

[Transcript] Lex Fridman Podcast / #366 - Shannon Curry: Johnny Depp & Amber Heard Trial, Marriage, Dating & Love

The following is a conversation with Shannon Curry, a clinical and forensic psychologist who conducts research, therapy, and psychological evaluations pertaining to trauma, violence, and relationships. She received worldwide attention in April of last year by giving a lengthy televised testimony on her psychological evaluation of Amber Heard during the Johnny Depp Amber Heard trial. I found her testimony to be an eloquent description of complex psychological

concepts and evaluations procedures. So, I reached out for a chat. In person, she was brilliant, funny, thoughtful, and truly kind. I really, really enjoyed this conversation.

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conversations from her interviews. She's so eloquent and clear and explaining some pretty complicated psychological concepts because there's a lot of gray area in how you identify the different disorders, the different things that might be right and wrong with our minds and exploring that area, all the gray areas within that with clarity that the terms aid in understanding

versus limit you by putting you into a particular kind of bucket and exploring all that kind of stuff, especially in the context of relationships, she's brilliant. She of course does all kinds of therapy and review both for PTSD, for couples, therapy, all that kind of stuff and just shows that lifelong taking seriously your mental health with partners, your mental health alone is really

important through the act of talking it out with licensed professionals and that's what better help provides and makes super easy. Check them out at [betterhelp.com slash lex](https://betterhelp.com/slash/lex) and save on your first month that's [betterhelp.com slash lex](https://betterhelp.com/slash/lex). This show is also brought to you by House of Academics, a company that chips delicious high quality and healthy macadamia nuts and macadamia nut based snacks directly to your door. Small portions, healthy, delicious. I don't just eat them

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myself. I also share it with guests, with friends when they come over. I think it serves as a good icebreaker. There's something about human beings that just love connecting over some food. That's what I've been using it for. But let's be honest, actually, most of what I've been using it for, sitting on the couch, feeling content, appreciating the seconds as they take by and putting some macadamia nuts in my mouth. Yes, I said to friends. It's the only nut rich in omega seven, so there's a bunch of reasons that it's healthy for you. There's all other kinds of positive stuff I could say about it, besides it being delicious, that it's healthy, but you should try it for yourself. Go to houseofmacadamias.com slash lex to get 20% off your order for every order, not just the first. The listeners, that's you, will also get a four ounce bag of macadamias when you order three or more boxes as you should of any macadamia product. That's houseofmacadamias.com

slash lex. This is the Lex Friedman podcast. To support it, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, dear friends, here's Shannon Curry.

Charles Bukowski said that love is a fog that burns away with the first daylight of reality. I love that quote. Do you think romantic love fades away in this way? Bukowski. Does it have to fade? The truth is that you have all of these chemicals pumping through your body, you're essentially high on heroin in the beginning of a romance. And you're going to have these rose-colored glasses on everything your partner does is magical. But really, it's the novelty. It's just like going on a vacation. You're fully present. You're just attuned to the magic of another human being moment to moment. And then on top of that, you have, you're just flooded with dopamine. So you're high on drugs. And we can't go on like that. You will die if you are using these kinds of chemicals all the time, all day long. So eventually, our bodies are sort of made to dial it down. We've made it. I mean, we're evolutionary beings. We are doing the same thing we did 200,000 years ago to find a mate, procreate, spend enough time with each other that we have sex a whole bunch of times and make babies. Now we've changed the rules of the game.

We're living, you know, almost till we're 100 years old. In some cases, we're making these marriage commitments that last half a century. And we're expecting it to be all because of love. And we're signing these contracts based on how we feel when we're high on these drugs. So the reality is we know based on the... And I'm also talking about certain Western civilizations here because as you know, there are arranged marriages. And a lot of times, those marriages, if we're looking at longevity, are actually way more satisfied than people who are marrying for love, which logically makes sense. If you're making a decision based on a feeling that is basically based on endorphins and dopamine and oxytocin, I wouldn't sign a contract just because of a feeling necessary, you know, for 50 years. Whereas an arranged marriage, if you have your elders kind of deciding for you that this partner has a bunch of traits that you're going to appreciate more and more over time, I think there's some wisdom there. So you don't think that feeling could be a foundation for a 50 year relationship? Well, I don't think that specific feeling you're having based on drugs is going to be the same feeling you have 20, 30, 40 years down the line. If you're going to wake up and turn to your partner when you're 70 and think, Oh my God, I'm so glad you're hot. You are so hot. Then sure, marry for hotness. But if you've been through life a little bit, and I think most people who are on a second marriage know, shit happens in life. It is hard.

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You're going to have maybe a kid with special needs or your dad gets dementia or you get diagnosed with cancer. Who are you going to want to come home to? Who is going to hold you when you are sobbing on the floor and tell you we're going to get through it together? Who's going to know the names of your kid's special ed teacher and the process for getting a 504 plan? Or is it going to be you on your own? I think those things matter. But doesn't that hotness, don't those drugs kind of solidify into a deep appreciation of the other person into something you could call beauty? They can. But isn't that the same thing? When you notice the beauty of another human being, aren't you high on drugs still? You're making it sound like there's a brief rock star period of going on heroin, and then it's over. But can't you be on heroin your whole life a little bit? I have some good news. I have some good news. That was something. I think one of the reasons I got into studying relationships was because I wanted that. I'm a scientist, but I also love art, and I love writing, and I love literature. I wanted to know that true love could be real. But as a scientist, I am cynical. I just need some data. I practice a type of therapy called the Gottman method, and I love that because it tends to be, well, it is one of the most evidence-based therapies we have based on John and Julie Gottman, two psychologists who have been researching relationships for now about 50 years, and this therapy happens to be for couples. They found that you absolutely can make longevity work in a relationship. You can build. You are not just settling for companionship, but you can have passion and intimacy and growing love and appreciation. But there is a blueprint, a set of skills that we were never given. We're not taught it in school. We changed the rules of the game, and we haven't learned the rules yet. And the Gottman method for couples therapy kind of gives you a few guidelines, the rules for longevity in a relationship. Yeah, they did a beautiful job at taking these findings they had through decades of research, quantifying it, and then codifying it into a therapy method. It's really skills-based. I tell couples when they're starting out with me that they're essentially going to be starting a class. So what's the five-to-one golden rule? What I read is there's the kind of balance you can achieve of how many interactions you have in relationships that are positive versus negative. And I think that's what the five-to-one means. But basically, there should be kind of an empirical like if you just look back over a month, how many of the interactions were positive, how many were negative. Or the day. Or the day, right? So the idea of this ratio, well, it's not an idea. It was a finding. It is a research finding that the Gottmans got after looking at thousands of couples and codifying these interactions that they were observing. Couples that tend to be satisfied in their relationships that are happier, they have better health, et cetera, they are having approximately five positive interactions to each negative. And I want to be clear about what I'm defining as positive and negative here. So this doesn't necessarily mean that these don't need to be big, sweeping romantic gestures, buying flowers, having sex. These are things like paying attention to what we call your partner's bids. We make these bids for affection, for connection, all the time in our relationships, not just with our partners, but with our friends, our coworkers. And we may not even know what our style of bid is, but if you see them on a sheet, you can pretty quickly identify them. Bids could be wanting to show your partner, tell your partner something and have them be proud of you. It could be wanting to go by groceries with your partner, doing things together. Hey, you want to come with me? It could be telling a joke and hoping that your wife looks up from

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her email on the computer and acknowledges it. If she laughs, then you've got a positive. But if I don't even look up, that's a negative. So it's not necessarily that I'm calling my husband an asshole. It's just, am I connecting with him? Am I meeting those bids for connection and vice versa? But do those also give you a guide of how you should behave?

Well, I think what's really important is actually asking your partner or paying attention to what your partner's bids are, because what matters to Ty, my husband, may not matter to you. For instance, Ty's bar is so low with me, I thank God for him.

In terms of what defines a positive interaction?

Right. He just wants me to ask him if he wants a water when I get up to get myself one.

Just be a basic, decent, considerate person is all he asks of me. Whereas mine might be stay up later with me, watch a show, go to bed at the same time as me, or know about the people in my life, that sort of a thing. I should highlight this, and I hope hopefully it's okay, that you were running a little bit late and you sent me this text, which people do really rarely, and there's a subtle act of kindness within that text. So the text you sent was that I just decreased the amount of stress in your life or something like this by saying it's cool.

But that means that you were signaling that you were stressed because you care enough to be there on time. And that was like, that made me feel really special. I was like, oh, you know, people don't often, people don't often, don't always do that because that puts you also, that makes you vulnerable. And I actually thought that after I sent it, but I feel that most of the day, any interaction, like God, I just exposed myself. But absolutely, I was excited to be here and I didn't want you to think that I didn't care. I think being a therapist has shown me that it really, it's so lucky to be in that position because you meet people that you would have thought are cooler than you or smarter than you or just somehow impervious to life. And you realize that we are all in it together, we all want to be cared about and liked, we all want to be liked as a baseline. Some people will say they don't care, but everybody does. It's human. And I have gotten much better being a therapist, much more comfortable showing caring, showing love and genuineness and vulnerability

than I think I ever would have been otherwise. And that kind of vulnerability is what's required to do a positive interaction in a relationship? I think so. And people have different levels of comfort, right? So, but as long as it's working for both partners, and typically you have to communicate to figure out what your partner, what makes your partner feel cared about. However, you might be working, for instance, with an older couple and I have a couple that's perfectly happy and they sort of have a system, it works for them. If there's some sort of a rupture, if they get in some sort of a disagreement, they don't talk it out. She might go to the store, run an errand, do a little shopping, he'll work in the wood shop and then they'll come back and there is a repair attempt though, but it's maybe she'll say, Hey, do you want to have dinner or come? I made your favorite dinner and or he'll say, Hey, I recorded your favorite show, you want to watch it tonight. So they don't need to process it, but there is an understanding between them that we're still in this together, we care about each other and there's a repair attempt. Most people need to be able to process it verbally and talk about what happened. But not all. So for most people, if there's a conflict, you should talk about it and resolve it and repair it versus like just put it behind you. I don't want to say should. I guess it depends on the couple. Everybody processes emotions differently. Everybody handles emotional expression differently. I mean, I have couples where I have

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one person in the partnership who has autism and the other doesn't. And so they're obviously going to have different ways of communicating or processing what happened. We all have different perspectives. It really depends on what makes a person feel like it's been repaired. What makes a person feel understood? Does that need to be verbal or in the case of that older couple I have where they know they understand one another because there's a gentleness toward one another after?

What are some common ways relationships fail that you've observed in all the therapy?

Well, the Gommons identified what they call the four horsemen either apocalypse.

What are the four horsemen? I mean, I could just keep it simple and go off their research.

Those are four different behaviors that you can identify in couples that are really highly predictive of a divorce, some more than others. But I'll start with the lower ones.

By the way, actually, we all do these things. These would be in that five to one ratio. You'd want to stay away from some of these. These are the ones. So as they pile up, now that ratio is going to get imbalanced and then you are headed for a split. So the first is criticism. So criticism is when we have a complaint, complaints are normal, but instead of owning our own problems, our own feelings, we assume that our perspective is the only valid accurate perspective. And so we take it upon ourselves to tell our partner what is wrong with them. So there's essentially no real belief that they might have a valid perspective too. So this could look like you never helped me out with the house or even you're so lazy. Can't I just get you for five seconds to help with the kids or something like that? And then what happens is horsemen number two,

defensiveness. So not everybody is defensive just because they were criticized. Some people just are more prone to defensiveness than others. None of us really like admitting our fault. So it's pretty natural. But defensiveness is essentially making excuses or worse, turning it around on your

partner, not accepting any responsibility and definitely not validating what they're feeling.

Now, if you get criticized enough, or if you get really flooded, that flooding is what happens when our heart rate goes up kind of around 100 beats per minute, our frontal lobe shuts down. That's our thoughtful brain, our logical brain, and our reptilian kind of hindbrain takes over our thinking and we just go into fight or flight in a way. We just want to annihilate our partner instead of say anything that would be helpful to the relationship. So if you're getting flooded, if you're getting flooded, you could do a couple of things. You could get super critical, you could get contemptuous, which I'll talk about in a second, it's the last horseman, or you do the third horseman, which is stonewalling. And in their research, the Gottmans found that men are actually more likely to stonewall. I also am someone who stonewalls, but it's where you just sort of disconnect

from the conversation. You shut down, you turn away, you can physically even turn away kind of arms cross, but you're just you're shut off. And stonewalling happens, usually because you get flooded, you feel like you can't win, you don't know what to do to make the situation better, it feels pretty hopeless, and talking feels unproductive. So you can see how in a typical heterosexual relationship, the gender dynamic, we know that women tend to use criticism more often

because they're the ones that typically raise issues verbally. And then if men are feeling

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more criticized, that they tend to stonewall, and it becomes this vicious cycle of then more criticism, but the criticism is really just a plea to be loved and get your partner to show you they care. And then the man tends to feel like he can't do anything right. This isn't even productive if I say anything, I'm just going to make it worse. And they don't have any real, you haven't given them a specific need, a solution, something they can do to shine for you. So they turn away. And where does the contempt come in? All right. So contempt is criticism on steroids.

This is what John Gottman calls sulfuric acid for love. Nothing will erode a relationship quicker than contempt. Contempt is when you are looking at your partner from a superior position. So you are eye rolling, you are name calling. There's a mockery mocking, even physical mockery, imitating them, imitating their voice. Contempt is meant to just take the legs out from your partner, make them feel pathetic, ridiculous. And it can be abusive. But most people have engaged in contempt at some point in their relationship, lower level would be sort of the eye rolling. But that is the biggest predictor of a split. If you allow yourself to think, yeah, that mockery or contempt, just a little bit, it's like this weird slippery slope.

Sure is. And the opposite is true. Where I just look at a person and think, wow, isn't that the most like wonderful creature I've ever seen in my life? I just think that. And you notice the little details about who they are. And so I just observe them the way you observe like a weird like peacock at a zoo or something like that.

Intention is powerful, isn't it? Yeah. And it changes. You start to notice beautiful things and then let the things that annoy you. Yes.

You're exactly right. You're touching on some really important things. So in relationships, we actually know that wearing rose colored glasses is important. It's healthy. We need it. And it's a choice you're making, right? So there is a saying that getting married is just choosing one person's faults over another. And the reality is that we may become infatuated with somebody else as human beings. Love is an emotion, attraction is an emotion. And as you go through life, even if you're in a committed relationship, you might see beauty in another. And that person who is novel might seem attractive to you. But if you can remember that they too have a set of problems that you would be marrying, it really helps you to see the beauty in your partner again and recognize all of their incredible strengths and all the ways we meld with a person become our own family, almost become, I mean, our lives intertwine and we grow those oak trees. So by the way, it's a line I read somewhere that when you're wearing rose colored glasses, all the red flags looks just like flags. I think it's a good line. I love that.

So you think that humans are fundamentally, all of us are fundamentally flawed or have flaws. They're unique flaws. And basically relationships is just a way to figure out how the two can fit together. Right. And we're different. So no matter what, we're going to have differences. We are raised differently than our partner. We have different stories, different experiences that shaped our value systems, especially when it comes to the big ones like parenting, love, money, these principles that are based in our history. We're going to have differences.

So is this a set of differences you can accept from somebody and work with?

Do the benefits and do their strengths, do they make it worth it or are they deal breaker differences? Tricky question. But in the couples you've worked with, is there like the feminine and the masculine? Is there different dynamics that come into play like dominant and submissive? Is it like a dance where it just changes from minute to minute? Is there dynamics that you observe that both limit

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and enable successful relationships? Yes. So there are, if we're talking about masculine, feminine, then how also are we going to get into, are we talking about actual gender, identified gender, or are we just talking about these traits? Because like I said, I Stonewall, which is typically in couples, something that is more associated with straight men. But that's my style of coping when I get overwhelmed.

That is not tied to any sort of success or non-success of a relationship. But what we do know is that gay couples, so lesbians and gay men, tend to be gentler with one another when they are having conflict discussions. So that's actually been identified in the research and it's something I've witnessed and it's just fascinating. So with my straight couples, I'll be going through one of these. If we're processing a conflict that occurred, I'll be going through the sheet and it's very, very structured because you don't want couples doing more damage when they're there with you. You want them practicing skills that protect them from criticism, that protect them from contempt. And when I'm working with a straight couple, I am like a referee or sometimes I'll relate it to being like a ski coach and keeping people on a bunny hill and you tell them, you let them make like two turns and then you stop them and you meet up again because you don't want them to veer off. With straight couples, you are doing very short turns before you need to kind of intervene and rescap. I had a lesbian couple recently and they were so lovely with each other. They skipped like seven steps to the advanced final portion where they were already coming up with solutions and suggesting things that they might be able to do differently next time to make it better for their partner. They were asking each other questions about how their partner felt with no agenda, no attempt to sort of be like, well, do you think you're feeling that way because, which straight couples do all the time? You just see this humility and openness. It's lovely. Yeah, it's lovely. But I wonder if maybe watching too many Hollywood films, if some of the drama, some of the tension is required for a passionate, lifelong romance. No, it's not. And that's great news. So we actually know that the closer you feel to your partner. So I mean, you've talked a lot about beauty and you can ignite that beauty, that interest, right? So when you're falling in love, it's usually that a person is sort of a mystery to you and you're uncovering these layers that you find really appealing. There are continual layers that you can uncover with your partner over time. I don't think we realize that. I think we get complacent and we think we've had every conversation imaginable. What, well, are they going to do to surprise me? But we don't know the questions to be asking. One of my favorite questions, I like turning these conversations kind of into a quiz because I get bored easily. So rather than just asking an open-ended question, there's a way you can do this with your partner where it's sort of like the dating game. Like, what is my as of yet fondest but unrealized life dream? And see if your partner knows. You might not even know. They might know

you better than you know yourself. That in and of itself is a beautiful reminder of the relationship and how special it is. But then also, when they say it, or when you realize or have to think critically, like, what is my husband's as of yet unrealized but fondest life dream? And then you can talk about it. You just, I don't know, you just kind of transcend into this new area and you feel tight again. You feel like you feel close. Well, you really talk to each other. I've recorded and without intending to publish podcasts like this with microphones, with friends, with people close to me. Because it's literally that. You get to ask questions like as if it's

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an interview. Right. And we don't do that. That's exactly it. The way you're talking with me. Yeah. Sit down with your partner. Have that conversation. Like years later. Right. Show interest. Actually be curious. See what they surprise you with. And actually what you learn is you don't know the answers to most of these questions. 100%. Exactly. Like, what's your favorite movie from the 80s? You might not know the answer to that. It's like those first date questions or whatever. Or what's your favorite movie this year and why? And why? Yeah. It's fascinating. It is. It's hard to do that because I think that you'll probably be offended at first, how little the other person knows. So I think you have to work through that. You know, I actually find that there's this rekindling because partners are shocked that their partner does know so much about them, especially if they've been feeling dissatisfied or disconnected. It's a reminder of all the good that's still there.

What, I know we've said some of those things, but what's on the opposite side? What's the key to successful relationship? What's like, what are the things you see time and time again that do you designate that they're in a good path? Yeah. There's a real attunement, honestly. It's sort of an us against the world feeling. Neither partner is going to talk shit on them, the other. There's a loyalty. They handle each other in the relationship with care.

You can tell that they've worked some things. To me, it usually indicates that these are some people who have figured they've had to work some things out. They know that this is delicate. They know that you're on thin ice. You take a wrong step and you can be back in a tough place in your relationship or you treat it with care and it can be amazing. They're careful with one another. They give each other compliments. They are considerate. You'll see he'll bring the car around for her because it's raining or she'll bring him home some takeout. She'll order for him too at the restaurant. They keep each other in each other's minds.

But that us against the world thing, that definitely is there.

A hundred percent. You've seen that, right? Yeah. You've seen it. I like it when couples have been together for a long time and when one is talking, the other one looks at them. If you don't do that, that's not a bad sign, but it's a good sign when you do that.

Yes. I think it's actually a really good exercise to do because I enjoy what I see in others. It's a way to show that you don't take him for granted and then you still find them like this mysterious, wonderful creature to observe. I think too often we have that with our parents, with people close to us, you think, yeah, I've heard what they're about to say. I know. I know you can complete that sentence. Take him for granted.

And then if you just look at them and say, wow, this is the most brilliant person I've ever seen in my life. I can't just appreciate every word that comes out of them and look at them in that way. You actually begin to believe it and you actually begin to see the beauty of what they're saying. You are exactly right. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. And it's caring. It's very caring. I mean, that's I think the beauty of what the Gottman research showed us, taught us, provided us, is that we can do these things that become cyclic and just keep growing this relationship, making it stronger, more powerful, more loving. You would never want to cut it down.

Well, you were talking about the sheet for conflict processing. What are we talking about? So a couple will come and say there was this conflict and you put it on the table and then what does it mean to process it?

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So in that Gottman Method of Therapy, there are all these different, I mean, hundreds of different interventions and based on what the issue is in that session, you can decide the most appropriate intervention. And so this is a specific intervention for if it is a conflict that occurred and there are different types of conflict. So this would be more like an incident. It's not a perpetual recurring problem, which has actually a different intervention where you kind of look at the underlying belief systems values and the goal is not to solve that problem. The goal in that situation is to actually just get a better understanding of each other and your positions and just you stop seeing your partner as the adversary and you start seeing them as a person who makes sense. But if there's been a specific event, a specific fight that's just sort of situational, but it's left bad blood, things were said or you didn't feel understood, this intervention I was talking about is one that you would go through a series of steps where first you identify the emotions that you were feeling, then you describe play by play, your movie, your perspective. If your partner were looking through your eyes, this is what they heard, saw, thought, then they saw this, then they heard this. So you're not saying, yeah, then you came in and were yelling and acting crazy. You're saying, so then I saw you come in, I heard you say and I thought to myself, well, great, now everything's ruined. Right? So you're showing them your movie, then they have to summarize the movie for you and then vice versa. And then there's this step where each person validates some part that they can understand. Like based on what you saw, heard, I can actually understand how you felt one of those feelings that you said. And then my favorite part is you rewind sort of the movie from that day back through into childhood and you land on a time, and you land on a time, a memory when you felt a similar set of feelings. And this is like the most beautiful part ever because let's say the feeling was I felt misunderstood, I felt misjudged, uncared about, unloved, like you didn't even like me. And I'll say, when did you feel that way, you know, land on a time they're like my whole childhood, you know, my parents were, my mom was always accusing me of doing things I wasn't doing and it would set me up and my dad would come home, he'd hear about it, he would just believe her. And then you have like a partner climbing up on the couch, like give their partner a hug while they're sharing the story. It's beautiful. And it changes the way you interact in future disagreements. So you have those moments. Yeah, you can't unlearn. Now you know this about your partner, you know what they're sensitive to. Yeah. And again, you kind of see the beauty in the flaws then. Right. It all makes sense. Yeah, it all kind of makes sense. Yeah. So you maybe we're in this dumpster dive in your head of how your partner sucks and all the things that are wrong with them and it's so hopeless. And then you get this light shining through and you realize, oh my God, of course they would be sensitive to that. And suddenly it's not about all the way your partner is wrong and proving that they're wrong. It's just how can I in the future make sure they do not feel this again? I would never want this person I love to misunderstand me and feel so unloved. What are you the early days of that? What do you think about the whole dating, modern dating process? How do you find a partner that you can stay with for the rest of your life? So we are absolutely doing it wrong. And but there is a way you can do it. And I am such a fan of this psychologist, Ty Toshiro. I adore him. He's brilliant. He's lovely. He's also very humble.

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Just a wonderful salt of the earth guy. I'm going to tell you a very true story here. I was in a bad relationship and I was at a psychology conference with my partner at the time. We were both at this conference and we were sitting in a lecture hall there for Ty Toshiro to do his talk that day on his phenomenal research on relationship satisfaction and dating. And I was sitting next to him and we'd been, you know, it was just always unpleasant on trips. There were always fights. We're sitting there and Ty Toshiro starts talking about his research and how he found that most people are, you know, signing this agreement, getting married and doing it based on the love endorphins. And really only about 35% of anybody who's married is actually happy. And he said, so then, you know, and exactly. But here's what I love about Ty Toshiro is he didn't stop there. He wanted to know what those people who were happy had in common. And then same thing with the people who were unhappy. He found a couple fascinating patterns. So the couples who were happy tended to rate their partners higher in three different traits. And I love talking about this because if you are somebody who can follow instructions, you can find this. I mean, very easily. Those three traits tend to be conscientiousness. Okay. And I love the word conscientiousness because it's not just kindness. Kindness is a good way to think of it. But you can be kind and kind of be a pushover and that's not attractive. Conscientiousness is smart, attentive. It's somebody who reads into a text message and thinks, wow, she was making herself very vulnerable there. That's conscientiousness. I like how you're just doing a compliment. I appreciate it. No, but it's true. It's a certain intelligence, awareness and attunement. And then on top of that, conscientiousness is motivated. So you can't be on your ass all day and be conscientious because then you can't meet the needs that you anticipate about the person. So conscientious is that guy who drives the car around in the rainstorm so his wife's hair doesn't get wet. It's my husband who checks my alarm for me every morning because he knows I'm terrible at time management and he makes sure that I set it a reasonable amount of time before my first meeting and not the 20 minutes I think I need. And then he'll come wake me up with a cup of coffee. That is ultimate conscientiousness. And it is true. I mean, I will tell you, as somebody who's with a conscientious partner, your love increases over time as you continue to feel grateful and admiring of that person. The second one, you want somebody who is low in a big five personality trait called neuroticism. You want somebody emotionally stable in a way. Now, this doesn't mean you can't have somebody who doesn't get the blues or struggle with mental health issues. Trust me, Ty is with somebody who I'm all over the place. But you want somebody who kind of owns their shit and isn't going to just be emotionally unstable all over. You want somebody who is generally happy and has some life satisfaction. Having a partner who has serious, not mental health issues, but unmitigated emotional distress and instability is really hard on the partner. And it's really hard on other family members, including children, if you have children. So it's just a predictor of happiness. So there's a certain threshold of chaos that if you exceed it, it's going to be destructive to a long-term relationship. That is a perfect description about chaos. Not the mystery chaos you love with your little poet brain. I'm talking more like just somebody who... There's just no peace. There's no peace. There's a problem with everything. Everything becomes more difficult. Going to a party is a chore. You don't know if they're going to have a meltdown at the party or how many complaints about your friends or everything is a problem. So you want somebody who

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has just some resiliency, I think is a good term for it. Some flexibility. Some spice is okay, but not too much. Right. Flexibility, resiliency, easy going. The third is really interesting, I think. So he found that having a partner with sort of moderate adventurousness, not high adventurousness, actually leads to greater satisfaction. And the reason for that is high adventurousness equals novelty seeking, shiny new things. And so if you're in a monogamous relationship, if that is what's important to you, it's going to be very hard for a partner who is novelty seeking to be faithful. So that will cause a lot of pain. But also, novelty seeking people tend to always have new projects, new interesting things. And so their attention is drawn away from the relationship. And so you can just feel pretty neglected or unimportant.

By a little bit.

But you want a little bit of adventurousness. So you want your person to be sort of self-motivated, individuated, have their own interests, not completely dependent on you. But also, I mean, low adventurousness is not a bad thing. Ultimately, what you're getting with low to moderate adventurousness is that rock, that feeling of stability at home. And I made some references earlier, like when you're 70 and you turn to your partner, do you want them to be hot? Or, you know, for instance, my dad has dementia right now. And my husband turned to me on the plane, we were all coming back from a trip and where we really saw how severe it's getting. And he just turned to me. He knew how much pain I was in, even though I wasn't showing it. And he said, I want you to know that if it comes to a point where we need to take care of your dad, he needs to live with us, you don't even need to ask. It is, I am 100% on board and will help. And those are the things that matter, that home feeling. And technically, that's a trait that's usually, that's sort of a, my husband caring so much about family and home and taking care of things that matter. Those are things that tend to be associated with that low to moderate adventurousness, somebody who really cares about simple things and family.

I wonder if those things, those, those three things that something you can work on, you know, conscientiousness, you can probably proactively observe yourself and, you know, do it more regularly. Neuroticism might be the hardest one probably to control.

I think so. Well, I mean, I was pretty neurotic in my early 20s.

And when you wake up to it, maybe you, if you're self-aware about it, maybe you'll be able to control it. Yeah, I think self-awareness is key. I think, I think that's why I love therapy so much. I think life is about growth and our potential for growth and to make our own lives better, to make the lives of others better, to serve others, to heal. All of us are this collective healing. And I think we're all capable of growth.

And the same with adventurousness. You can, I'm somebody that's pretty low on adventure, but I keep throwing myself out there just for the extra adventures so you can grow in that way.

Yes. And I am high in adventurousness and I was not really ready to settle down.

I was married earlier in my 20s, but I would say that I am much more prepared to be in a committed long-term relationship now in my 40s than I was when I was younger.

But in that same way, for me, I like to connect myself to high-adventure people so that it brings me out. It's like they're a horse and I'm gonna get to ride them.

Yeah. And that's the thing. So high-adventure people are attractive. They're interesting, exciting, but it can be a world of heartbreak because you're only under that spotlight for a few minutes and then they're on to the next shiny thing.

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Yeah, but heartbreak is part of love. But that might be the drug thing that you were talking about. Speaking of adventurousness, what about sex?

Sex is important. What role does sex play in a successful relationship? Well, okay, so I'm saying it's important, but I want to qualify that everybody has different levels of sex that are satisfying to them. Sex can definitely bond you to your partner. Orgasms are amazing. They destress us. They're healthy. I mean, you can have an orgasm and have a lower level of stress for 48 hours. I think that's pretty incredible. If you have, I mean, just that kind of physical contact with your partner, even a 20-second hug with your partner has similar benefits to an orgasm. You're gonna have a lower stress level. You're gonna feel immediately close to your partner. You're gonna get a rush of oxytocin, which is gonna make you feel happier, more grounded throughout the day. So that's a 20-second hug. You extrapolate that to sex and things are gonna be great. So it's just physiological. But I wonder, there's probably metrics about how often you have sex, how that correlates to successful relationships and so on. Well, there are, but it really has more to do. It's sort of like, remember I was talking about processing conflict and what matters is, do people feel like it's been resolved? Do they feel like there's been a repair? Not necessarily how they go about doing it. Same with sex. Does each partner feel sexually satisfying? So that could be once a month for one couple. It could be five times a week for another couple. It could be never for other couples, truly. I mean, so sex has a ton of benefits, but its absence isn't necessarily detrimental, I guess, would be the qualifier, depending on who you are.

And I know couples that use sex as part of the conflict resolution process.

It's hugely effective for that. If it works for both parties. All parties. Not just both.

All. That's true. What do you think about infidelity? What's the cause of infidelity?

Why do men and women cheat? It's different for everybody. But I mean, even earlier,

I was saying with adventurousness, like if monogamy is something you're doing.

I've seen, in my own practice, I've seen the entire range of couples who are open about having sexual

relationships with other people and fine with it. Couples who want to be fine with it, but find out they're not. Couples who aren't just couples. Couples with multiple people, multiple romantic relationships. I've had couples where affairs are tolerated and not talked about. They're not enjoyed, but they are not the type of betrayal that will destroy the relationship. Sort of a understanding and keep it out of my face. And then also, we won't talk about it.

So an affair that happened without getting permission first, and as long as you don't talk about it, it's not going to do a damage to the relationship.

Right. But we can't even talk about it like that, right?

So nobody's going to admit that the affair is happening. There can't be any evidence of it.

It's sort of just look the other way, type of a situation. But the partner who is not having the affair, right? They typically know. They certainly know that their partner is capable of that. They just kind of know, but they don't want it in their face. It would become a problem if it was in their face. As long as certain needs are met and everything else is okay at home, it's just one of those things where don't ask, don't tell.

Well, that's an interesting point because I had a bunch of arguments with people.

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I tend to hang out with, especially in the tech sector, people who really value honesty and radical honesty. And I keep arguing with people about this because to me, it's not that simple. That's an example right there that honesty can be really destructive. Honesty is also a really complicated thing to get to the bottom of because what is really honest? How do I look in this dress? There's a million ways to answer that. It can be a cesspool in my mind. If I'm in a bad place or my partner and I haven't been connected lately, my honesty of what I actually think about him would be horrifically damaging and completely unfounded also. And it can change on a dime.

And that's also not actual honesty to the big picture of how you feel about him.

I have interacted with a few folks who talk about their previous sexual partners, for example, hundreds of numbers of sexual partners they've had. And they feel like that kind of honesty is actually empowering and reaching to the relationship because all the sexual experiences you've had in the past make you a better sexual partner, a better partner in the present.

And to me, from the culture I've come from, that's like anti-romantic.

You kind of throw the past kind of away. You don't really talk about it. It's kind of there in this amorphous shape, but it's almost as if you've met together for the first time and this is a beautiful new thing, like your creatures that have woken up from a long slumber. You're starting anew.

You're starting anew. And you want some mystery there.

Right. I think the mystery, and you have to figure that out about each other. So I'm not exactly sure that honesty is always...

It's different for everyone. And then also is honesty harmful or helpful at certain points too. So you're talking about sort of like disclosing prior sexual history.

I thought you were going to go to... So if you've had an affair, do you hold...

Do you keep that under your hat?

Oh, yeah. That's a really tough question.

Or are you obligated to disclose it?

It's a really... That's a really nice...

It is a very tough question. Very tough.

Well, what do you think is the right answer?

I have my own personal beliefs. I also... Then like I have my therapeutic beliefs.

I think, frankly, and this is just me as a human being, not Shannon, the psychologist,

I believe that if you have fucked up, and again, I'm coming from a framework right now of monogamy,

if you are committed to somebody you love and you have fucked up,

you don't get to shed your guilt onto them. You need to carry that burden. It's not necessarily...

I think it's simplistic and unsophisticated to be like...

But then you're being dishonest. I think it's actually selfish to unload it on somebody else and give them the trauma of imagining what we do know about infidelity is it can create an actual post-traumatic stress-like experience for the betrayed partner, where they are having intrusive thoughts about it.

Those are unwanted thoughts and it's uncontrolled. It comes in at multiple times a day.

They'll have depressed mood. They'll have nightmares about it.

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Their entire sense of security, safety, self-esteem gets shattered because of your actions. I think it's kind of moralistic and naive to think, well, they deserve to know the truth, if you actually know the harm that that sort of betrayal does, especially if you truly mean to stop it. If it was a one-and-done or if it happened and you've stopped it and you do not intend to do it again, frankly, I think you live with that burden. You live with that discomfort. Thank you for saying that because I totally agree, but it's like logically... It doesn't quite make sense to give that advice, but psychologically it makes complete sense because you really are destroying another person's mind, their faith and love in relationships, their trust, everything. Then you're imprisoning them to be stuck with you for months or years if you're trying to work through it through that torture. You should be carrying that burden of working through it. Why do you say that that's your personal opinion versus your therapy? Everybody has different values. I think that's a value-based decision because to me, the hierarchy is kindness and do no further harm in that case over truth. Whereas other people, my husband, for instance, he is like truth above all else. You don't get to decide what I know or you don't get to decide whether or not I can handle that knowledge. He would even see my determination of that I should carry the burden arrogant. Why don't you let your partner decide whether or not they... Why do you get to choose? I don't know. I think there's value to both arguments. I absolutely see his point. It's fascinating. It's fascinating. I absolutely see his point. I think it's a very humble option. You don't get to choose what's better. You just need to give them the information and they can choose. I think it's going to cause your conscience more discomfort to hold it. I think there's a cleansing we do when we share that information. I think in real life, most people disclose it because they can't stand the secret anymore themselves. That to me is a selfish act. I have unemployment applications and so on. Just with friends would ask people, what do you care more about? Truth or loyalty? Just to get to see how they think about those different questions. I was surprised how much variance there is on that. Also, conceptually, I don't think we actually know where we stand until we're faced with a situation like that. I think a lot of people, especially when they're younger, say especially if they're kind of intellectual, they'll say truth above all else. You're exactly right. Until you get to hear a truth that truly breaks you, truly hurts you or causes suffering to you, and then you realize or a truth you give to somebody else will cause them suffering, and they get to see that suffering destroy their life and maybe your relationship and so on. Then you're like, oh, should I sit my dad down right now and be like, dad, you have dementia again today. I'm going to tell you, dad, you're not making sense. No, it's not going to be discussed. We're going to make them comfortable. I think truth can be a little bit of a platitude sometimes. Some of those complexities are all the things involved in the challenges of what makes a relationship work. What do you think about open relationships in general? My worldview is such that I see the beauty and value in monogamous relationships just for me, but I'm also open to the possibility of what works for other people. Have you done any kind of work with the people in open relationships? As clients or researchers? As clients. Is there some interesting differences in between open relationships and monogamous relationships? I think that may have been actually what was behind my question about the satisfaction with them being on the extremes. My hypothesis essentially was, is it because if you are really all and you've worked out some of the kinks, I think I've seen couples who are trying it out

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for the first time, it tends to get a little haywire. There's some excitement in the beginning. Everybody's really excited about it. I think the philosophy makes sense to a lot of people. The science of it makes sense to a lot of people, but we have been raised in a society that is pretty monogamous. There isn't a lot of scaffolding around it. There's a lot of inter-conflict, I think, for people to go away from the values that they've been taught since they were kids. Jealousy arises a lot. Also, it's very difficult to be, I think, as truthful and direct as you need to be, which you're describing in these polyamorous situations where everybody is laid out on the table. I think that's something that may be practiced in my own work with clients. I've just noticed that the partners who are happier in these situations who I've worked with, they are more experienced at it. They seem to have it down.

You testified in the Johnny Depp Amber Heard trial based on your role as a clinical and forensic psychologist. It was watched by, I don't know how many people, maybe tens, maybe hundreds of millions of people. What was that experience like?

Thank God I didn't know that at the time.

Were you scared?

Oh, yeah.

Given the size of the platform, how many people are watching?

I'm not. Scared typically isn't the word when I testify. I'm always excited and a little trepidatious before I testify because the stakes are so high for everybody's life in that room. This was different. Anxiety isn't usually my brand, and I just skipped anxiety that morning and went straight to terror, and I was mad. I was mad at the legal. It was funny. I was having all these strong emotions. I couldn't find my bobby pins. I almost started crying because I couldn't find them. I was pretty unhinged that morning, and in a way that was really unfamiliar to me. It was right when I cried because I couldn't find my bobby pins that I realized I needed to get a grip and that I was a professional and that my hair didn't matter, even though it ended up mattering. People noticed that it was crazy, but I got a grip and I went in and I just did my job.

So the terror in the end helped you focus and do your job well?

I think it does, and it's a little scary though because I know what fear does cognitively, and there is a sweet spot where you want some stress and then you can be really acutely focused in a tune, but then if you go over this threshold, you get that frontal lobe shutdown where you're not thinking clearly, and everybody knows that experience from taking a really stressful test at some point in high school, and then they're going over the answers with the teacher in class later and they're like, how did I miss that question? I know that. You're just in a different state. That's when you have too much stress. I think this day I actually was bordering on too much stress, if not clearly in that threshold, but once you're sitting there for a little bit and you're asked the questions, you can go into a routine of just wanting to talk about your work. So what is the work, the job of a forensic psychologist in that context?

In the depth heard trial, I was serving as an expert witness based on a psychological evaluation of one of the parties. So forensic psychologists can serve the court or in legal matters in a number of ways. They can act as a confidential consultant for an attorney on a case or they can, even assist with jury selection, they might testify without doing an evaluation if they're just coming to testify about sort of a subject matter, and then they wouldn't be answering

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specific questions to either the parties, but just talking more hypothetically about a field area. In this case, because I was ordered to conduct an evaluation, I evaluated one of the parties and then you provide a report to the court with your findings and then you testify as to what your findings were. But from my perspective, just watching you, you seem to have held it together really well. So what do you attribute that to? So you said like it calmed down after you were able to ask the questions. So to me, if I were just to put myself in your place, it seems like the internet and the world would be very nitpicky about individual words. You're speaking from a place of a scientific rigor. So you have to be very precise with the awarding. I would feel like so much pressure about each single word I choose. Did you feel that pressure that you have to be extremely precise with the words? Always. The pressure is so high going into testifying. I think that's where I feel the most pressure is preparing and literally the moment until I start having to answer. And then I don't even have the luxury of thinking about myself because it is so important that that answer be clarified and understandable to the court that that becomes my focus. And that's the godsend is that I can stop thinking about how scary it all is because I need to pay attention to explaining something. So if it's okay, I would love to talk to you about the the personality assessment test because I think it's actually super fascinating. But personality assessment inventory or the MMPI two, you're probably referring to the MMPI two, which is one I talked a lot about. MMPI two. Yeah. So maybe can you explain the MMPI two seems fascinating. It has like its output, the results has some basic scales as code types and just reading through the different complex. It's the thing of beauty. Because the human mind is really complicated. Even, you know, depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, like all of these things are really complicated. There's like, we many of them we don't understand well, there seems to be a huge amount of variance. And yet you have to be able to stitch together a bunch of characteristics that give you intuition about the unique aspects of each person. You want to be able to have tests that get you closer to identifying the peculiar flaws or beauties of a particular mind. So this seems to do a good job. Just reading through the different descriptions of the code test. That was the best description. I don't know. I'm being poetic. I apologize. No, that was a beautiful description. You have to be in part poetic about the human mind. It's not math. It's psychology. Okay. So what is the MMPI to? Like, what are we talking about here? Like, it's a questionnaire? Yes, that's a great start. So it is a questionnaire. Yet 567 yes, no questions. I'm going to tell you what's most beautiful about this test. So they used an empirical keying method to develop it. What that means is that they didn't have a bunch of psychologists get together and say, let's ask them, let's make sure that we identify people who have somatic complaints or physical complaints by asking them questions about like numbness in their hands, nothing like that. What they did instead was they through, you know, like take a thousand questions at a group of people who they know at a certain mental illness and a group of people who didn't have that mental illness. And then they looked for patterns in what the people with the mental illness endorsed as yes and no of those random questions. So it would be, for instance, there's a bronze light fixture right there. One of the questions out of the thousand might be, I like light fixtures that are bronze true or false. And they looked for correlations in the way people would answer to these completely innocuous, just boring questions. So there was no real way that a test taker could foresee the point of answering.

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And so because they can't foresee, it's very difficult to cheat to get to a conclusion. Very difficult. And not only that, but you can imagine using that approach, you can then look for patterns for almost any type of response style for any type of personality trait, any type of mental illness, you just get a comparison group. And then a group who's using that specific strategy or has that specific mental illness or has that personality trait. And you just look for patterns. And there's a scale output of different kinds.

And there's code types. Yep. So we've got, you've got validity scales. And those are just fascinating. And often one of the most useful parts of this test and forensic context, because they show you how a person is approaching the test, how they're answering questions about themselves. So for instance, you can see if they are tired, you can see if they're kind of responding randomly, you can see if they are in an unsophisticated manner, trying to make themselves look perfect, but not very nuanced. You can see if they may be deceiving themselves and truly believe that they are perfect. Whereas others don't see it that way. You can see if they're exaggerating, you can see if they're exaggerating, because they're truly, it's a cry for help, they are in extreme distress, but they feel as though they need to really punctuate it to get people to notice. Or you can see if they're exaggerating in a way that is driven for a specific outcome or gain. It's just fascinating. And it's the most well-developed assessment we have for a person's approach to answering questions about themselves. So it gives you the context about how honest they're being.

The state of the person as they're answering them.

Yeah. Yeah. They're honesty. How forthcoming they're being and how accurate they're being. And then the result of the classification based on the test are these code types.

Right. Well, so you have these clinical scales as well. You have 10 clinical scales that look for different kind of primary clinical pathology issues. This test doesn't tell you anything good about yourself. At best, it just tells you that you're not responding in a way that is dishonest and that you are not hugely problematic. But it's not looking for strength. So you have these 10 clinical scales that look for variations above the mean of the population in certain areas anywhere from depressive symptoms, manic symptoms, physical complaints, anxiety, nervousness, aggression, social engagement, whole scope of human experience. And then there are much more nuanced scales from those, so little subscales. And then the real power though of the MMPI2 is in, as you said, these code types. And these code types are additional patterns that have been detected that really can be more defining of a personality. So you look for peaks. There can be either two extreme peaks or three typically that make a code type. And those peaks are higher scores on these personality traits. And specific code types can give you a very nuanced picture of a person's general approach to life and their personal relationships, their personality. So you can build on top of those code types, an understanding, yeah, how that person go to deal with different kinds of situation. And then there's, by the way, a lot of code types.

There are a lot of code types. I was looking at them. They're pretty interesting.

It is truly fascinating. I want to take this test. I wanted to see which one I would...

I have given it to some people in my life. It's just phenomenal.

How hard is it on your side of the table to give the test?

Oh, it's easy. You just proctor it. You just make sure that somebody,

there's no distraction, that they're well rested, they are sitting there and they can just take it

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in front of you. So I guess the question is because the questions are well designed in that it's hard to mess with them. You just give the...

It's very hard to beat it. You just hand it to them.

And it's yes and no. It's yes and no.

But I should also add to this that this test, as much as I love it, and it is the most research and widely used personality assessment in the world, it is not in and of itself definitive.

So you use it like you already have sort of a hypothesis and you use this for clarification.

And it has a ton of value for showing somebody's response or their approach,

how forthcoming they're being. But other than that, you really need to

consider it as a piece of the puzzle. You had said stitched together earlier and that was just one of those points you made that was perfect for describing this.

There's probably no one perfect test, right, for personality?

No.

I wonder, especially with advancements of AI, there could be more and more sophisticated ways of measuring, of collecting data about your behavior and being able to measure some kind of more productive kind of, especially not in forensic context, but more in trying to figure out like how to improve your lifestyle, improve your relationships, all that kind of stuff.

So the results of the test with Amber Heard, if you can speak to the public stuff,

you said that the results of Ms. Heard's evaluation supported two diagnoses, borderline

personality disorder and histrionic personality disorder. Can you speak to each one of those?

What are they? What are the basic characteristics of borderline personality disorder?

Sure. Well, so right now, the DSM-5, which is sort of the Bible for mental disorders,

it's what we go to, our diagnostic manual, it classifies personality disorders according to

clusters. And cluster B is one that involves the emotionally erratic, interpersonally erratic,

emotional disorders. And those include histrionic personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, and antisocial personality disorder.

Eventually, there's been some research on this and a lot of support for us eventually moving

into a more spectrum type approach to considering personality disorders where you'd essentially

be looking at dysfunction in different domains of somebody's functioning that has persisted

over time. And again, the really important part is it seems to be a stable trait part of their

personality that, you know, it's in their interpersonal relationships, it's in how they

handle their own life, their own functioning, their mood, and it's not just situation-based,

it seems to be all areas. I don't love the title histrionic personality disorder. I think

its history is, it's pretty controversial, and there's some misogyny in it. But that all being

said, as a servant to the court and somebody who is there to just provide the science as it exists

today, my job is to relay, and in this specific case, I was ordered to provide my diagnostic

impressions, a diagnosis, and I don't get to decide which diagnosis, whether I like a certain

diagnosis or not, ultimately, if the criteria are met, that diagnosis is given. So as we have it

right now with the current personality disorder categories, histrionic personality disorder

is probably the most controversial. Some people believe that it is narcissistic personality

disorder light, so sort of a less obvious, a less malicious version of narcissistic personality

disorder. And I think that will probably get sussed out if we do move to a more spectrum-based

approach, because then you would be describing sort of a personality disorder, and then you would

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add the traits to it, so with issues in interpersonal functioning and etc. So you could be a little bit more specific rather than having to just put somebody in a category. So that's where things are moving, you're saying? That's where things are moving. From a cluster's base view of NPD, anti-social personality disorder to more of a spectrum with personality dysfunction, then you list the traits that are there. And I think that'll be more accurate, especially there's so much overlap between these personality disorders right now, especially cluster B. It is not uncommon for people to have two or three personality disorders to meet criteria for two or three at the same time. So speaking about borderline personality disorder and histrionic personality disorder, borderline personality disorder can best be thought of as a disorder of instability and impulsiveness, emotional instability, instability in a person's self-identity, sense of self, instability in a person's relationships, and then underlying all of this is an intense fear of abandonment. Histrionic personality disorder is more of a disorder of emotionality, dramatics, and attention seeking. This, you know, histrionic disorder typically is known for the dramatics and people who are observing or interacting with somebody with this disorder may even feel themselves almost kind of wanting to turn away. There's a sense of play acting as the person is speaking or engaging with you. Something just feels a little bit disingenuous and a lot of attention seeking. Similar to borderline personality disorder, you might see with histrionic personality disorder attempts to manipulate. However, the motivation with histrionic personality disorder is that attention. Whereas with borderline personality disorder, the underlying motivation for almost everything is to avoid abandonment. So you'll see frantic attempts to avoid abandonment, frantic attempts to keep people close. And those frantic attempts can be really harmful to the person and to others. To the person themselves. So the fear of abandonment can result in the very thing you're afraid of. Right. And there has been some research also to suggest that borderline personality disorder has different types as well. And I think this is really important because in my own work, I have encountered many people with borderline personality disorder in my own life, right? And there are different types, right? I'm thinking specifically of a girl I really love who I've worked with for years who is so self aware about this and endearing and she owns her shit. I can forgive almost anything if somebody just owns their shit. She might lose her temper. She might lash out. She can be erratic, but she will come back and apologize, own it, and accept full responsibility and not only that, but identify it and make changes. She doesn't want to be harmful. I adore that about her. I think it's an admirable quality more of us could have. That's very different than when you think about it, there are nine different symptoms and you only need five to meet criteria. So depending on which symptoms you have, you might be far more calculated, conniving, manipulative, or you may just be more of the impulsive, kind of messy, emotionally erratic type. And so there's some new research also coming out that's even suggested that among women, those that score higher in some of these more calculated traits of the disorder may actually be, it may be a certain presentation of female psychopathy. Yeah. Are some of these personality disorders, again, probably impossible question to answer, but how much of it is nature? How much of it is nurture? How much of it is in the genetics and you just can't do much with? Maybe another question, a different way to ask that is, how much can you help that? How much can you become better? That is a tough question. So there's been a ton of change in the way we've thought about the

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etiology of these personality disorders, specific to borderline personality disorder. I think in general, the view is that most people believe that it was associated with neglect or trauma and childhood. While there is a correlation there, there's a correlation between that and many mental health issues, not just borderline personality disorder. We also, there is evidence to support a genetic basis for this personality disorder. And there are people who have borderline personality disorder that report no childhood trauma or difficulty. And I have seen, you know, sometimes things just happen. So I think it's a mix. I think we need to think of it as biopsychosocial, which is generally the answer to most things when you're talking about how a mental health issue comes to be. I certainly think that in most cases, and here's just me speaking personally, again, I think in my own work, in most cases, what I see is that somebody may have some sort of predisposition, then they go through certain life events and learn patterns of behaving that may serve them well as a child in a dysfunctional situation, but end up being very problematic later on. Or they just have enough hardship that that gene, whatever it was, lying dormant, that little borderline personality disorder gene, expresses itself. And you'll see that with things like schizophrenia, depression, anxiety disorders, there tend to be certain ages where you'll just see that expression happen. All right, for the record, it got cold in here. So we upgraded with a blanket. You look cozy. Just as a question for me, just observing the trial is interesting that first of all, it was a really raw and honest exploration of an intimate relationship between two people. It was interesting to watch. I suppose I haven't watched that kind of thing. It made me think about what makes for a good relationship. All the many things we already talked about in this conversation, it was useful for that. But also there was raw recordings of two humans interaction. What did you think about that? That there's recordings? It's kind of interesting. The act of recording your partner? Yeah. Not the ethics of that or so on. But the fact that you have this data, it made me wonder, if I recorded myself, how would I sound? Well, you do record yourself. No, but here with microphones, but when you're in private, you wonder, I had a bit of a fight with a friend last week. And I wondered which one of us was the asshole. I would love to hear the recording because we're a little bit, I think we're a little bit rude to each other. And I wonder how it went wrong. I love that you asked yourself that question. That's so useful. We made up the next day and we, I think, both agreed to not ever talk about it. But I want the data. Just bury it deep. I record my couple sessions. And one of the primary purposes of that is so that after, if they start to get nasty with each other in the session, I can stop it and I can say, what was that? Right. And most of the time, that, what you're describing is so useful because we don't say ourselves. We have no idea that we just came off as critical. We think we're being completely reasonable and thoughtful. Whenever somebody is sort of retelling an argument they got and they said, and then I was just caring and just asked, I mean, why is there a reason you didn't, something like that? If they can actually see themselves, they realize, no, their jaw was clenched, their voice was raised, they actually called a name. Sometimes they're shocked. So just a quick sling around it. The, you labeled Amber heard as a three six code type, going back to our discussion, which can mean that, quote, she's heavily concerned with image prone to treating others with cruelty, unable to admit responsibility for wrongdoing and prone to externalizing blame. And then I also went into the MMPI to list three six includes anxiety, tension, rigidity, fear of criticism, suppressed hostility, merging in passive or episodic aggression, suspiciousness,

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egocentricity, what else, projection. What can you say about that code that is not captured in the different personality disorders? What are we supposed to do that from a forensic psychology perspective? And what, what, what are we supposed to do that in general, forget the three six in general, these kinds of code types in that context, in the context of a trial? If I'm understanding you correctly, it's sort of, what's the point of these code types? Yeah. Thank you for asking the question, but I don't know what I'm doing. I just, I just actually honestly really find MMPI too fascinating. I love that you do. Yeah. I love that you get it because I just, to me, it's such a, it's almost unbelievable that humans created it. But I think that goes back to that empirical key method of creating something that enabled it to be as robust as it is and something that is very difficult to beat, if not impossible. But the code types really, so it depends on, in any friends, in case what really matters is the legal, psycho legal questions. So what is the legal question? And then what is the psychologist's responsibility in assisting with whatever question they're being asked? And there's some questions we can't answer, some that we can. You don't always need to provide a diagnosis when you're asked to provide a report. It depends on the jurisdiction. It depends on the statute. Some jurisdictions actually require a diagnosis. In this case, I was asked to provide a diagnosis. So when I'm considering a diagnosis, you're integrating multiple different sources of information. You're integrating an examinee's self-report. You are adding collateral data. Usually I wasn't able to obtain collateral interviews in this case. And that was the decision of the court. They said no collateral interviews. But typically, that would be something that you would add. You're looking at records, ideally, from birth up until the date that the alleged injury occurred. And I'm speaking now specifically to a personal injury evaluation or something where somebody is claiming that they were harmed psychologically. But you want as many records as possible to show how a person functioned before that event occurred and how they functioned after. And you want it to show financial functioning, physical functioning, academic functioning, basically, where is their evidence that something in their life changed? Where is their evidence that harm occurred other than from what they're telling you? And in addition to all of those records that you're reviewing, in addition to their self-report, then you're also going to give some of these tests, like the MMPI. So the code types are really that strength of the MMPI-2. It gives you really nuanced information about a person's personality. Now, again, you're not going to use the MMPI-2 or any other test by itself to diagnose someone or decide that the person is telling the truth, not telling the truth. It is just another piece of data. And when it's working the way it's supposed to, it lines up really nicely with all of the other data you're getting, including what you've observed from the person during your interview with them, the information they're giving you, or inconsistencies with the information they're giving you, the consistency or inconsistency of their self-report from the records, what the records themselves say, et cetera, et cetera. So it's adding, it's helping you clarify and clarify and clarify the picture you have of the person. Yep, just dialing it down more and more. You're just making sure that it is as accurate as possible. Okay, so given how huge this trial was, given how eloquent you were, I know you don't think of it that way, but from a public perspective, you were like the star because of how well you did. That's insane. I mean, you know. I'm pretty sure Camille's the star. Camille's also incredible. I've gotten a chance to interact with her. She's somebody that

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really inspires me by how good she is at her job, how much she loves her job, and how much the fame, the money, whatever has not affected the basic core integrity of who she is as a human being. So she's also incredible. Okay. What's the takeaway for you personally from the trial? How has it made you a better person? How has it changed or solidified who you are as a psychologist, as a forensic psychologist, clinical psychologist, and so on?

Wow. I mean, a lot happened in my life around that trial leading up to the trial after the trial. So let's tackle forensic psychologists first. Okay. So in terms of forensic psychology, I am grateful to that trial for really strengthening my abilities. The stakes were so high that I was retained about two years prior to the trial. So I really delved deep into the academic side of forensic psychology and making sure that I was adhering as closely as possible to standard practices, best practice recommendations for this specific type of an examination. It was intellectually awesome and challenging. I feel like my brain was on fire for a full year leading up to the trial, and that can be really, really fun. It was just challenging, but I am really proud of the work I did. I think the stakes were really high. It's serious work. It's important that it's done well and accurately, and I felt really good about it.

So have some of those lessons carried through to your practice now, to both research and some of the things you're doing in terms of helping couples?

No. My practice hasn't changed that much. It demanded so much more of my time than my typical forensic work does, and personal injury cases where there is an allegation of trauma or psychological harm tend to be super labor intensive. This, given the magnitude and how long it had been going on in the back and forth, required a ton of work before the trial as well. So it pulled me away from the practice. I think it's been nice to go back a bit.

Okay. So now, personally, I've learned some things. I've learned that I need to slow down a little bit. So this took a lot from you?

It took a lot, but it was really the culmination. I feel like there are these hoops we jump through again and again, academic challenges that we continue to meet, and then there's a next one, and a next one, and a next one. And in the beginning, when you're getting into college or applying to grad schools, you don't really realize this is going to be a never-ending thing, especially if I continue with research or forensic work. I love it because it is so academic. You're writing these 75-page reports with citations, and you have to be accurate.

It feels like I'm doing giant board exams again and again and again. It never ends, but that feeling, I think you and I were talking about how it's fun to doubt yourself because it pushes you to do better work. But so if you keep having high stakes, you're going to work all the time, work yourself into the ground, constantly be thinking about, oh, this question, I'm not sure if I fully know the answer and all the research behind that, so I should go there.

And again, super fun, but I don't just do forensic psychology all day. I also own a clinic.

I provide therapy. I've been providing therapy for 15 years, so what happens is you have clients who maybe you've stopped seeing, but when they have a crisis in their lives, they reach out to you again even if it's seven years later. So you've accumulated hundreds of clients who at any given time are going to reach out when they're in crisis, whether or not you're working on a federal case or in Virginia for this, and that is never going to be something easy to grapple with because I feel that I am letting somebody down. I know I am because these are people I genuinely care about, and they care about me and they trust me, and I want to be able to be there for them.

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I know that it's disappointing if I can't be, and it's also very difficult to separate out the professional therapy relationship from loving someone who you've seen through some of the most difficult parts of their lives. And I can explain that to people all day long, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to be easy for someone to accept when I can't talk to them, and they just found out their husband was leading a double life or their sister just died, and I can't even get on a call because I am getting maybe 15 messages like that a day, and have to testify, and have to run my practice. So I think that was why I need to slow down. This case, I was doing all of that, and then the academic load or the work involved was just tremendous. And some stuff happened, like my dad, he started having his cognitive decline, I got a medical diagnosis that is stress-induced. I really thought I was getting away with it. I really believed that people who talked like a lot about self-care were kind of full of shit and just didn't know how to push themselves. I still believe in pushing ourselves, but I think I kind of traversed into an area without realizing it where I was no longer pushing myself to challenge myself or see what I was capable of. I was almost pushing myself as a necessity because I didn't know what else to do anymore, just an obligation. It wasn't even, I wasn't pushing myself to do, the debt herd case reminded me of that feeling of pushing myself to do something I wasn't sure I was capable of and overcoming that challenge. That was rewarding. But when you're piling that on with running a business and all these other things and trying to be perfect at all of them, that just starts to become a feeling of necessity and it's not healthy. That said, you somehow manage to hold it all together, to put forward a masterful performance and like you said, still take care of all these clients because you're the most important person in their lives for many of them. Is there a secret to that? Is there any hacks? Is there a... I don't sleep a lot. I don't get a... No, and honestly, it's not 100... It's a work in progress, right? I don't have an answer for... I wouldn't want my life to be any other way. I wouldn't have had the opportunity to work on this case if I hadn't established my practice and had outreach. I can't figure out which piece you take it out without it all crumbling, but I would love to have a little more downtime. It all works together and there's passion as the fuel that's behind all of it. That's probably the reason you haven't lost your mind quite yet. Maybe. Yeah, maybe, unless I mean it depends who you ask. What about the stress of just being in the public eye? Has that been difficult for you? That's a lovely question. Thank you for asking it because it is nice to talk to you about this because I feel like you probably understand it a little bit. That was something I was absolutely unprepared for. Like I said, I had no idea how many people were watching when I testified. I had no idea and I got off the stand. I staggered to the back room and truly thought about lying down on the floor because I was so exhausted. I'd been up studying all my stuff, terrified that I was going to forget some statistic about the MMPI too. It's going to be so great. It's great for me. It's going to be great for people to hear this that you're human. You're too flawless. That's extremely stressful for many, many hours. I wondered how you could sit there for so many hours and stay so focused and listen so well. It's so difficult. Well, I mean, I could talk about that too. The moment I came to almost like came back to my body and realized where I was and just wanted it to stop and felt like I was burning alive. I just was thinking, I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to do this anymore. Is this going to stop?

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And then another question came and I just had to get back to it. After I testified the first time I went in that back room, I might have laid down on the ground. It's kind of a blur. I mean, I might have. I do remember that Wayne Denison, one of the senior managing partners at Brown Redneck, who is a phenomenal guy and absolutely brilliant, I will be indebted to him for life because I trusted him. I trusted him and that made all the difference in probably how I testified. But he came in the back and he was looking at his phone and he said, you're on the cover of Time, something on Apple News. And I thought, I mean, I really, I thought he was messing with me. I thought it was his joke way of saying like I did great. You've worked with veterans. What is PTSD in that context? What's the landscape of psychological sufferings that veteran soldiers go through?

Well, if we're talking about combat exposure, you're seeing things you're not meant to see. You're seeing the worst of humanity, people harming other people. It's not natural for others to intend to harm us. It's not natural for us to harm others. And this dehumanization can occur that's so troubling and disturbing that people have a hard time living with it later. Or they just feel this ongoing anger. It depends. It depends on the trauma they're exposed to. It depends on whether their convoy was ambushed by weapons that were purchased from money that was given to this village from the US government. It depends on whether they did something that they have a hard time reconciling outside of war, now that they're back home into civilization. It depends on whether they lost a lot of their comrades and feel that guilt of being a survivor. And again, not everybody develops PTSD. It really, it's a mental disorder. It's serious. We talk so much about trauma and PTSD gets thrown around lightly when actually it's very difficult to meet the full criteria for that diagnosis. And many people experience severe trauma in their lives and only about 14% are likely to actually develop PTSD. It's an exception, not the norm. Traumatic stress is absolutely normal after something traumatic happens. You'll likely have nightmares, you'll likely have anxiety, you'll feel depressed because you're a human being and something abnormal

happened. But PTSD is a longer standing condition that is significantly impairing in a person's life. And I think we've lost that in some of the sort of narrative in society. It just everybody has PTSD. But no, you can have traumatic stress, you can be distressed, you can be affected by trauma and not have that particular diagnosis. PTSD significantly impairs people's lives. How do veterans, how do soldiers who suffer from PTSD or close to that kind of diagnosis begin to heal? What's the path for healing? Well, I will hand it to the military because I think in terms of working with their active duty service members, they really invest heavily in mental health. The US Department of Defense was one of the first to bring animal assisted therapy into any type of treatment in the early 1900s with bringing, you know, farming into certain hospitals and letting veterans help with the farms and brush the horses. And which is so advanced because now we have all this research on animal assisted therapy and how beneficial it is. And just looking in the eyes of a dog can increase your pain threshold and speed healing after a cardiac arrest, help people with dementia to ambulate more freely. It's incredible stuff, simple. And the military was ahead of the game on that. And I don't think that's changed. I did my training at a military hospital in Hawaii, Tripler Army Medical Center. It was phenomenal training. And, you know, our psych department, there was so much interesting research going on. We had, and it was so integrated. So you might not imagine that the military would be doing this,

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but we had an acupuncture department. We had a chiropractic department. We had a yoga section. We were doing yoga sessions there. I mean, anything that has evidence to support its efficacy was being utilized. And I think that's pretty cool about our government. They have a lot of funding, so I'm glad they're using it on that. The real challenge, I think, comes with the large scale need of the veteran population. And they slipped through the cracks. I know that the DOD had a campaign going where they were doing outreach to anybody who served, for instance, in the Vietnam War. The problem is they were trying to get all of these people assessed for PTSD, and it was great. Like, they were getting phone calls, mail. It was sort of saying, hey, we know that you served. Come on in or let's schedule you an exam with a psychologist and just see if you're owed benefits. The idea of it's great. The problem is that they outsourced to this third-party company. They're paying really low rates for a one-hour meeting with a vet, and you don't need to be specifically trained in assessing PTSD. And so you're getting these variations and opinions that are coming through. And I've had clients who, to me, who I've worked with for years who have clear combat-related PTSD, according to gold standard measures, according to my knowing them and observing their symptoms and how impaired they are, and it is clearly associated with combat, the content of their intrusive thoughts, their nightmares, etc. And they are having a one-hour meeting sometimes by phone with one of these psychologists who's been contracted by this third-party organization. That's not even enough for me to get through the first few symptom questions on the CAHPS 5 assessment for PTSD. But in that hour, the psychologist is saying definitively no PTSD. And it's been a travesty for some people, especially for those who need an advocate the most. It tends to happen to my veterans who are maybe a little bit less sophisticated and presenting or advocating for themselves, more humble, less, you know, the guys who need to deserve it the most, right? They're just getting passed over, and it's a maze. I'm not quite sure what the solution is, though, before. I mean, I've worked for government agencies. They're dealing, it's a massive population.

I love that the outreach is even happening and trying to get these guys in for assessment. I think we can criticize any system. I'm glad that system is even happening, but it still needs to be better.

So, I've got a chance to interact with a lot of soldiers that served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and now a lot of soldiers from all different kinds of nations in Ukraine went to the front. There's a bond between soldiers unlike any other. I don't know if you can speak to why do you think that is. On the opposite side of PTSD, there's a deep human connection. There's like a love for each other. What is that? What is that about war and combat that creates that kind? Well, you're seeing, we talked earlier about that vulnerability, right? So, I believe that combat, I believe that most survival situations strip away all ego. And really, I mean, there are a couple of different layers to this, but I have not served in war, so I want to be cautious here. But from what I know just about psychology and also from my own experience of survival type experiences, when you're with a group of people and all the ego stripped away, nothing else matters. The focus is on the here and now and a specific mission or your day to day. You can get really close. You're very, very vulnerable. And also, in my experience, the guys I work with who have served, there aren't a lot of people who understand what they've been through. Not only some of the unspeakable things they've been through in combat, but some of the things that they feel are

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unspeakable

about returning, especially if they are experiencing trauma. A lot of them, some of the things that service members with PTSD are the most reluctant to disclose is the feeling like they may not know if they love their children anymore or their wife, that they don't even know if they can love anymore, that they feel emotionally numb, that they want to kill someone, that they have a whole lot of racist beliefs and thoughts. There are a lot of things that can be associated with PTSD that aren't as clear or expected. And these guys don't have many people who understand it or they don't think they would. But a lot of their fellow service members do.

And so I'm going back to Ukraine and, boy, nothing makes, nothing makes, reveals the human condition in a more pure form than war. Especially the kind of war you get in that part of the world, especially the war in Ukraine, which is a very 20th century kind of war.

Brutal.

Well, like I mentioned in a few different ways, you're exceptionally successful by, I think, the best definition of success. You're doing what you love and you're one of the best people in the world that are doing it. And so what advice would you give to young people that look out to you that saw you in the trial, which is your most public facing thing, and are just looking, young people that are looking to find what they want to do with their life, career-wise? I love that question. What would you tell them? I'm going to tell them something my dad told me. He said to me, Shani, just pick anything. Pick anything. If you like it at all, studying it, just pick it. He was like, look, don't worry about the job. You don't even know all the jobs that exist. Pick something you like. You will make it your own. And that is exactly what happened. I like psychology. I was reading some self-help books. It's not like I had this calling where I, you know, looking back, I can actually create that story because I think now it makes a lot of sense that I do what I do. But I was lost and scared. I started studying psychology. I met a professor who was really inspiring, who wasn't even a psychology professor, but he was public policy. I stayed in touch with that professor. He is a dear friend still to this day. That was 20 years ago. We do research together in Mexico, integrative research with you know, public policy officials and environmental engineers. And I get to be the psychologist on the trip. I never, ever dreamed that that sort of stuff could happen. I didn't know about forensic psychology. I also want to warn anybody who's interested in forensic psychology

that it's not like you're like solving crimes all day and getting calls by the FBI. You are going to be sitting alone in your home office with your husband, bringing you like bowls of cereal and reminding you to go to the bathroom because you haven't gotten up in like 24 hours from the computer. And you're going to have papers all around you. And you're just going to write 75 dense pages with citations of like science. It's brutal. It's academic. But you're going to love it. But it's fulfilling. My friend, my friend Franny posted a meme of one of the girls from Glee that they're crying and saying like, I'm the happiest I've ever been. And she said it reminds her of when I try to convince her to do forensic site because I think her mind is perfect for it. You have to be strategic and thorough. But it's a slog. But it's wonderful. It's wonderful. The image of your husband bringing you cereal while you work on the 75 pages is maybe the most romantic thing I've ever heard. So we started on love. Let me ask one last question about the same topic. What's the role of love in this whole thing, in the human condition, in this whole

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experiment we've got going on on earth? I think it's all there is like that jewel song.

How does that go? I don't sing it. Don't sing it. Don't get it in my head.

Please don't sing it. So there have been some profound moments in my life where I feel like I am closest to kind of the truth of life or what it's all about. And usually there's this resonating sense of love and ease and love for myself, love for other people, sort of like it's all okay.

We're all okay. We're going to get through this. I liked what you said about the harm caused by the misinformation or negative things being said about you because you're right. It harms that bigger picture. I think it holds us back, takes us back from that truth. That there's a love that connects all of us and that if you remember about that love, it's all going to be okay.

I really hope it's going to be okay. Me too. I believe it would be. Thank you so much for talking today, Shannon. Thank you. You're an incredible person. Thank you for everything you do and for everything you stand for and from everything from your text messages to just who you are and for this amazing conversation. Thank you. Thanks for listening to this conversation with Shannon Curry. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description.

And now let me leave you some more words from Charles Bukowski. Sometimes you climb out of bed in the morning and you think, I'm not going to make it, but you laugh inside remembering all the times you felt that way. Thank you for listening. I hope to see you next time.