is "get back in the box that I put you in when I met you!" Like be my good feeling machine or like whatever.

Prentis: In the, oh, sorry. Go ahead.

Dean: Please go ahead.

Prentis: No go.

Dean: No, you go.

Prentis: Okay. I was just thinking about the start of our relationship. I used to say to my partner something that I thought at the time was like, this is the most I felt about anyone. And I would say, I am going to do my best to be committed to you until I die. And she was just like, can you just say "I'm gonna love you forever"? And I was like, wait, I'm saying the most generous thing I can say.

I've never said anything like this to another person. I'm gonna do my best to commit to this relationship until I die. And she was like, just humor me. So I would, in the beginning, I would say, I'm gonna love you forever, and that means I'm gonna do my best, 'cause that's really, that's all I got.

Dean: We're really seeing the differences in our intimacy styles right now, Prentis, because my boyfriend of 15 years, we agree every season to stay there for one more season. You and Kasha are like, let's be together forever until we die. And I'm like, let's talk about spring.

Prentis: We do that too now, but we've gotten more honest over time. But I still think that is still my commitment: I'll do my best.

Dean: That's beautiful. I love that. Yeah.

I'm having this thought, which maybe we'll edit out later, but I just wanna name this thing. There's this, the mainstream relationship, self-help author, psychologist type of person named Terry Real. And he has this idea that you have a core negative image of your partner, a CNI. And so it's like the way you see your partner when you're most like emotionally activated, that's a real reduction. It's not really who they are.

Prentis: Oh, that's, yeah.

Dean: And it's just like a basic, oh, like you're selfish and you don't care about me and blah blah.

Prentis: Mm-hmm.

Dean: You're like something, you're, I'm thinking about the examples from his book, but anyway, and so he encourages people who are in long committed relationships to really figure out what their core negative image of their partner is so that they can be aware when it's

happening.

And this is really edgy – and I recommend you do not rush into this, anybody who's listening – tell each other what they are. Because what it is usually, if we're fighting and you are seeing me through that lens, there's also always a grain of truth in the core negative image.

Prentis: Mm-hmm.

Dean: Something slightly true. I'm not the most selfish person in the world, but it's true that I'm slow on the dishes or whatever, or it's true that I lose track when I am doing this whatever, or that I don't call back or whatever it is.

So like, the job of the partner, when you see that your person is in the CNI about you, is you are: my lover is in distress. I feel compassion for them, even though they're saying like, this terrible thing about me, fundamentally. I know that it's just a sign of their distress, and I know that a part of it is true. And is there any part of it that I can soothe them by acknowledging.

Prentis: Right.

Dean: I'm like, that's like varsity level care.

Prentis: That is. Yeah. No, that's good. I'm gonna have to use that. Yeah. It's, it's that move. I think it's that move that's so hard, that surrender move that I feel like we've practiced together. It's can I surrender into the kernel of truth in this? Can I surrender into, almost like out of this contentious place where we're battling over some detail or some image of ourselves, can I open enough to change the dynamic that's trying to move through us? Can I surrender? And that move is so hard.

Someone's coming at me, I wanna defend, but if someone's coming at me can I fall underneath? Can I alchemize something in this moment to create a whole other paradigm? Yeah. It's a complex move when you're afraid or being attacked, et cetera.

Dean: Yeah. And if you're mischaracterizing me in our argument, can I get less concerned about being right or fixing, no, it was six times not seven or whatever. And can I instead, or you're arguing with me wrong, you're expressing your feelings wrong. Can I instead just be like, you're in distress. I know you don't always feel this way about me. Not throw my core negative image back at you, but instead can somebody give some parental holding love to this situation?

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: And that's, it is a a lot to ask, but it's, I feel like I, when

I see glimmers of it, in my experience is, it's just, this is what everyone wants and needs is to be able to be imperfect and messy, to not have to show up perfectly, which we can't do anyway. Like we're incapable.

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: Especially when we're distressed.

Prentis: Yeah, absolutely.

Dean: Okay. I have my next question for you.

Prentis: And then I get a question for you. Yeah.

Dean: Okay. Actually, I wanna ask you this question that... shame comes up a lot in the book, in your book, and it's the center of my work. I'm a shame monster. It's my personal identity, my gender identity. And I'm curious, I feel like you provide such a rich, nuanced account of what it can look like to experience shame, and I'm curious if you would reflect some on how shame impacts our relationships, on what you think helps with shame. Like it just, it's a huge part of the work.

Prentis: Yeah. I will talk about that from the perspective of the book, but, and I also have to say, I think a little bit of my, there's something nuanced happening on the edges of my understanding of shame. I think the thing that's like the big takeaway for me is that a lot of times we're going for transformation, where it's changed behavior is what we are looking for, in the other, in ourselves. But shame, while it feels like it's right there, it's...I want changed behavior. I'm gonna shame this out of someone and that's gonna produce it. It might actually produce changed behavior, but behavior is representative of some deeper belief. And so shame is not actually addressing what it is that's producing whatever the action is.

So a lot of times when we shame someone into an action, it doesn't hold over time 'cause we haven't actually addressed what is producing that action. And I think the challenge around shame is that if the person at their core is holding this question of their worthiness or their belonging, if they feel like the person that they are at their core is not worth anything, that is a person that can't change. That's a self that actually cannot transform.

So the more that we attempt to produce that feeling of worthlessness or inherent badness, the less we give room for the possibility of sustained understanding and change over time. So I always say, shortcut: shame impedes change. And in a way, I wish that it weren't true because it seems, it's like such an easy thing to do. It's like I, oh, I know how to do that. You know what I mean? All this other

stuff we're talking about, and surrendering and compassion, making room, it's like, ugh, who has time for that. Shame seems so much easier. But it doesn't, in the same way, it didn't, I think for a lot of us as kids who were shamed, for whatever reason, it may have created a temporarily changed behavior, or it may have created changed behavior in front of our parents, but it didn't change us deeply because we didn't, we weren't understood. We weren't able to, we weren't supported to look at our motivations. All the things that go into behavior, we didn't actually get a chance, a safe place to examine.

And on a social level too, it's like shame is the way that we keep people in line and in the status quo. We shame people for things that are often inherent to them. Growing up feeling, growing up as a black kid, black queer kid in the South, it was like everything about me. It was like, this is shameful. I am shameful. I'm bad at my core. I'm bad as a queer person. I'm bad as a black person. So I can internalize it and end up in this never ending pursuit of, can I just get good enough to pass enough, in a way? That's one thing that shame can do. Or can I figure out that shame is actually not, this isn't mine. It's a tool that's used to keep things in a particular order. So I think it's a really massive tool of social control.

The thing that I'm considering in this moment...so I was in Hawai'i doing a book event and my friend No'u was doing the book event with me, and she was just talking about how those kind of shaming moments of, oh, we don't do that. We don't act like that. We don't do that. It is a teacher of the norms in a way, in a culture or society. And this edge that I'm playing with is, okay, there's oppressive ways that shame comes in, and there is a, there's a way that we go: here, we speak to our elders, or here we do these things. It's not always clear to me what feels like it takes it too far, and what... I think there is some more wiggle room. I don't think it's as cut and dry as I maybe used to think. Because I was on the plane recently, and it's like, people like coughing and not having a mask on, not covering their face. I was on a plane once and someone hocked a loogie in the foot rest, and I was just like, I wish that you had been shamed about that, because that's absolutely unacceptable to me.

So I have things that I'm like, I don't know, I guess it could do a deeper understanding thing, but you need to cut it out immediately. Yeah. So those are some of the things I'm in inquiry about. I'm curious your perspective on shame.

Dean: Yeah. When you said that, it made me think about these fundamental abolitionist questions we have about how we can create a society together where punishment is not the way that we articulate norms, but where we still have norms. Yeah. We don't touch people without their permission. We don't – whatever it is. And I feel like years ago someone told me like the difference between guilt and shame

or like remorse and shame, right? It's like shame is where not only do I think I did something wrong, but I think I'm fundamentally bad and I have to hide enough that people don't find out who I really am. Versus, oh dang, I wish I didn't do that. I'm gonna apologize and we could move on. So I also think the person bringing the norm can bring either energy. Like you are foul for who you are.

Prentis: Yeah. Yeah.

Dean: Or, we really need people to not do that in here. You know what I mean? And I think whole systems bring one or the other. And we live in such a shame society and such a punishment exile society. Everyone's afraid they're about to get kicked out, or they gotta be the one who kicks people out. Like that kind of vibe and that, and you get, people get a feeling of pleasurable thrill from shaming others on little and big things, including their children, but also the person at the store or whatever. And so that's the, that's like the water we're swimming in.

One thing I noticed when working with my own therapists and practitioners is that for years they'd be like, that's shame. That's shame. Like I would see so much of my thinking that I didn't know was shame. Because it's an elaborate whole, it's an elaborate artificial system that's managing my okayness and what to do and not do, and it would be an underlying belief that I wasn't aware of, that there was something fundamentally like wrong with me.

Also so much of my life as a person doing radical political work is like being out on a limb by myself somewhere, people disagreeing with me, saying something nobody wants to hear in a job, university, courthouse, wherever. So that means shame is really hard because of course shame tells me to just do whatever people who are in front of me will like, because I am fundamentally, I am actually too weird, too big, too – I'm overreacting. Whatever the story that, that shuts up people who are trying to speak for justice. So just interesting to, on the one hand, be proud of ourselves when we have done things, even though we are shame monsters. And also be like, wow, what was the cost? How painful was that? Or, I used to have a lot of like really severe shame spirals after every time I said anything publicly. But I did it anyway because I felt driven to do it.

But just, it's just interesting, I just, I think for a lot of people I love, even just coming to notice where shame is more about anything, about their body, their sexuality, asking for things they need, saying something they believe in. Just noticing it, not even needing to resolve it, but just noticing it and being, oh, that's shame. And then in a wonderful world we get to be like, oh hey, that's not me, that's not mine. I didn't invent that. That's a message that got put in here that I can also know isn't totally true.

Prentis: I'm just thinking about, as you say that, it reminded me of just thinking of this sort of stance we can take. Like I, this is gonna sound completely unrelated, but when my kid was really small we tried to put her to bed and she was screaming. And then I would say, I'm gonna talk to the self inside of her that wants to go to sleep. And that's who I would try to communicate with. I would say, I know there's a part of you that wants to sleep right now and you're having a hard time and I wanna help you and I'm gonna try to figure out how to help you, instead of engaging with the self that was tantruming.

And I think about that sometimes in terms of the orientation I have inside of myself to my own shame when I do things that feel unpopular – and they are often really unpopular. But if I can do it in a way that's speaking to the self and others that believes in liberation, that longs to be free, I think sometimes that can help break up the way that we can either be experiencing shame and pushing past it, that kind of gas/brake sensation that we have, as to be like, I'm actually speaking to the part that I believe, I have no real confirmation, but the part that I choose to believe is in each of us that longs for liberation for themselves and for others. And maybe the shame and the fear and everything that's in the way is preventing that understanding from being expressed. But I believe it's in there. So I'm gonna talk to that person. That that helps me a lot in being in unpopular places. You know? I talk to everyone all the time. I'm that kind of person. I always make a friend on the street, unlikely friends, and sometimes my friends and my partner are like, can you not talk to people right now?

But I think I'm always talking at that place in people.

Dean: I would consider that part of your magic. I think as your student, your teaching felt like a pedagogy of modeling and that your book feels the same way. Like modeling vulnerability, showing me how it was done, like your embodied practice in our courses. A lot of people can talk about this stuff, but it's tough to really be with it with others. And it's so beautiful to think about you having that experience with your kid.

You know the story that actually is like haunting me the most from your book is a story about your first kiss with a girl where someone called the police on you. And just the profoundness of being an adolescent and like, just the conditions under which we have to be our beautiful wild animal selves in this society are so brutal. And I was thinking about that when we were talking about shame.

And also I just recently had this really intense experience where I came to Portland, Oregon to see Morgan Bassichis, our mutual friend, perform a beautiful show, with a bunch of trans people. And then we got on the Amtrak train to go back to Seattle together, and one of these trans girls in our group was telling us all a beautiful story about this date she went on with another trans girl. And it was just

like, it was that feeling where it's like trans people are all actually adolescents. So it was like so sweet. And it was actually a very chaste story about like never kissing and dancing together. It was so cute. We were all like, oh yeah. We're sitting in the cafe car and we're like all giggling and enjoying this. And the, the guy who works on the train, the conductor or whatever, he is also sitting in the cafe car and he like loudly from his seat, like shamed her and yelled at her and said, nobody wants to hear about your inappropriate sexuality.

And it was super transphobic. Super really specifically felt like this anti trans woman thing. And it was so intense for all of us. And I was racked with anger, protectiveness for her, love for her, and shame. Like, 'cause he did shame on us and on her.

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: But also on all trans people and all queers. It was just so intense. And just like, we all have those buttons implanted whether or not... We all were like, that person's a fool. We were all together. So I was thinking about how in your story about you and the girl you kissed, like how your friendship didn't thrive afterwards. How sometimes when we have things like that... Is that, do I remember that right?

Prentis: Two different stories.

Dean: Sorry. Oh, no, you're right. It was a different thing. But sometimes when things –

Prentis: We thrived.

Dean: Okay good.

But sometimes when things happen between people when we're together, like how do we make it a coming together? How do we get through it together? And I think sometimes things happen like to you and your family, like my experience, or pivotal moments of either being shamed or punished that really can rock the relationships too.

And how like when we can feel each other's support and love, even when a horrible thing happens, it can actually be less damaging. I dunno. Just was like thinking about that kind of whole journey with the stories from your book and with our recent train experience.

Prentis: I only have a question in return, and this is the question that I'm turning into in this next period, is how do we reach for each other when things get really hard?

And I don't think that it's not an uncomplicated thing. I've been

studying fear a lot lately and how fear wants to move us away from other people. It's, yeah, the only way I can be safe is like, narrow what it is that I'm paying attention to. And I can pay attention to myself and getting myself safe.

I was reading this book recently about fear and they were saying that one of the reasons, and I hate to bring this example in, but the military focuses on collective activity so much because when people are in fearful situations, they turn into individuals in a really particular way. So they really practice taking care of each other in all of these scenarios so that they do that actually in the field. And I was like, wow, the military knows that. And how do we use that knowledge actually to strengthen what it is that we're doing?

'Cause it's not just that, oh, fear is bad, isolation's bad. It's actually something that's in us. It's not something remote to us. It's not something we can push away. It's not undesirable and not of us. It's deeply of us in a way. And if we had more regular practice of being in community and communal space and caring for each other, it wouldn't feel as hard as it seems to be right now to reach for each other in crisis. We would practice that often because we'd know what we're also capable of.

So I've been, yeah, just thinking about that a lot. This question that feels like it's the next however many years of my life, this question of like, 'how do you reach for each other when you're afraid' feels so important to me right now.

Dean: Yeah, what you're just saying too made me think about how you talk in your book a lot really effectively about how individualized our culture is right now, and people are really afraid. We're having like existential crises. Of course, that response you're describing seems like it's happening at such a big level, and it also made me think about how I think people even just taking like a street medics class or taking classes or doing work that's about prepping for crises of any kind in a collective way where you care for others. Just even going through the scenarios in your mind, just doing that kind of thinking, when we've been...

Also, we live in a culture that shows us like the zombie apocalypse movies where you're just like, my job when things are bad will be to like get my biggest hoard of stuff and, yeah, not share with anybody, and protecting with a gun (like of course none of that works, P.S.). But I feel like, how can we practice really something that we have not been exposed to enough?

It also made me think about, my sister and I have had this experience where when we remember back to some of the kind of most traumatic experiences of our childhoods, we each remember having been there alone, but we were both there.

Prentis: Wow. Wow.

Dean: And I think that is so interesting, right? It's literally like a, amnesia. Wow, we weren't alone. And I think that's because trauma, when you're not getting fundamental things you need while something bad's happening, feels like you're alone. And it gives me comfort to know that she was there. And there are times when I do remember her being there and I'm so glad I can reflect with her on these instances. But I bet that happens to a lot of people. Like it seems like it's the same thing you're talking about in the system.

Prentis: Yes. That's right. I'm so glad that y'all have that relationship too.

I was, I wrote a story in the book about my sister and this like early traumatic memory. But it took me, I had been recounting a memory for, I don't know, however many years in therapy until I realized one day that she, it was this profound thing. I was like, I knew that she turned me around. I was looking at something horrible. I knew that she turned me around. I had this moment. My sister turned me around and put her arm around me, and I just called her crying like, you turned me around. You held me. I didn't understand that before. And it opened up a whole other way of being in that memory, which was still terrifying, still all these things, but I realized that there was love there.

And she was also a child. She's older than me, but she was still a child and she had reached for me, it was like this loving moment. And I was like, oh, now there's love infused in that, that I wasn't able to perceive before. And it totally changed everything for me, actually, our relationship, everything.

Dean: I think there's something really profound about healing work about the past, about going back and finding love. I had this experience when my friends started having kids, and I'd be taking care of these babies and I was like, oh my god, someone did all this for me. I don't remember it. But as neglectful and abandoned and all the things that happened where I didn't, before I can remember, people took precious care of me or I would be dead.

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: And that I could feel back, even though my parents are dead, I could feel back into their love. And I'm curious about how much our healing is somewhat about changing what stories we have about the world and about ourselves and about our own histories.

Prentis: Yeah, I think it's what we're saying, even in the projection thing too. It's reentering the stories and looking around and finding

something else that was there, or finding a need that was there. Finding whatever it is. It's like being willing to not just go back over and over again to reopen the wound, but go back and look around. Is, oh, there's something else here that maybe I missed before. I think it's, oh, the story I have of, I was unlovable, actually it might be a story of: these really under-resourced people tried. And maybe there's still longing in me. My needs didn't get met. But I can also see that these people, that were under-resourced for whatever reason, they tried.

Dean: And then that might open up the possibility that when I'm encountering all the other under-resourced people in my life right now, I can see them trying instead of just seeing them, how they're failing me.

Prentis: Exactly.

Dean: And blaming them and getting in a really binary story about that.

Prentis: Absolutely. Yeah. We can do a whole other podcast also about how parenting is absolutely impossible in these conditions, no matter, like I currently have the resources to send my kid to preschool and do these things. It feels overwhelming for me and on the daily, I'm just like, my mother had three of us, working nights. What, how?

Dean: And parenting is like the most activating thing, and being around other people's parenting is like the most activating thing. I can't believe anybody doesn't immediately break up the minute they start parenting together. Because it's like you have the hardest job \_and\_ you can't possibly wanna do it the same way as one another.

Prentis: And then there's a person who's going to scream in your face multiple times a day.

Dean: And like, whose job is to like, try to like fuck with you.

Prentis: It's just, and they do a really, they're really excellent at it.

Dean: Yeah. They're brilliant.

I'm curious, what's been surprising to you to hear in terms of what people are saying about your book? Are there patterns to responses you've got? You're like, oh, I can't believe that stood out to so many people or... Sometimes I think like when I write a book and then I talk about it, I'm like, oh, I didn't actually know what this book was about until I started talking about it with others. I mean, I wrote it for all those years. I'm curious kind of what's been surprising you as you've been bringing this out into the world?

Prentis: Yeah. Different things in different places, but I will say, I think what surprised me is how activating it is to people. I think that's one. It's like less about the specific stories, but that people are like, I had to take a break, come back to it, and I was like, oh, is it intense? Am I intense and I don't know it? I think so. But I think that, I will say one of, an intention I had, and I think you mentioned this in the beginning, is that I wanted a book, it wasn't, there's people that I know that know somatics and in the work. I was not writing for that crowd. I was writing for their siblings or their friend or their cousin or parents. I wanted people to be able to understand and enter into the ideas without having to know the things that I know. But that meant that I had to write very viscerally so that it could come in, the stories could come in. So the intensity has been interesting. I've had a lot of people say to me, you said things that I didn't really know I could say out loud. And that's been some of the most incredible feedback for me, in the generations of folks that are coming and 'yeah, I didn't really know we could talk about this really intimate stuff' has been super meaningful for me.

So I think those are some of the things. Yeah, there's been a couple times where people share a story back and I'm like, that's not exactly what I wrote, but that's what it means to you.

Dean: Totally.

Prentis: Okay.

Dean: I just did that with your stories. Totally.

Prentis: It's okay.

Dean: We're all reading for like our own healing. Of course.

Prentis: Yeah. Great. Yeah.

Can I ask you a question? In a way this book feels, I think there's one way you could look at it where you're like, okay, this book feels like a departure from things that you've talked about, and you can also read it and see the obvious connections and undergirds a lot of what you've been talking about. But yeah, I think talking about love, I'm just curious how you got there to talking about love. The last chapter of my book is on love and I was super embarrassed to write about it 'cause I was like, is this serious? If people think, they're gonna think... But I just thought it was like an interesting move for you and I think it's so right on time, but it's, it could feel like you moved away from something that people might think is more practical into something that occupies a lot of imaginal space, a lot of like heart space. It traverses across a lot of terrain. So I'm just curious.

Dean: I've been writing this book for nine years and I have had so much emotional distress about it because I'm like, is it okay for me to write this book, for so many reasons. Who am I to talk about this stuff? And also I'm just as, but also because, yeah, I do have a fear that people will be like, it's a relationship self help book? 'Cause it's a genre that is considered not serious and yeah, not political. 'Cause I mean most of it is actually not very political in the ways we'd like. It's political in the ways we don't like, it's conservative. And some people think that doing work around healing in ourselves and our intimate lives is like too personal or distraction from like real political transformation.

Obviously you and I deeply believe that we cannot do one without the other. And for me, the practical piece of the book is just, this is just what I saw our groups falling apart about. I'm like, what are movements made of? They're made of people working together on things and having relationships that can sustain during doing something hard or risky together, and experiencing losses together. And our movement groups fall apart a lot over how people treat each other regarding dating, sex, romance, and friendship.

And so I was like, the amount of time I have spent over the last 25 years on my own struggles around this and supporting other people in movement around this or being in groups that fell apart. And I'm like, we need to really do stuff together right now. Like things are super bad. So it actually felt just like the blinking red light in the movement for me in a lot of ways.

And also I spent years and years reading all the literature on this and doing so much of my own work on it, and having to read between the lines because the politics is so bad. The books are all like super classist and racist and heterosexist and transphobic and all these things. And I'm just like, what if somebody just lifted some of these ideas that are useful and put them through a feminist and anti-racist, anticapitalist lens?

So that is, I felt like I had to do it, honestly. Sometimes that's how ideas are for me. I'm just like, oh, I have to express this. I don't know. Yeah, it's, other people might not agree or like it. And then it was really interesting to try to figure out how to do it well and have it be, I really want it to be accessible and reachable for people who are just getting politicized.

I think there's stuff in it for people who've been in the movement for decades and been frustrated by the same stuff as me. But I'm really hoping that people who are, I think a lot of us enter politicization through what's really going poorly in our, like, most intimate lives. And so I'm hoping that people who are like, oh, I don't like how I'm being treated by dates, or, I don't like how my friends are ditching

me when they get dates. Or also, I want to end all war and end all prisons. Like people who have that range of interests, that are maybe just getting started in it. I'm hoping it'll be one of their ways in, because for me as a feminist and a queer, learning about those parts of myself went side by side with learning about US empire and white supremacy and everything else that I needed.

It's all goes to, we do it all at the same time, but you're like listening to music and dating or having friendships or making art and blowing up pipelines and whatever. You know, like we do it all at the same, we're not like people who just do one of those things. We eat, we do it all. So that's my way in.

And I do think Mutual Aid is also a self-help book, interestingly.

Prentis: Mm-hmm.

Dean: Like the second half is just a lot about like group dynamics. And I've spent years giving a lot of workshops that are about like, how can we work together better in our group and what are some of the things we do in our groups that create hard times?

So it's, this type of thinking is definitely a huge part of my life and a lot of what people rely on me for these days in my day-to-day student groups and mutual aid groups. So it's what I end up doing a lot is just, yeah, what problem solve the interpersonal slash group dynamics. So that's like how it comes to be.

But I do think it is, it's a major genre like shift and I imagine some people will be moderately mean about it. And luckily I've spent years healing, so I'm just like, this is my one life and I did something. I'm curious about how, whether you feel a lot of exposure, like when people are saying to you, wow, you said those things that I thought we weren't allowed to say.

You do such a good job explaining somatics by sharing your own somatic experiences, like the stuff about your chest or your, like, you just really make those ideas understandable by sharing your internal experience. And I wonder what's it feel like to have a lot of people you don't know read about you in that way?

Prentis: I don't know how you do this or any writer does this, but I, writing is such a intimate experience. This is my first book. So I did talk to people. I had conversations, and then a lot of the time I holed up in my office and I wrote, and it took a lot, pull a story up, and then you try to write it and you'd be like, that's shit. And you're avoiding something. What are you afraid to say? And just this internal process of revealing what it is that I believed about what happened, what I wanted to convey. And then you do that process and then people start to edit it and you're like, okay, all right. Those

are your thoughts. I felt invaded by other people's ideas, but I could mostly deal with that.

And then you release the book out into the world and then you've lost all control. And you do events, which are lovely and can be so affirming. And it's a totally public experience of this thing that was once very intimate. And I chose for it to be intimate 'cause for all the reasons that we talked about.

But it was, it's been a little bit jarring to be perfectly honest, to find the way to move between those worlds. And I'm just, for whatever those categories are worth, I'm an introvert to the max. Or I'm just better one-on-one on a walk with someone where we can peer into each other. I'm less like, whatever this other thing is where it's a lot of projection. And generosity and kindness, and a lot of projection that you have to be like, ah.

I was encouraged by some folks that were interested in the book in the beginning. They were like, okay, write it as a therapist and give yourself the benefit of that kind of distance and elevation to write these concepts. And I was like, I don't wanna write that book. I wanna write it as me, as a person, so that people don't have to feel alone in those scary places or feel like they're always trying to achieve some something.

I do consider myself a teacher, but to me a teacher is someone that has just been asking the questions longer.

Dean: The vulnerability in it is so beautiful. And I didn't feel like you were overexposed, like in terms of as a reader, but I know how these things live in us differently than others perceive them.

Yeah. I'm so glad you didn't write it from the distanced view of the therapist. I like those kind of books sometimes, people use stories and vignettes to get you there, but it's so much more of a, it's got that storytelling quality that you can't put it down, which is just really different from those more clinical accounts, I think.

Prentis: Yeah.

Dean: I think people just really need this stuff. People don't like to read that much anymore either, so you gotta write it like in a way that's compelling.

Prentis: You know, look, I was trying to make, I was like, how to make it delicious? How can I get in that zone where it's like it pulls you in? And I think there are ways to do that. I think making it useful, practical. I just think there's ways to get people's attention and engagement, and I think your book really does that. It's like, it feels very active. Like I can be in a question, an inquiry with

myself. There's something you like, take the questions deeper. I think you're moving people through a process, which yeah, feels super engaging to me.

Dean: Thanks. I tried to make it feel like a Cosmo quiz. Like a, that made me, yeah, that mean, I mean anything. I want it to be like you could skim, like just like not asking for, just letting people have a light touch on stuff that...these are like hard areas of life to just, can it be fun in any way?

Prentis: That's right. Welcome to the self-help world. To the self-help shelf.

Dean: Yeah. Yeah. Is your book on other, is it always in the relation... Is it like, yeah. What shelf do they put it on in bookstores?

Prentis: Yeah. It's like the self-help slash psychology, personal growth shelf. That's where they put it.

Dean: When I was looking at those shelves, when I was, I was looking at formatting to be like, how do I want this to look and stuff, I was just surprised that bell hooks' book on love was on that shelf. I thought, shouldn't that also be, I don't know. I just, so many books do so many different things.

Prentis: Social sciences or something, you thought maybe?

Dean: Yeah. Or it's some kind of feminist shelf or some kind of, I don't think...

Prentis: It depends on the bookstore also.

Dean: Yeah. Yeah. Like some kinda shelf that's more about like our liberation struggles. I don't know. Yeah. It just was interesting to me that I could see your book being in multiple places, 'cause it's also an account. There's so much about the Movement for Black Lives. There's so much about like how organizing actually works, that I think is very hard to find reading about.

Prentis: Yeah. But I think, I hope that it's on a lot of different shelves. I was, that kind of was my intention that I wanted it to surprise me where it showed up. But I think other like independent bookstores, feminist bookstores, I think it, it's more likely to be in interesting places. But general bookstores, yeah, it's self-help. I think it says that on the back of the books.

Dean: And the title. Yeah, the title directs people to think.

Prentis: That was the point. I was like, I wanna show up on that shelf

and people be like, what's this? And they're like, ahhhh.

Dean: It makes me so happy. Also, some of the ways your book has been visible, like that genre, that self-help world. I feel this way also about adrienne maree brown's work. Like you two are some of the only people who are bringing a politicized lens. And it's so unethical that mostly people are told to think about their healing and wellbeing and not think about the collective, general context in which they live. That is so unfair to those in pain seeking relief. And you all, both of you bring the other wisdom that is like needed for any real healing. And also to get people out of the shame of just thinking individually instead of that there's something wrong with the context that they get to, on their own and with others, work to transform.

Prentis: Yeah. I think we're all doing it together and there's work to be done. I'm trying to be patient and I feel like the world has actually been quite generous to me in the way that it can. They're like, oh, you're the new thing. Come in. I'm like, yeah, I'm coming in. I'm gonna kick down the walls. But I appreciate being let in.

Dean: Yeah. I hope you're getting to feel satisfaction that you made this and that people –

Prentis: Thank you.

Dean: – Are just loving it because I, that's what I'm seeing.

Prentis: I really appreciate that. I think I have to leave my house more to understand that, but I appreciate that.

Dean: All right. Maybe we'll wrap up since I've kept you for so long. But I'm so grateful to you for being in this conversation. I really feel like we could do this for weeks, for dozens of episodes.

Prentis: I hope we do. I hope we figure out a way to do that, 'cause I'm really excited about what you're doing. I'm grateful for you. Always.

Dean: Thank you so much to Prentis Hemphill, someone who I think just knows so much about both love and healing, and it's so beautiful to hear these reflections. Really grateful for the time we spent together. Thank you for joining me for the latest episode of Love in a F\*cked Up World, the podcast. This podcast is based on my book of the same name, which is now out from Algonquin Books.

I hope you'll pick it up from an independent bookstore and not buy it on Amazon or Audible. Please check out libro.fm if you want the audio book. Love in a F\*cked Up World is hosted by me, Dean Spade. It is produced and edited by Hope Dector. Thank you, Ciro, Eugene, Derek, Kelsey, Lindsay, Jessica, Raindrop, Nicole and everyone else who

helped on this podcast.

Our theme music is I've been wondering by the ballet. If you found the show useful or you have ideas of things you'd like to hear about, we'd love to hear from you. Please check out our new Patreon where you can join the conversation with other listeners. I hope to see you on there, and please don't forget to submit your questions for the Ask Me Anything episode with Jessica Lanyadoo.

We need each other now more than ever, and I hope this podcast offers tools and ideas that can help us stick together in these difficult times. I hope you'll keep listening, subscribe and share this episode with people in your life.