

LOVE IN A F*CKED UP WORLD PODCAST
EP11 AMA WITH JESSICA LANYADOO (PART 1)

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 with each other because our resistance movements are made of our relationships and are only as strong as they are.

Thanks to everyone who's already joined us over on Patreon. I hope you'll consider joining us there to be part of conversations about themes from the podcast and help shape future episodes.

Ciro, one of the members of the podcast team and who also is the animator of the stop motion animation video about mutual aid that maybe you've seen that I released in 2019 and has circulated often on social media, he asked me to do a live event on Patreon recently, where we talked about themes from my next book, Getting Shit Done in a F*cked Up World. We talked about procrastination, how to pace our work, anxiety and collaborations, and so much more. You can watch the video of that session on Patreon and join us for the next one.

Thanks to everybody who was there during the Live, sharing brilliant questions and insights about your own relationships to organizing, collaboration, and getting shit [00:01:00] done.

We really appreciate all the support and love we've gotten for the podcast, and just wanted to mention a few more ways you can support. If you're listening to this podcast on Apple or Spotify, it helps us if you follow, rate, and review the podcast. Another way you can support the podcast is to spread the word. Please share this episode, or your favorite episode, with a friend.

Now to today's episode. I am very excited to share this "Ask Me Anything" question and answer with Jessica Lanyadoo. We got so many great questions that we will actually be putting out two episodes, so look forward to more soon.

As we were preparing to release this episode, the podcast team realized that some additional information might be useful for the part of the conversation where Jessica and I discuss a question from a listener who's longing for more solidarity around COVID safety, and observing the isolation that many people with chronic illness and disabilities experience when they can't attend community events because people aren't doing COVID safety precautions like masking.

When we were editing the episode, we realized that the conversation that Jessica and I are having might presume some contexts from our lives that may not be [00:02:00] familiar to all listeners. Even on our own team, we've had very different experiences with how much people in our communities are or are not masking or testing for COVID

if they get sick.

We have different information about COVID. And we're in different social contexts in terms of norms about COVID safety, so we wanted to put some additional information in the show notes that might be useful, both about Long COVID and about the kinds of organizing people are doing in local communities to bring more COVID safety and disability justice to events.

The general context of this conversation, which we recorded in October 2025, is that after an initial period of more concern about masking, ventilation, testing, and not showing up to places as symptomatic, COVID awareness and precautions decreased a lot in many places in the world. The governments and corporations wanted us all to go back to work and school, and masking became discouraged at many jobs.

Over time, most people stopped wearing masks. COVID testing sites were shut down, and more and more people stopped testing for COVID when they got sick. Policy changes and behavior changes meant that people started going to [00:03:00] school and work more, even if they were symptomatic. And for many people with chronic illness and disabilities, this meant it became way less safe to go on public transit or to the doctor's office, to public events or any public place.

In some communities, people are still putting on masked events out of a desire to make events accessible to people with illnesses and disabilities and prevent the spread of COVID, and many people are trying to organize to increase those practices.

Some places I've been, it's pretty typical to be asked to wear a mask at an event, or to ask people to test before coming, to not come if they have symptoms, or to plan events outdoors or work on ventilation and air filtering. In other places I've been, people tell me they haven't been asked to mask at an event in years.

Since I started doing events about my new book in January 2025, I've asked people to mask at all my events, and many people have come to events and shared that it was a very rare chance for them to join something in the community. I've gotten strong feedback that asking people to mask at events that I'm organizing is a way to be in solidarity with people in my communities, and I'm also [00:04:00] interested in protecting my own health from more exposures to COVID.

Okay, so that's some context for this conversation. I loved answering these listener questions with Jessica, and I hope you'll tune in to Ghost of a Podcast to hear more from her.

Welcome to the podcast, Jessica Lanyadoo. I'm so excited about recording an Ask Me Anything episode with you. Thank you for joining.

Jessica: I am overjoyed to be here.

Dean: I feel like it's important for people to know that I had my first ever astrology reading in my life with you. It was given to me as a gift by my friends for my 25th birthday.

Jessica: 25th birthday!

Dean: Yes.

Jessica: Oh my god. It was that long ago.

Dean: In person, at your location in San Francisco, your, your maybe, I think your first office that you were doing astrology out of.

Jessica: Yes. It was a complicated office environment, but yes. Well, we can say that ish. Yeah.

Dean: As usual, it had your incredible aesthetics. I remember how bowled over I was by the space and the way you manage it. And [00:05:00] it was a life changing experience in which I was like, oh, astrology is real. This person has just fully read me and given me like, incredibly useful advice. And since then, I've of course followed your work and stayed in touch with you and been like really moved by your own work as a podcaster, and especially the ways that you support people to take political action. You know, people who are maybe being politicized by coming to astrology and to self-inquiry and to the feminist and queer and anti-racist themes that are central to your work. And I just am like very moved by the popularity of your podcast and what you're saying there, and so delighted to get to be in conversation with you.

Jessica: Aw, thanks. That's so nice. Well, you know, I am, as everybody else who is listening to this, is such a huge fan of your work and has been influenced in so many ways by your body of work over so many years. So we are co-presidents of co-appreciation society, which I hope [00:06:00] everyone will join.

Dean: Yes, it sounds great.

And, and for people who don't know, at the beginning of this year of 2025, we had a really fun time doing a, Jessica does this incredible webinar at the beginning of every year looking at the astrology of the year ahead, which is some rough astrology these days. And so we collaborated on that and it was a really fun opportunity for me to do some historical research and just think about these themes.

So I'm excited to be back together, not just in our usual signal chat, but also here on this podcast. And we're gonna answer listener

questions and people sent in a bunch of really juicy questions, so maybe I'll read us the first one.

Jessica: Yeah, kick it off.

Dean: Okay, so the first question is: "I've been really encouraged to hear you talk so honestly about collapse from a left anarchist perspective. What you've said about collapse, being very hard to discuss with friends, family, and comrades really resonated.

Can you talk more about tools for navigating the reality of ongoing collapse, both in the realm of your interpersonal relationships and organizing work?"

And this is [00:07:00] something that Jessica and I talk about even in our own friendship about what it's like to have this awareness and hold it in our relationships. And I wonder, do you wanna start by talking a little bit about how you come to this?

Jessica: I come to it in a messy way, and it remains messy because it's a messy topic. And I think that's like the kind of like starting point of my response is like nobody's gonna have a tidy answer that like absolves us all of feeling cruddy in ways and at times. Like what even the word collapse means, like what's collapsing? Who's it collapsing on? In what hour of what day are you experiencing collapse? Or what context are you thinking about collapse? You know, I have some friends who really think about the collapse in terms of racial justice, but not in terms of ableism.

And you know, I have different people in my life who process risk and harm in different ways, and [00:08:00] everybody's trauma history is activated within this topic. And so I think it's like how do you navigate it? You navigate it with honesty and with patience because there is no way that all of your friends, no matter how intellectually aligned we are, there's no way that we're all emotionally on the same page and this is so scary that it is much more emotional than I think any of us are really prepared to deal with, is my starting answer.

Dean: Yeah, and I think what you're saying also makes me think about how it's incomprehensible. Like when I say collapse, I think it's the collapse of a certain kind of consumer industrial society that upholds all the ways we all live.

Like we don't know how to transport ourselves and eat and clothe ourselves and communicate and stuff without all the extractive technologies. So it means like life as we know it is unraveling and we don't exactly know what order the losses will be in, or what places will be affected next, but we can see some patterns and it's really [00:09:00] terrifying.

And it's incomprehensibility means that it's so important to have other people to talk to about it because people are seeing and experiencing and digesting different parts of it. That's like, I really need that. Like I really need people to talk to about this. I remember when I first read Jem Bendell's 'Deep Adaptation' paper around 2018 and I had a new dawning understanding of really where things were at and I really like went around to different friends trying to see who would talk to me about this.

And I did find that a lot of people didn't want to and it was hard 'cause these are like radical, amazing people who I rely on to strategize about ending prisons and police, and who you know, are looking squarely at so many tragedies globally and in our lives. It was painful when people didn't wanna talk to me about it and that actually somewhat, it's changed like because it's hastened and it's upon us in a new way than in 2018.

More and more people have wanted to talk about it, but there is just like a pain in friendship I think, when people don't wanna engage with reality in the way that you do. And for me, I try not to go to a super judgmental [00:10:00] place. I sometimes feel judgment and it's sometimes, it's a response to feeling abandoned or like left behind or something.

But ultimately, it's okay that people are in different parts of it, we all have some denial about this and it's okay that we're thawing that in different orders or going through periods of panic around it that make us not wanna talk about it. And I just need to make sure I find people who can, so that then I don't have to judge those who don't wanna talk about it with me.

Or maybe it's the way I'm talking about it. And the other thing is like, how am I coming into the conversation? Am I like, overwhelming people with a bunch of facts that I just read that are scary? Am I like just being sensitive that we're talking about something that brings like deep grief, fear, anxiety, like, you know, just are there any ways I can fine tune how I'm approaching other people? It's not surprising that this is hard.

And then I think with organizing, that's especially true. Like I've made the mistake before in organizing of feeling frustrated in a group. Like I really feel like the group's conversation about what we need to do is unrealistic 'cause it's not considering the current phase we are in around collapse and unraveling.

But I [00:11:00] said it in a judgy, harsh way instead of a way that would really maximize people's willingness to see if we could inform our work together more about that, or see what if we need to do some learning together. Like if there's opportunities for us to watch something together, read something together, like come more to like,

it's like an organizing issue and it's not good organizing to just come in with my panic and judgment.

So I feel like, not that this is easy to do, but I have found trying to be aware of what this does in people, whether it's intimates or in an organizing context.

Jessica: Yeah. When you were talking, something that I remembered is back in 2016, I was seeing the astrology forthcoming, and I went to all of these astrologers that I really respected that had more years of experience than me, and I was like, "I see this stuff coming. What do you see?" And they all had the same reaction, "Eh, it'll be fine. Don't worry about it. You're overthinking it." And at the time I was just like, I knew in my gut, I knew based on a number of data points and factors that [00:12:00] what I was seeing was correct, but I was really shook. I was like, "You're more experienced. You have a deeper body of knowledge than me. How can you not see it?" And once it started coming, I understood it was not about the intellectual capacity of the people I was talking to. It was about their emotional capacity for staying present with traumatic and terrifying content, and if we only think about this intellectually, it's easy to get angry.

I get angry, I get judgmental like obviously, but when you hold space for like, perhaps this person doesn't have as much trauma in their background or this particular kind of trauma in their background so that they can stay somewhat present with terrifying realities, right? There's a number of ways that humans function and sometimes we go into denial because it's the only way that we can like brush our teeth and like text people back or whatever.

And I think holding space for that without abandoning yourself and your [00:13:00] needs and your reality is like a skill we're all working on at the same time, but not together. And so i'm just really glad we started with this question 'cause I feel like it's like such an important one and it spans beyond collapse.

It spans into just how do we navigate emotional complexity in communities and in relationships, which is like a life path question.

Dean: I think it's also hard, I just wanna be real, like it can feel like a friend thinks that we are paranoid. Of course I do want feedback from people if I am over-ascertaining risk, if I'm, you know, seeing risk more than their needs to be, or if I'm overly afraid.

And I also don't want to be told there's not risk, just 'cause someone else is afraid of perceiving risk. And this is just hard. That's why I think we all need like deep benches of friendship, and lots of people to talk to, and I know a lot of us don't have that. So that's for me, like so much of all my work is a call for people to connect to more

people.

And I, to that end, I do wanna say, we have a thread going on our Patreon page about this question and about like how to talk about [00:14:00] collapse in our relationships. And if you're looking to meet more people to talk to about it, that is a place that you can come for free to be part of that conversation.

Should I take us to the next one?

Jessica: Let's go.

Dean: Okay, so this one is about astrology, so I'm gonna ask it to you and then I'll share thoughts if they come up.

Jessica: Okay.

Dean: So the person is asking about Pluto and Aquarius. "My question has to do with how to work with the 20 years of Pluto and Aquarius around revolutionary shifts in the collective. Sometimes it feels grounding to orient that way in the midst of all the crisis, but other times it feels like inevitable doom and gloom we must live through. What kind of roles do the everyday mundane transits play in the longer term slow movement of Pluto, and how does that apply to our movement more?"

Jessica: Okay, so this is a really important question on lots of levels. It is an important question on its face, but it's also an important question in regards to astrology and organizing and activism and living in accord with your humanity. It is not meant to be a short-term project, right? When [00:15:00] you think about, oh, I don't know, like fighting capitalism, fighting racism, fighting for the environment, this is not something that's gonna be resolved in your lifetime.

This is not something that you can think about as like, okay, but we haven't fixed it yet. So like, how are we supposed to handle it? Right? It's, this is lifetime work. The thing about Pluto is it's always fucking somewhere. And when Pluto is somewhere, it is transformational, fucking intense. It is heavy. And so now because of the way astrology is popular, you are aware of Pluto and Aquarius, but you might not have been aware of Pluto and Sagittarius.

Guess what? That fucked shit up too. So one thing is with astrology, if you give it a power over your thinking, it can actually be antithetical to being helpful. It's like over intellectualizing with a dash of spiritual confusion, right? And so I wanna just say that if you find yourself overwhelmed by the ideas of Pluto and Aquarius, [00:16:00] stop thinking about Pluto and Aquarius.

I know that's not what you'd think you'd hear from an astrologer, but if it's not supporting common sense engagement -- emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, materially -- then fuck it. That's my first answer. The second answer is, you can look at, and I forget exactly how the questionnaire worded it... "revolutionary transformation", was that the term?

Dean: Yeah, they said "revolutionary shifts in the collective".

Jessica: Yeah, "revolutionary shifts in the collective". Okay. Yeah, that is a really good key word breakdown of a very complicated thing. But the truth of the matter is, this is a technology revolution as much as it is an environmental collapse, as much as it is a transformation of gender roles.

Now the thing about Pluto is it is about the power struggle with that. So in terms of how that boils down on the mundane, how do you engage with power? How do you show up in egalitarian ways? That's Aquarian energy for you. This idea that there's gonna be a [00:17:00] revolution and the people are gonna, you know, like the people of Nepal got rid of the president. They elected somebody on Discord, that's Pluto and Aquarius. But should we expect that to all be Pluto and Aquarius? No. The technocrats running the United States is also Pluto and Aquarius.

So the thing is that when you have energy, it's simply energy, and how it flows and where it gets stopped and how it works is responsive to the moment and to the collective.

So it shouldn't be surprising that in the United States we have tech billionaires running this country because that's pretty consistent with what the country is being, right? And so in terms of how to deal with it on a Monday and level day to day, there's this high level assignment we're going through, the environmental stuff we're going through, we're going through the gender based stuff we're going through. We're going through the revolutions with technology that we're going through. All these things are interconnected and we can, you know, I can keep on listing things, but just as an example, and that's the high level stuff that's happening and how you show [00:18:00] up day to day doesn't always have to be perfect for Pluto in Aquarius.

What it ideally is going to be is presence with power and how it functions on a systemic level and how you engage with it on a personal level and in your communities. That's the assignment. And that's just also the assignment of life, isn't it? So I don't know if I did a good job of like comprehensively answering that, but that's the good starting point.

Dean: Yeah, I mean, it's interesting to think about, it makes me just

think generally about like what do I do with the information I've learned from you about this really intense astrology that we are living through and seeing in our future? And actually, I feel like I, I really hold your wisdom with Kelly Hayes and Peter Gelderloos and Vicky Osterweil and Dylan Rodriguez and all these different people, William C. Anderson. All these, there's so many different people who I see as spotting patterns that allow them to anticipate some of the next moves of our opponents [00:19:00] and some of the next conditions, better than me. Like they're, they've got, they know about some things I don't know about. And so astrology is one of them. And so all of them though, leave me with the same assignment, which is like, oh, how would it help us prepare to do the care and resistance work that we inevitably have to do, to know some of what's trending? Yeah. Like I remember first hearing you say things about the current astrology, and reading and listening to Kelly Hayes's stuff about AI and being -- before AI was in my face every day the way it is now. You two told me it was going to be, or you know, the things you have said about airborne pandemics or other, you know, it's like wise people using a variety of methodologies can help us think about preparation and in some ways, a lot of the preparation is kind of the same.

Like know a bunch of people, like have masks and store water. You know, there's some things that kind of work no matter what's coming, but also there is some real wisdom like about what this fascism looks like, and what these conditions are like. And I especially appreciate it when I'm reading multiple sources using multiple rigorous [00:20:00] forms and there's obvious overlapping patterns.

Jessica: That's when it's both helpful and scary. And I think, you know what I come back to, and I think something I love about your work is that you and I come from really different disciplines, but we come back to the same place of like, okay, and that's hard to metabolize. That's hard to stay emotionally present for. And so this is where in order to engage with astrology, or activism, or astrology and activism, it's important to recognize when your anxiety level gets activated at a point where you're like, oh, and I have to tap out, or, oh, I can't be responsible anymore, or, oh, I'm finding myself like I can't concentrate anymore. Because that's not about like, okay, then shove your head in the sand and move on. It's about recognizing, oh, okay, so I've consumed as much as I can of this information in this moment. Then I go and I do a little self-care, and then I come back to it. Like, do I listen to 'Democracy Now' in one fell swoop? My friend, I used to; I do not [00:21:00] anymore. I can't metabolize it. It's too much. It's too much. The news is bad.

And so, you know, I am adapting as it's becoming harder and harder for me to metabolize the poisons of the world. And that sometimes is scary because it's like I'm used to being able to function in X, Y, and Z ways, and I just don't have it in me anymore. Now I have to change. Changing is scary and I think a lot of people who really care, we go

into a hypervigilant form of caring, or we just check out. And that's like maybe not what this questioner is about though, because I feel like the person who wrote this question is like all in. And I think that being all in is wonderful and, it can feed hypervigilant patterns in one's nature, and those are things we must be working on as individuals so that when we meet in communities, we are not just showering people with our shit. Which is I think what we all know happens in communities.

So yeah, there's that. Pluto's [00:22:00] sticky that way.

Dean: Thank you. Do you wanna read the next one?

Jessica: I can read the next one, but I like your readings too. Okay. COVID Isolation. This is a good question. "I'm committed to being COVID cautious for as long as it takes, and I'm grateful to be in a city with more COVID cautiousness than other places. However, I'm concerned about how segregated COVID cautious community often feels, especially when so many of us are disabled, chronically ill, neurodiverse, and otherwise vulnerable to what's coming down the pike. I recognize that I have a heightened fear of abandonment after having many people in my life abruptly drop COVID precautions" --- I mean for reals. Sorry, that was an insert to the question --- "excluding me from spaces in ways that are tangible, deeply painful and reoccurring. I've also been demoralized by how hard it's been to find mutual aid or activity group where people consistently mask. How the hell will we ever be able to build the inter-abled solidarity that we need to get through the coming challenges? How can we create more spaces that feel accessible to [00:23:00] people with different masking practices? What are some practices that might help tend to feelings of abandonment by people who we deeply wanna be in community with?"

It's a really good question.

Dean: It's such a good question. I've gotten this question a lot on my book tour. You know, I've been touring a lot since January and my tour is masked, and you advised me on getting a UV light that I bring to the tour, and I've been partnering with Mask Blocs and having people show up and table wherever possible. And so a lot of people come to those events who can't, who don't go to anything because it's the first masked event that's been offered in their town in a while, or at all. And people come with this just like really exasperated question of just like, god, like what do we do? People are not doing this, and it's so obviously excluding people and it's really painful emotionally to be excluded. I think the first thing I feel is just like, let's just feel the grief. Like it's just, this sucks.

Like just not skipping how much this sucks, how unfair this feels, how shocking it is, how bad our communities are at disability [00:24:00] justice, like the feeling of abandonment and how that often in general

often goes with sickness and disability is like --

Jessica: Yeah.

Dean: -- Being abandoned, ignored, being considered undesirable, or being left out of stuff. So I just wanna be like, first of all, I think oftentimes when we skip those feelings, they actually fester into more resentment or like things that end up poisoning us. And then the second thing is like the bad news is like all we can do about it is organize. Like I'm just so moved by the Mask Blocs and the Clean Air Clubs. It matters to reach out to people like speakers coming into your town and be like, Hey, would you consider having a masked event? It matters to reach out to all the venues. It matters to stand at the venues at the doors and to hand out zines about COVID. Like it sucks, but it's also how all the other organizing is.

You know, like so many of us have been part of groups that have been really left out or sidelined in our communities and this is what we've had to do. And it doesn't make it okay, but we can I think just support each other, lean on each other and just have a space that's safe to complain about it. And then [00:25:00] even if it's just with one other person, be like, all right, can we come from a place of love, and wanting to help people be in their own values more deeply and get out there and write that next email to the venue or the speaker or the event planner. I think that it's just an organizing problem, and for anybody who's sympathetic but not doing anything about this right now, let's all join the push to have events be masked and to have people have work on ventilation and work, you know, like do the things. Let's all join a mask bloc, not just people who are currently excluded from events because they can't go to unmasked events. Like we could all do allyship around this, 'cause actually we can have all the events be masked. We can. Now if somebody has access [issues], maybe they cannot wear a mask. But it's actually like, we used to have things be masked and so it's utterly in reach. It's like we don't even need to buy a building. It's like not one of the harder things in our movements. It's not like housing everyone, which is like really hard. And so yeah, I just, I think it's possible for us all to show more solidarity and allyship. If you are not currently [00:26:00] making that push or if you're putting on events and they're not masked, like it's just... I'll say I had the feeling, especially in my events in Europe, where people really mask even less than in my communities in the U.S., I had self-consciousness asking for this. The venues sometimes said weird things back, or the other person I was speaking with gave a response that showed me that they thought it was strange.

You know, I felt that, that exposure and I was like, yeah, that's something I believe in for solidarity. You know, like just really try to take up my own space in myself and like, this is my ethics. Even if I get some pushback, you know. I'm putting on this event. Don't I want

people not to get sick here?

Jessica: I've lost opportunities. I've lost opportunities because I mask. I have lost opportunities because I asked for it to be COVID... calling it COVID compliant is kind of bullshit. It's so much bigger than that. I feel like COVID radicalized me and educated me about how to just be a better community member in this regard. And yeah, people really don't like masking.

Listen, [00:27:00] listen, I don't like masking. I love wearing lipstick. Let's just talk about lipstick. I love wearing lipstick and I can't wear lipstick with a mask. And if I can, then I just get lipstick all on my damn face and no one can see but me. It doesn't do me any good. And I know this sounds stupid, especially in the severity of this question, but I know that a lot of people don't mask because of how it looks, because it's like interrupts the way they flirt or they talk to people or whatever.

It is not that deep. For some people it is kind of surface, but so many of the choices we make about how we step into public are surface. And I don't have an answer that is different than what you're saying, Dean. Like, I think everything you're saying is it, but talking about the deep reasons and the surface reasons, like the, there's like, you know, I have a friend who is just, I just don't like being inconvenienced.

And I was like, my heart dropped. I was like, I don't even know if I can talk to this person anymore. I felt devastated. I was like, you don't like being [00:28:00] inconvenienced, that's why you're not masking? It like blows my mind. I hate wearing masks. I find them very inconvenient. I don't find them to be easy to wear and I wear them because it's such a small price.

But you know, it took me months and months and months to get over hearing her say that. And eventually I was like, okay, this is a person who I'm just gonna like adapt my expectations of them as a person. I do think it's important to remember that when people don't mask, it's not just that they're not showing up for disabled people. It's not just that they are maybe not informed or whatever about COVID. It's that they've made the decision, if I get sick, whatever, I'll just deal with it. And that's a decision that some people don't have the ability to make because they're already ill. Or some people don't wanna make, you know, I feel like masking is an investment in my health.

Anyways. All to say if we're not more curious and we don't hold space for more [00:29:00] conversations, we can't get back to that place where people were doing what they did in 2020. We found out that we could all mask in 2020. We, I mean, everybody was fucking masking. Right? So what are the emotional motivations for not doing it anymore?

I think we do need to talk about it.

Dean: There's been a couple events where I've handed masks out at the door, especially where I wasn't, didn't have total buy-in from the venue, but I was like, I'm gonna ask everyone to mask. And people really will often if the speaker asks them to.

Jessica: Yes.

Dean: And one of those, it was a bigger bookstore. It was just a part of the bookstore that was the event space. And I watched people come in. I would hand them the mask. They would look at it. They would look around to see if others were masked in this section of the store. And when they saw that they were, they would put it on.

Jessica: That's it.

Dean: We just don't wanna be different from others.

Like, you know, I mean, it's so funny. And I was like, oh. It just made me think, oh, these are all just sweet little baby humans who just wanna fit in. And so the good news is as soon as I make a masked event and everybody decided they wanted to [00:30:00] come there and thought it was a cool social space or whatever, they all put a mask on unless somebody has a real need to, not to.

And so to me, that just says like even the thing where it's like, I, I would flirt better or I want people to see my lipstick or my mustache or like, you know, whatever, my...

Jessica: you got a great mustache. People should see it, /slash/ also...

Dean: ...huge part of my gender, but people are gonna have to just wait and see it when we get to know each other better.

Jessica: Yeah.

Dean: But yeah, I think it's really a lot of times about being different and being the same.

Jessica: Yeah.

Dean: Which is like whenever things are about social norms, it's like, oh, we're radicals who are trying to change social norms. Like we're trying to tell people to not assume someone's gender (if you have, if they haven't told you). We're trying, you know, we've got all these things we're changing and this is just one. And people are actually so adaptable to new social norms. We just have to be more bold about

asking, asking, asking, putting pressure on, getting a no and then coming back around. And the more of us are doing it together, the more effective that'll be.

Jessica: That's such an important point and I, I'm so glad you said it because I've had the same experience at my events when folks are like, oh shit, everyone's masking. They put on a mask and I have this conversation with [00:31:00] every new friend. Eventually they're like, so are you gonna mask forever? And then eventually they stop masking with me.

It happens frequently, and both of those things are such a bummer. They're such a bummer. But it's also like there are so many reasons why we're in relationship with people, and it is rare to have a comprehensive shared worldview, right? It really is. I have a friend who's a socialist and this person only masks at the socialist meetings. And I just feel like that's some bullshit. That is, that's like performance, right? But is the performance not better than no performance? Again, it's we're all just making choices and navigating options and risks in our own unique ways, and it breaks my brain. This question breaks my brain because I don't know what the answer is, and it shouldn't fall on disabled people.

Dean: No, and we all have so much decision fatigue, so what we do when we say, "Hey, this event is masked" is we just take away that need to make a decision. It's like it's really [00:32:00] complicated to decide like probabilities of illness, and we've all heard different information and been tracking different things. So yeah, I think just, yeah, the answer is organizing, which is the answer to so many things.

Jessica: It is.

Dean: All right. Let's see what's next. Okay, this person says, "I'd like to ask about resources as they relate to relationships and organizing spaces. I find that money / access / resources can be a difficult subject for people to discuss, particularly in organizing spaces where it's often the under-resourced and multiply-marginalized people doing a lot of the heavy lifting.

I found in my organizing work that money and needs don't come up, and I think the topic is avoided in part because of how painful it can be for people that have struggled all their lives to meet their needs. But also when access is not discussed, it upholds the privilege and power of resourced comrades.

Do you have any insight about navigating the power dynamics that result from people in relationships having different levels of access to resources? How can we talk about resources openly and make sure that under-resourced comrades are held and supported? Have you found money to be a divisive factor in your organizing?"

[00:33:00] Yes. This is something that I've been obsessed with for decades. A couple resources that I wanna share. I did a project called "Enough" with my friend Roan, (I think the website is enoughenough.org, but we'll put it in the show notes), where we collected stories of people who've actually tried to address this in interesting ways in their friend groups. Like people who tried to change the way like people paid rent in a shared house or people struggling with how to give away money. We encountered this because Roan was somebody who had family wealth and was coming at resource redistribution from that angle and was involved in like Resource Generation, which is a group for people with wealth who wanna think this through in a radical way.

And I was coming at it from background of poverty and was doing a lot of writing about things like that. And we found each other and did this project. This was many years ago, but we're actually working on finalizing an anthology about it right now. So I wanna mention that resource. But I think that at this point, when I work with groups, one thing I see a lot of groups doing is just like, let's have a rent fund in our group. Let's have a childcare fund in our group. Especially when groups are like noticing that people [00:34:00] find it hard to organize 'cause they're like working a lot or the ways that poverty can impact access to time. Not doing the thing that often ruins groups, which is trying to figure out a way to pay people in a wage system, pay people per hour, which can be like unjust in a thousand ways and mimics extractive wage relationships and often leads to groups dissipating because then only the paid people do the work and people resent the people who are being paid and they're mad at them if they don't do enough of the work. I mean, there's all kinds of things.

I have a lecture online that people can read if you're interested in this, called 'Should Social Movement Work Be Paid?', where essentially, I talk about some of the major problems that come from when we try to pay wages. But I think having passed the hat or having like, let's do a party or a bake sale or however it is we raise money and have it be for somebody's rent or for somebody's childcare or a medical need, like that kind of thing can be really bonding.

And I've also been in some groups where people have actually just done, like in this group, let's do some income sharing. And it's, you know, just like this month or let's put some in every month, or, you know, there's lots and lots of ways to do this and be creative about it, but so that people's incredibly different accesses to wealth and [00:35:00] income aren't a secret.

And how to do it in a way that's not about shaming each other for being poor or rich. You know, all of this is terrible. How to do it in a way that's like, wow, we were all just put into really horrifying society where some people don't have what they need and some people

have so much more than what they need and we all have emotional work to do on how that affects us.

And what is it like to start right now, being frank with each other about it and doing it in a careful way that assumes everybody is actually like a human who's trying their hardest and who has unlearning to do. I mean, I think this is really difficult work for a lot of people in a lot of groups, and I think even just bringing it up in a group can be scary and I think it's really worthwhile and actually, for like a lot of people, it's a relief when this happens.

Jessica: I feel like I don't really have anything to contribute because I'm not an organizer, so I'm not in the context that this question is really specifically asking about. I'm always like alone in my hot pink shed or whatever. So yeah, I don't think I have much to contribute, but everything you said [00:36:00] sounds right to me.

Dean: Cool. I love that you're in your hot pink shed. Do you wanna read the next one?

Jessica: Okay. Let's see. What does it say? Okay. Accountability and avoidance in conflicts. I love this theme. A question is about discernment and navigating conflict in relationships or friendships and in organizing. "What is the line between trying to choose to self-soothe, like understanding that I can only control myself and my actions, versus being conflict avoidant? I find that trying to own my own shit in conflict leaves little room to advocate for myself. I see this pattern with a lot of other folks who are available for crisis or care support in communities where eventually making themselves small results in serious crises and conflict later down the road. How do we navigate conflict with people who are not ready to engage and may never be, but it affects projects, living situations, work, organizing, et cetera? How do we do this in a massive culture shift towards avoidance and desensitization and disassociation, [00:37:00] Instagram and chat GPT therapy?" That's a very good question.

So there's a lot of layers to this question, right? There's the layer of conflict avoidance, and let me actually look at how this person wrote it. Okay. "The line between trying to self-soothe versus being conflict avoidant". So self-soothing is something that I believe you do for yourself, with yourself. So you can do it in a room with other people, but it's ultimately like self-care. Conflict is something you engage in with other people, right?

And so connecting self-soothing and avoidance is a particular coping mechanism. Other people might be kind of, you know... I, when I was younger, used to be like, okay, the second I see a conflict, I like a battering ram go in hard because I must be accountable to this conversation. We must have it now and I must say every single thing that's on my mind. Thankfully I don't do that anymore, but I'm saying

self-soothing for some people [00:38:00] is avoidance and some people is going hard.

But regardless of the style. My conviction is that in order to be accountable in relationship, you first must be able to tolerate your own feelings because if you don't tolerate your feelings, then you can't listen to them. You can't hang out with them and be like, okay, buddy (if you call yourself buddy), okay buddy, I'm feeling really riled up, really defensive with this person on this topic.

I need to sit with my defensive feelings instead of chase the thoughts and seek an answer. Seeking an answer before you appropriately and in a nuanced way, understand the question or the conflict is the mistake, right? Because you're seeking that answer with the other person before you're ready and then you're like, well, I could see them saying X or Y, or this could go this way or that way, and I, I just, I can't, so I'm out. And that will lead to, as you talked about, Dean, in a response to another question, resentments, right?

So [00:39:00] making yourself small is not the answer. Spending time with yourself so you can understand what's actually happening and what in this moment and in this dynamic, is a trigger versus a trauma. That's the assignment of self-soothing.

And for me, the difference between a trigger and a trauma is vast, but they're very important and they feel like the same thing a lot of times, right? Because you can get triggered by somebody who says something to you that really fucks with your head. And that doesn't mean that they're actually traumatizing you or harming you, or that their intent is equal to the impact it had on you.

The impact it had on you may be because of your family history. It has nothing to do with the current situation. And so being able to sit with your feelings and to be able to identify, okay, this is actually for me to work out with my bestie and my therapist, and this is for me to work out in this relationship.

This is what I need to be accountable to because this is what I'm bringing to the situation. This is what I [00:40:00] actually need to talk to you about and figure out. Being able to sit with that messiness is the assignment of self-soothing in an authentic way, right? Because we talk about self-soothing and it's like, well, you can take a bath, you can do breathing exercises, but that's not gonna fix your problem. It's not even gonna address your problem. It's just gonna bring your anxiety or your activation level down from like an 8 to a 7.5 or something, you know? And so I think the assignment within all of this cannot be achieved in an individual situation. It's your life's work of how, what kind of person are you, what kind of friendship do you have with yourself? How do you center or de-center your emotional experience, your emotional intelligence?

These questions are a lifelong project. It's not like, you know, you'll figure it out one day. No, you'll figure it out in this context, but in that context, it's a whole new question. And so recognizing that while you're going through all of this, so is the other person or the other persons. The [00:41:00] messiness, the complexity makes it so that most of us, as you say in your question, like disassociate, and we check out and we ask Chat GPT, "what's the best way for me to respond to this email?" Which is not necessarily the wrong thing to do. I mean, don't get me fucking started on Sam Altman and AI, okay, that's a whole other topic. But like asking somebody for advice, whether it's a language model or a person for advice is not the problem.

The problem is seeking an answer or a solution when you don't understand what's actually activating you, when you're just in a constant cycle of reaction, that's what gets you in trouble. And that's why in so many like activist spaces, it's a lot of young people 'cause people do that for a period of time, they burn themselves out and then they're like, fuck it. This is a toxic environment. I can't possibly. And then they take their toxic environment from that toxic community, and then they bring it to just a couple toxic friendships. You know what I mean? Because everything's fucking toxic. Have you breathed the air? Have you drank the water? It's all poisoned. We're poisoned. So what [00:42:00] are we gonna do with it?

Dean: Yeah, that is, I do see that pattern in general that a lot of people try organizing once and then inevitably have unresolved conflict because we're not that great at conflict, and conflict is part of all work with others, and then leave organizing and are like, I'm burn out. I can't do this anymore. But then, yeah, have those same kinds of conflicts later at workplaces and with lovers and with friends because conflict is part of all work and all being together. This question, uh, the thing about self-soothing and conflict avoidance, what it brought up for me was the question of vulnerability, like I think sometimes some of us have a coping mechanism that really is about avoiding our vulnerability. So when someone is upset at us or in front of us, like in the organizing group or in the family or in the roommate situation or whatever, we perform steady.

Jessica: Yeah.

Dean: And we feel like we're the steady guy. And sometimes it was something we learned in our family, like we had a really reactive person and then we were the steady, or it was a way to deal with not experiencing more violence or something like that.

And I think a lot of people who are in [00:43:00] our movements who do crisis support are like, I'm good in a crisis. Sometimes it means I go

to steady. It's just a nervous system response, but it doesn't, it's not always good 'cause it's actually not an updated response to what's happening now. It's a autopilot. So I think if we notice we have that, nothing wrong with that. All of our responses are good and, and they all make sense and we, we earn them all the hard way. But if I'm noticing that in myself, I'm not really engaging with the conflict (like with the friend or the person I'm working with, a collaborator or whatever), I'm instead doing something to steady myself, that's a _disengagement_.

I could just find out what is the more vulnerable move that would connect us more, because really what we're looking for is that deep trustworthy connections, which means like more honesty and more vulnerability. It doesn't mean oversharing. It doesn't mean processing all night. It just means, did I do the thing that was willing to show a little more of myself?

And mostly we're not doing that and no blame or shame, just, oh, what would be my 5% more? And one thing I've really been noticing this week that I think might be relevant: a lot of us wanna do conflict by telling you something, 'cause this will be better for _you_. I'm like, [00:44:00] Jessica, I'm worried about your drinking or your overwork or your relationship with your date or whatever. Instead of being like, Jessica, I'm being impacted by your drinking or your overwork or your, like, the more vulnerable thing would be to talk about how I am doing, but instead I do this thing that looks altruistic, that's actually kind of paternalistic and people often feel controlled.

That's just one example. So this is something I've just been noticing like so much all around me. Can we all choose the slightly more vulnerable thing where I'm like, oh, that feels a certain way for me. I think actually that's more motivating for the other person when we are more vulnerable. So anyway, just reading this question, thinking about like this kind of avoidance.

The other things I would say inevitably about this question are of course, like direct feedback. Like that's the same thing I'm saying in some ways. Like this is impacting me. Like direct feedback that's not a generalization and not going off about the person, but that's just like, this thing is impacting me, or this felt this way, or this felt funny. Can we talk about it?

Like that is such a huge connector. It feels scary, like it's gonna disconnect us, but it actually connects us. And then confidentiality, like if you need to [00:45:00] go vent to somebody else about what happened with your friend or collaborator, or you need to ask advice like, am I seeing this? I had a really big reaction. I'm really pissed. Am I right on? Ask that person to keep that confidential. Like try to not have everything be everyone's talking behind each other's backs and then hearing, oh, everyone in the group is like, oh my god,

Jessica and Dean are so mad at each other. You know? And then keeping others' confidentiality if you're on the receiving end of the vent, like actually listening to someone and not assuming you should go tell others, that's huge.

And then if you're the listener, helping the other person take the next vulnerable step. Have you mentioned it to Jessica directly? And there's no guarantees that when we give people feedback, they're gonna take it well or listen to us or change. But if we don't give them feedback, there's no chance that'll happen.

And most of us need to receive feedback on certain topics like many, many times from many people if it's like one of our sticking points. So we all get to be part of that effort with no guarantees. And I think that's hard to digest 'cause we're also afraid to give the feedback. What if it doesn't go perfectly and the person is defensive? Good likelihood they will be in this culture. [00:46:00] Still, what would it mean?

One of the things I think we've talked about in other episodes is something I really care about is like in our relationships and collaborations, roommates, whatever we're doing with other people, lovers, could we talk ahead of time about how conflict is likely to come up?

How we wanna value direct feedback? Could we put some of those things in place as shared values while things are going well? And then I'm a little more likely to do them later or to know that I have your permission to, you know what? I'm scared and I don't wanna ask Jessica about this, and I wanna just not call her and like avoid her. But instead we said we were gonna, so I'm gonna try it. You know, like that's something I think we can do in any collaboration of any kind.

Jessica: Yeah. And I wanna say like, that's one of the things I love about working with you is like, you're really good at that. You're like, this is what I like. And I think I've done that with you a little bit too, because we're both comfortable with being direct.

And I think that when somebody is conflict avoidant, they're often are scared of other people's fragility or they themselves can like collapse or fall apart or experience their own fragility in whatever [00:47:00] ways. And I think, again, it's really hard for most people when they experience fragility to not lose themselves in it, instead of being like, oh, this is an emotional response that is so big that like, should I be curious of whether or not it's proportionate to the situation? Should I be curious about my own emotions? Can I hold space for like, I said something, Dean's having an emotional reaction and he gets to have his emotional reaction. I can just hang out and be curious about it and be empathetic without taking it on or trying to fix it.

These are exceptionally challenging things to do. And again, every relationship we're in is an opportunity to do them differently, to try them out, to experience the boundaries of our own capacity, and to allow other people to bump up against the boundaries of their capacity. And it is hard. It's the path though.

It is the path.

Dean: I think avoidance is also, uh, yeah. It's often as you're saying, like, I'm afraid that if I hear about what's going on with you or I spend time with you, I'll be [00:48:00] subsumed by your desires.

Jessica: Yeah.

Dean: You'll make me stay forever on this date. Like if I hear about your complaint, I'll have to accede to it and be like, yes, whatever, your worldview.

And so a lot of what I hear you describing is, can I listen to you because I care about you and still feel myself? And can I remember that we are separate people and care for your strong feeling. And even, I mean, the varsity is like you're yelling at me about how you're irritated, I was untrustworthy, or I was late, or I hurt your feelings or whatever. You're giving me feedback and can I hold onto the fact that there's probably parts of this that are grounded and that are about me and good information I could use. And parts of it that are about your histories and your vulnerabilities, that is also important information as someone who cares about you. And not be like I either have to see it entirely Jessica's way and I'm a piece of dirt, or Jessica's entirely wrong. And it's especially hard if the person is at you about it. And I think that's like a lifelong practice. And in our friendships and collaborations and stuff, we can invite it by being like, I [00:49:00] want us to give each other direct feedback. And I acknowledge that it's hard. Just keep telling each other that.

Jessica: Yeah. I feel like these questions all have really similar through lines. Right? And I think something that's really important within all of this is we are all fucked up. We are all trying. We are all trying, and we are all sometimes failing.

And the less carceral we are in our thinking about our own failures and about the failures of others, the more we can actually deconstruct and unlearn what needs deconstructing and unlearning. The more space there is to be curious. And curiosity, especially emotional curiosity is essential for the answer to any of the questions that we've addressed so far, right?

And it's really hard because most of us aren't emotionally curious of

our own feelings. We're just like, oh, I feel anxious. That must mean something bad's happening. I've gotta do something about it. I gotta fix it. What am I gonna do? And this is something that comes up on my Patreon a ton. This is something that we're like constantly dropping videos about because it is this [00:50:00] endless cycle that we are in, especially in 2025, especially today for a variety of reasons.

And if you find that you are super far along intellectually, you are great at fucking, you have lots of wonderful pals, but like when it comes to like serious dating and serious friendship or like long ongoing relationships with organizing, whatever it may be, those more like intense relationships, that's where you're confronted with shit.

That's not like, oh, that's what's wrong with you. That's where oh, that's where you need more care. That's where you need more curiosity. That's where your evolution, because you're only a certain age, there's only so much you can do by a certain time. Right? That's where your evolution needs more nurturance and updating so that your operating system is more consistently modern and not referencing your early development, which is what most of us are doing a lot of the time.

So I know we have a lot more questions to get to, but I think that this particular question in a way gets at the answer to all the other questions we've addressed so far, [00:51:00] which I love.

Dean: Me too. Why did such smart people send us questions?

Jessica: I mean, because they're listening to you to begin with.

Dean: Enormous thanks to Jessica Lanyadoo for joining me and answering these questions, and thanks to the listeners who submitted them. Look out for the second part of this conversation when our next episode drops.

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 out now from Algonquin Press. I hope you'll pick it up from an independent bookstore in your community.

Love in a F*cked Up World is hosted by me, Dean Spade. It is produced and edited by Hope Dector. Thank you to Ciro, Eugene, Derekh, Kelsey, Lindsay, Jessica, Raindrop, Nicole, and everyone else who helped with this podcast. Our theme music is "I've Been Wondering" by The Ballet.

If you found the show useful or you have ideas for things you'd like to hear about, we'd love to hear from you. Please join the conversation at patreon.com/deanspade.

We need each other now more than ever, and I hope this podcast offers

tools and ideas [00:52:00] that can help us build and sustain strong relationships and strong movements. I hope you'll keep listening, subscribe, and share this episode with people in your life.