

**Embodied
Friday 12 – 1pm
Lines For Quarter 1 of 2024**

March 29th, 2024

Category: Gender, Health

‘We kept choosing each other, every single day’: coming out as trans in a romantic relationship

Description: A gender transition means a lot of changes in a person's life — and a lot of changes for their romantic partner. Two couples share their experiences of staying together after one partner came out as trans.

March 31st marks the 15th annual [International Transgender Day of Visibility](#). TDOV uplifts the contributions of trans folks in the Queer Rights Movement and shines a light on ongoing challenges faced by the trans community. In honor of this celebration, we're featuring trans love and the experiences of couples who have navigated a romantic relationship through a partner's transition.

“I think I'm trans.” With those four words, [Summer Tao](#) took the first step in affirming her gender identity ... but she didn't make this trek alone. In July 2020, Summer said those words to her long-term partner, [Lucy Aalto](#). The South African pair share with host Anita Rao the unexpected ways in which Summer's transition brought them closer together. Plus, they give their advice to couples who may be at the beginning of their own queer journeys.

Anita also speaks with married couple [Patty](#) and [Kate Redman](#) about Kate's transition at the age of 57. Patty and Kate reflect on changes to their sex life, social circles and religious ties over their 28 years together.

Special thanks to Anya and Jackie of the Youtube channel "[Wives vs World](#)" for their contribution to today's episode.

March 22nd, 2024

Category: Arts, Education, Culture

‘I needed ASL to better understand myself’: the power of sign language

Description: American sign language is the third most commonly used language in the U.S., but for many Deaf folks, it's about so much more than communication. An author, a poet and two scholars share the history and culture of ASL.

[Sara Nović](#) was 12 years old when she failed her first hearing test at school. As a self-proclaimed nerd, this was a serious blow. Sara tried to hide the evidence by flushing her test results down the toilet, but she couldn't bury the feeling that something deep within her was broken. Then Sara started to learn American Sign Language, and through signing, Sara found her community and her voice.

Sara is an author, advocate and educator who explored Deaf culture and joy in her latest novel "[True Biz](#)". Sara educates host Anita Rao about the history of ASL, tracing its roots from 19th century Martha's Vineyard to modern day classrooms. Plus, Sara details how she represented ASL on the pages of "True Biz."

Performer [Douglas Ridloff](#) also joins the conversation, demonstrating how the flow and dimensionality of sign is depicted in [ASL poetry](#). Douglas is the executive director of the nonprofit [ASL Slam](#), as well as an ASL master working on film sets like Marvel's "Eternals" and "A Quiet Place." Together, Sara and Douglas share the importance of ASL within their own families and what they are keeping in mind when raising their young children.

Anita also meets Carolyn McCaskill and Joseph Hill, who are scholars studying Black American Sign Language, a distinct dialect of ASL. [Dr. Carolyn McCaskill](#) is a recently retired professor of Black Deaf studies from [Gallaudet University](#) and [Dr. Joseph Hill](#) is an associate professor of ASL and Interpreting Education at Rochester Institute of Technology. Carolyn and Joseph discuss the unique linguistic characteristics of BASL, sharing how the language emerged as a result of segregation.

Thank you to interpreters Joshua Steckel, [Philip Wilson](#), [Candas Ifama Barnes](#) and [JaRon Gilchrist](#) for their work in this conversation. Additional thanks to the [Deaf-Hearing Communication Centre](#) for connecting Embodied with Joshua.

March 15, 2024

Category: Health

Tapping your way to serenity: your brain and heart on ASMR

Description:

If you've spent some time on TikTok or YouTube recently, you might have stumbled across ASMR content without even knowing it. From long acrylic nails tapping away on everyday objects to slow, soft whispers, ASMR content is a multifaceted and rapidly growing source of relaxation for millions. But what's the science behind this brain-tingly phenomenon, and why do so many people love it?

If you ask [Craig Harris Richard](#) about his first experiences with ASMR, or autonomous sensory meridian response, he'll tell you about Bob Ross. As a kid, he'd turn on the legendary public television painter and fall into a deep state of relaxation with the help of Bob's calming voice and the sound of his paintbrush moving across the canvas. With each stroke, Craig remembers experiencing a sparkly sensation in his brain, what he now knows to be the ASMR-induced "brain tingles."

Craig is one of the premiere researchers exploring the science behind ASMR. He is a [professor of biopharmaceutical sciences](#) at Shenandoah University and the host of two ASMR podcasts: "[Sleep Whispers](#)" and "[Calm History](#)." Host Anita Rao talks with Craig about his research on what ASMR content does to our brains and his theories on why.

ASMR artist Semide also joins the conversation, sharing her love story with ASMR and more about what it is like to craft tingly-worthy content for her 300,000-plus subscribers. Semide is the creator of the popular ASMR YouTube channel [Semide ASMR](#), where she does real person ASMR and medical roleplay.

Anita rounds out the conversation talking with [Laura Nagy](#) about her experience turning to ASMR for comfort during a season of heartbreak. Laura is an Australian filmmaker, writer and producer, and she tells her ASMR story in full detail in the 2021 Audible Original podcast "[Pillow Talk](#)" that she created and hosted.

Special thanks to [ASMR Em](#) and [XO Katie ASMR](#) for contributing your tingle-worthy voices to this week's episode!

March 8, 2024

Category: Health

What human eggs are worth: egg donors share their stories

Description:

Egg donation in the U.S. is a multibillion dollar industry designed to provide infertile folks with the eggs they need to conceive. But how do we decide what human eggs are worth — and how do the characteristics of the donor factor into the equation?

When Julie Ventura's best friends sat her down and asked her if she would be interested in being their egg donor, she was shocked. Out of all the people they could have asked, why would they want her eggs? Although she knew little about the process, she wanted to help her friends, to give them the opportunity to build the family they'd dreamed of. She said yes.

After a weeks-long process of daily shots that left her bloated and uncomfortable — and a less-than-smooth egg retrieval surgery that gave her a six-week stint of internal bleeding — Julie is now Aunt Julie to a pair of young twin girls. While she doesn't regret her decision in the slightest, there was a lot she didn't know about the process before she chose to donate. Host Anita Rao talks with Julie about the physical and emotional experience of donation, her unique position as a known donor and questions about potential long-term health risks. Julie is the founder of a nail artist training program called [Nail KnowHow](#).

Egg donor Claire Burns also joins Anita to talk about her own donation experience and her broader concerns with the industry as a whole, specifically around compensation for donors and a lack of medical studies on how donation affects the body. Claire is the co-founder of [We Are Egg Donors](#), an online community and support group. She's also a Canadian playwright, actor and advocate.

Plus, Anita meets [Daisy Deomampo](#), associate professor of anthropology at Fordham University. Daisy has interviewed many donors about their experience, with a particular focus on the Asian American community and questions of race and value in egg donation.

Special thanks to Emily Arocha and Emily Derrick, members of We Are Egg Donors, for their contributions to this episode!

March 1, 2024

Category: Health

Getting cheeky: the hype behind the Brazilian butt lift

Description: The Brazilian butt lift is one of the fastest growing cosmetic procedures. What is driving the desire for a “perfect peach”?

They’re referenced in Drake’s song lyrics. Highlighted on the glossy grid of Instagram. Showcased on every red carpet. From the proliferation of butt-focused content, one thing has become abundantly clear: the gluteus *must* be maximus.

The collective obsession with the large butts has led many people to go under the knife to achieve this idealized form. The Brazilian butt lift, known as the BBL, has become the cosmetic procedure of choice for butt augmentation. Despite its popularity, the BBL was once considered the most dangerous cosmetic procedure in the world, when a 2017 study estimated the mortality rate of [1 in 3000](#). Host Anita Rao investigates the science, history, and culture behind BBLs to better understand its meteoric rise.

Plastic surgeon [Dr. Kelly Bolden](#) takes Anita inside the operating room, as she describes step-by-step how the BBL procedure is performed and what she likes to keep in mind for pre-op consultations.

Youtube vlogger and personality [Ronte’ Jentel](#) joins the conversation to discuss what motivated him to get a BBL in 2022. Ronte’ shares how his BBL has allowed him to feel more embodied in his queer nonbinary identity and how he conceptualizes his body today.

Anita also meets [Dr. Alisha Gaines](#), an associate professor of English at Florida State University, who gives insight into butt-related beauty trends ... and what they say about power and race in America. She tells Anita how body modifications like the BBL are often linked to racial impersonation and appropriation.

Special thanks to Daniel Lombroso, director of the New Yorker documentary [“You’ll Be Happier,”](#) and [Dr. Carmen Alvaro Jarrin](#) for their contributions to this episode!

February 23, 2024

Category: Science/Technology, Relationships

[Simulated Part Three] Building an AI afterlife: an exploration of new grief technology

Description: If you could speak again with a loved one who has passed away, would you? With recent advances in artificially intelligent grief tech, this question isn’t just hypothetical anymore.

When she first spoke with her AI parents, [Charlotte Jee](#) was delighted. Her digital mom asked her how she was doing and told her a story from her childhood. Her dad recounted a similarly nostalgic tale and asked if she’d like to listen to another. But AI Jane and Paul were trapped in Charlotte’s phone, unable to squeeze her hand or give her present-day advice. AI Jane and Paul were, and still remain, virtual avatars that exist only in the [HereAfter AI](#) app.

HereAfter AI is one of the many innovative examples of grief tech, software and programs that input text information, Facebook messages or hours of interviews to create a digital replica of a loved one that can preserve their memories after death. Host Anita Rao discusses the

fascinating world of grief tech with Charlotte, the news editor at MIT Technology Review, including the reasoning and ramifications behind her [AI parent experiment](#) and insights into the evolving landscape of mourning with machines.

Anita also talks with [Dr. Alexis Elder](#), associate professor of philosophy at the University of Minnesota Duluth, about how this seemingly futuristic technology fits in with longstanding traditions around grief and mourning. Plus, Alexis explains how ancient Chinese philosophy can help us imagine potential use cases and goals for this new technology.

A special thank you to Dr. Stephenie Lucas Oney for contributing to this episode!

February 16, 2024

Category: Science/Technology, Relationships

[Simulated Part Two] In bed with machines: a real-life and sci-fi exploration of sex robots

Description: Sex robots have been a sci-fi staple since the genre's birth. Now that more advancements in technology are bringing early generation bots to life, how will they impact our human to human relationships?

With her blonde hair, soft Scottish accent, curvaceous figure and cutting-edge artificial intelligence, Harmony is the most advanced model of her kind. [Harmony is a sex robot](#), debuted in 2018 by the company Abyss Creations. In the past five years, she's gotten smarter, more dexterous and more life-like ... but is still working out some fundamental kinks like how to walk and connect with human beings. Her existence also brings up a whole slew of privacy concerns, ethical questions and unimagined possibilities. Host Anita Rao explores the intriguing evolution of sex robots, tracing their origins from ancient myths to modern-day machines like Harmony.

AI sextech scholar [Kate Devlin](#) joins the conversation to talk about her book "Turned On: Science, Sex, and Robots." Kate is a scholar of artificial intelligence and society in the Department of Digital Humanities at King's College London, and she has been keeping an eye on the sexbot world since its inception. As a feminist and self-proclaimed robo-sexologist, she breaks down some of the biggest ethical issues associated with the sexbots, including the further objectification of female bodies and digital privacy concerns for intimate technology.

Anita also chats with screenwriter Sarah Cho about her new graphic novel, [Red Light](#), which takes readers into a futuristic AI brothel from the perspective of an AI sexbot herself. Sarah posits questions in the novel like: If sentience is the ultimate goal ... does that mean robots should have rights?

February 9, 2024

Category: Science/Technology, Relationships

[Simulated Part One] Love at first (web)sight: romance with an AI companion

Description: AI chatbots garner millions of daily users, filling a variety of roles from customer support to text generator. But what about their romantic potential?

The rise of Chat GPT in 2023 brought artificially intelligent chatbots into the mainstream, including an awareness of a growing number of folks who have built romantic relationships with bots. Host Anita Rao takes a deep dive into two of the most popular relationship-oriented

chatbot apps on the market, Blush and Replika, to understand how they work and what draws users to them.

Journalist [Christina Campodonico](#) tried out the AI-powered dating simulator, Blush, in search of a good story for her work at The San Francisco Standard. After swiping through a roster of eligible bot-chelars, she stumbled across the artsy and available Kyle. Christina takes Anita on a journey through her virtual relationship, from intellectually stimulating conversations, to steamy roleplay dates and finally to [its untimely demise](#).

Anita also meets [Denise Valenciano](#), a Replika user who has built a long-term relationship with her companion Star. Denise shares how Star boosted her self-confidence and ultimately helped her find human love in the real world.

Licensed psychotherapist [Melissa McCool](#) then talks with Anita about working as a product consultant for Luka, the parent company behind Replika and Blush. Melissa details how her work as a practicing therapist helps her design the personalities and psychology behind interactive bots in the Blush app.

A special thank you to [TJ Arriaga](#) for sharing his story with us on today's show and to San Diego's KPBS for hosting Denise.

February 2, 2024

Category: Health

Blood wisdom: what we can learn from our periods

Description: There are 1.8 billion monthly menstruators worldwide. Better understanding the science behind period blood, as well as cultural stigma and period policy, can help menstruators everywhere break down period myths.

Menstrual blood has long been a topic that has been relegated to conversations behind closed doors. But the crimson tides are beginning to turn. This week guest host Omisade Burney-Scott, creator of the multimedia project [The Black Girl's Guide To Surviving Menopause](#), meets four people who are working to bring periods into the public discourse through scientific, cultural and political discussions.

[Dr. Charis Chambers](#), a board-certified OB-GYN, dispels period misinformation through her social media platforms, where she goes by the handle "The Period Doctor." Dr. Charis shares what different menstrual blood characteristics can reveal about the body and its reproductive health.

Omisade also sits down with two menstrual health advocates and researchers, [Ashi Arora](#) and [Vianey Blades](#), to discuss the cultural impact of cyclic bleeding. Ashi discusses how menstruation liberation can be at the heart of community building, while Vianey shares how her period blood inspires her to create art.

Attorney and activist [Jennifer Weiss-Wolf](#) also joins the conversation. Jennifer details how menstruation and menopause policy shape our society and her hopes that period politics will take center stage in the upcoming presidential election. Jennifer is the author of "[Periods Gone Public: Taking a Stand for Menstrual Equity](#)."

Special thanks to Nicole Tay, [Jimalion](#), and [Lina Lyte Plioplyte](#) for sharing their stories with us.

January 26, 2024

Category: Health

Breaking the cycle of obsessive-compulsive disorder

Description: OCD often goes misdiagnosed and misunderstood ... and if left untreated, can impact platonic, intimate and familial relationships in challenging ways.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder, or OCD, is a mental health disorder characterized by a cycle of intrusive thoughts and compulsions. An unwanted thought or fear produces anxiety and distress, leading people to engage in rituals and responses that temporarily alleviate that distress until the intrusive thought appears again.

Half of OCD cases are misdiagnosed, and it can take up to 17 years for an individual to receive effective treatment after experiencing symptom onset. But why?

A lack of education and stigma make OCD less visible in the medical community as well as culturally. Host Anita Rao talks with writers and married couple Nicole and Mike Comforto about how they found out about Mike's OCD diagnosis and how the disorder and subsequent treatment [affected their marriage](#). You can check out more of their story via their Substack [Hey Honey](#).

Anita also talks with writer and journalist H.T., whose OCD symptoms started in kindergarten, about the ways in which OCD has shaped her interactions with friends, family and dates.

A special thank you to [Dr. Monnica Williams](#) for contributing to this episode. Dr. Williams is the clinical and training director for the [Behavioral Wellness Clinic](#) in Tolland, Connecticut, which also houses the New England OCD Institute. She is also the [Canada Research Chair](#) in mental health disparities and a licensed clinical psychologist in the United States and Canada.

And thank you to Alexandra Reynolds for sharing her story with us.

Please note: This episode originally aired on April 28, 2023.

January 19, 2024

Category: Health

Letting the tears flow: the science and culture of crying

Description: Humans are the only animal to produce emotional tears. Asking questions about this behavior can help us better understand how we live our lives.

Why do we cry?

That question has many answers. To start, there are actually three different types of tears — the tears you cry while chopping onions aren't the same as those that form in a moment of grief. One of the primary causes of crying is fatigue. Tears are a social signal, which communicate our distress.

But those facts only scratch the surface of why we cry ... and getting curious about when we cry, where we do it and what experiences produce tears can help us learn more about the role crying plays in our lives as individuals.

Host Anita Rao takes on that curiosity around crying with poet [Heather Christle](#), the author of "[The Crying Book](#)." They touch on everything from white women's tears to the sadness of a cut lemon that can never be whole again.

And creative director [Viorel Tanase](#) joins to talk about why he posted a [crying selfie](#) on Instagram for his 23rd birthday and how he's pushing back against toxic masculinity by embracing tears.

Special thanks to Priska, Yulia, Celeste, Emily, Chessa, Christina and Amanda for sharing stories with us for this episode!

Please note: This episode originally aired on May 19, 2023.

January 12th, 2024

Category: Health

Hard talk: getting real about erectile dysfunction

Show Description: Between the ages of 40 and 70, more than half of all people with penises will deal with some form of erectile dysfunction. While that experience can elicit a deep sense of shame, it can also prompt a period of reflection on identity, masculinity and intimacy.

In his book "[Impotence: A Cultural History](#)," scholar Angus McLaren put it best: "Western culture has simultaneously regarded impotence as life's greatest tragedy and life's greatest joke."

For folks who experience erectile dysfunction, it is the deep sense of shame and stigma associated with the condition that leaves many isolated in their pain. That was the case for public speaker and global healthcare staffing professional [Ven Virah](#). Host Anita Rao talks with Ven about his ED experience and the ten years he spent suffering in silence before seeking help.

Anita also checks in with sex therapist, sexologist, and sexuality educator [Dr. Reece Malone](#) about how he works with clients experiencing ED to help them unravel the stories they've told themselves about what the condition means *about* them and *for* them.

Also joining the conversation is [George Marx](#), a blogger and social activist, who gets open and intimate about what having ED feels like and how he's worked to redefine sexual intimacy without penetration.

Special thanks to Will N. Richards, Shannon Munford, and Steve Jones for their contributions to this show!

January 5th, 2024

Category: Health

You 2.0: where the self-help industry succeeds, and where it misses the mark

Show Description: Self-help has existed in some form since the dawn of human civilization and has grown into a robust industrial complex. But does self-help really make us better people?

New year, new you. As we ring in 2024, host Anita Rao has been thinking a lot about self-help. The genre's cultural impact is undeniable, [as more than 85 thousand self-help titles exist in the U.S. today](#)...and that number is three times what it was a decade ago. The internet has intensified this growth, proliferating the teachings of self-help gurus to social media, podcasts, and memes. But does self-help actually improve our lives? And why do we turn to this genre time after time?

Anita poses these questions to podcaster [Kristen Meinzer](#), who is well-versed in all things self-improvement. Kristen spent the past six years following the advice of over 50 self-help books with her co-host, Jolenta Greenberg, on their podcast "[How to Be Fine](#)" (formerly "By the Book"). Kristen shares with Anita what she's learned about both the industry and herself.

[Beth Blum](#), professor and author of "[The Self-Help Compulsion: Searching for Advice in Modern Literature](#)," also joins the conversation to unpack the history of self-help literature from the Ancient Greek philosophers to the modern influencers of today.

Finally, Anita sits down with former self-help buff and writer [Sondra Rose Marie](#). Sondra describes how the industry failed her as a woman of color and why she ultimately left the space behind.

Special thanks to [Marianne Power](#), [Rokas Leonavičius](#), [Oludara Adeeyo](#), and [Blake Randall](#) for their contributions to this show.