

Desert Island Dildos Transcripts

EPISODE 1: CHARLIE – DISABILITY, SEX WORK, AND TOXIC MASCULINITY

Quenby

Hello, and welcome to Desert Island Dildos, your friendly neighbourhood podcast talking about sex and sexuality. With me today is Charlie. Charlie, tell us a bit about yourself.

Charlie

Hi, I am a queer, disabled sex worker. I am a cis woman, although I'm always kind of surprised every time I look at my gender that I am actually cis. And I'm, I say I'm bisexual, but honestly, that's kind of shorthand. I'm sort of an elder, millennial - done loads of lefty activism type stuff. And I really like talking about sex.

Quenby

Awesome. And I would like to thank you for checking a diversity box, you are the first cis person we've had on this podcast. See, we're not cisphobic here! So what would you like to talk about?

Charlie

Well, I suppose I want to talk about like, disability and sexuality and the way in which disabled people are often denied access to our sexuality, and to the ability to be fully realised people. And to realise our sexuality in the way that we that we want to. I have ADHD, and I am pretty sure that I'm autistic, but I went through sort of standard schooling.

Quenby

I mean, I can relate to that.

Charlie

Oh, it's a fun time. And, and a friend of mine has been very involved in sex education in all sorts of environments, including in special schools. And the amount of sex and relationship education that is given to kids in special schools is awful. And it continues into adulthood. The sexual health clinic that I attend is very difficult to get to in a wheelchair. And once you get there, all of the counters are above my head height. When I'm sitting in my chair. They actually have a lowered counter that they used to use, but they don't use it anymore. And every time I've asked why I've never really got a decent answer. Getting into the rooms to get an examination is also very difficult. And every time I have gone for a te-, an STI check and I've said "Hi, I'm a sex worker", they look at my wheelchair and their eyes, bug out of their faces. But then also, there is one sex club in the UK that I have gone to that is accessible. One, the others all have, you know, steps and, you know, rooms with really narrow doorways, or, you know, there's one that even on the ground floor is on five levels, with a couple of steps in between each one and there's only one ramp. So yeah, it's extremely difficult to have a fully realised sex life. If you are a kinky ass motherfucker, in the UK. Sorry, I should ask can I swear on this podcast?

Quenby

Yes, yes, you very much can.

Charlie

So yeah, if you are kinky ass motherfucker in the UK, and you are in any way disabled, it's very difficult to to get your kink on

Quenby

A really good point you made, like I mean, sex education in this country, and pretty much every country I know is fucking abysmal to begin with. But like, I can only imagine it's it's got a whole load of other issues. When you're talking about sex ed for disabled people,

Charlie

yeah, there are loads of other issues. There is in general, a sort of attitude that disabled people need to be rather than to be guided and taught how to access their sexuality in safe ways. They need to be protected from it. Almost this idea that even though- even once we're adults, and over the age of 18, in terms of sexuality, often particularly people with intellectual disabilities are treated as though they're still children. And it is certainly the case that- Well, to start with sex and relationship education in this country doesn't have enough of a focus on on getting consent from

your partner on how to talk to your partner about the sort of relationship that you want to have, and the sort of sex that you want to have. that's particularly true in the case of people who grow up disabled, and people with intellectual disabilities whose sexual needs are often completely ignored. I have a particular story, which is from a friend of mine about a, a girl that was in one of the classes that she taught about sort of life skills and sex education, she was brought in. And she said that she and her boyfriend had been having sex. And of course, this triggered a bit of a panic. This girl was in her sort of mid teens. And because of the special school that she was at, there had been no education about pregnancy, or STDs. And all of a sudden, everyone was panicking. So my friend was brought in, and they ended up sitting down with this girl and discovered that, in fact, what she and her boyfriend had been doing was kissing. But because of the lack of sex education, she thought that kissing was having sex, because every time on a TV soap, that people are having sex, all you see is them kissing, and then it cuts to black and then later it said that they're having sex. So she didn't know what sex was. And so all of this stuff that had kicked into gear that could possibly have been traumatising to this girl, the STD checks, talks about pregnancy, all of this stuff had been completely unnecessary, and could have been, and could have been avoided altogether, if there had been decent sex education in the first place so that she knew the difference between having sex and having a snog.

Quenby

So you talked a bit about the response you get when you turn up for a sexual health clinic in your wheelchair? Is that something you get like across lots of areas of your life? Like I, I feel that it's definitely a cultural narrative that puts disabled as these tragic broken people who can only be serve as you know, inspiration? Or a dramatic point for able bodied people. So yeah, just how does that feed through into the way you're seen?

Charlie

Oh, I have a fantastic example of this, I am not going to name the creator because I know that he is embarrassed that he did this. Ummm, I was on a live chat with an OnlyFans creator, who is incredibly sexy, but also sort of was talking- is unusually tall, and was talking about how he enjoys the fact that being unusually tall, even when he has a AMAB partner instead of an AFAB partner. They are usually looking up at him. And so in the live chat, I put something along the lines of, "well, when I'm in my wheelchair, I'm definitely shorter than everyone. I'd definitely be looking up at you." That was flirting. I was flirting with him being like, "Hey, I'm short anyway. But when I'm in my wheelchair, I'm extra short, also being in a wheelchair, just the right height for some things. Mmm mmm mmm." Anyway, the response I got from this creator was, "Oh, yes. That must be really hard for you." So I was flirting, and I got pity. So that's one response, which is not uncommon, although that's the most egregious example that I can think of. Recently. And the last time that I went to the

STI clinic, was about a year ago after I stopped working because of the pandemic. And it mirrored many of my previous trips sort of go in and they're surprised. I have to wave my hand above the, the counter of the desk which is above my head height. The waiting room for the STI clinic is so inaccessible in so many ways. It's full of chairs that are put very close together, all facing a TV that is very loud. So it's inaccessible from a being on wheels point of view. And it's an accessible from an autistic and ADHD point of view, there's so much sensory overload in there, I can't even, I can't even. And also, the STI clinic is in a part of the hospital, where the- where it's obviously converted offices, it wasn't originally designed as a clinical space, because the corridors are narrower. And the doors are narrower than in spaces that are designed for everyone. Which means that all of the treatment rooms are a bit smaller, and they don't really have enough space for the doctor's chair, and the patient's chair and the Examination Table. And so when I arrive in my wheelchair, they panic. And I'm fortunate in that I can. I'm an ambulatory wheelchair user, I know exactly how long I can stand up for because my electric toothbrush times me in 30 second intervals. And by the third buzz at 90 seconds, I need to be sitting on the stall or I'm going to fall down. And so that's how long I can stand up for but it means that I can transfer on and off an examination couch, and the looks on their faces when I come in. And when I say- and the relief when I say that I can transfer lead me to believe that someone who came in who wasn't able to transfer by themselves and who did need assistance, would have a lot of difficulty in getting a proper examination and proper health care for their sexual health needs. And then when I say I'm a sex worker, as well, and they see that I'm fat and disabled. It's ... interesting, let's call it an interesting reaction.

Quenby

So what's been your experience of being a disabled sex worker with it= What's your experience within that industry?

Charlie

You'd be surprised actually, the number of disabled people who do sex work, because it is a form of work that is very much more flexible than most forms of traditional employment. In terms of my particular experience, I started out advertising myself online and going to individual meets with clients. And I found that the level of admin involved in that just the to and fro with emails and messages and setting things up, and then always having to find a way to get there in my wheelchair, navigate having my wheelchair at their location, and then getting back again, it was a lot. Now I'm very fortunate to live in a city that has what is called a sex Enterprise Zone, I think something like that. In any- in any case. in Sheffield, arou- in the area of Ataclif, there is a bordered area, which- in which brothels are not legal, but the council has made a policy of not pursuing action against brothels in this area. And it's also where the very famous Sheffield sex club la chambre is located. And there are several sex shops there as well. And after about three months of doing the freelance

stuff advertising online, I started working at one of the parlours and that is completely different to working freelance, there is no admin at all, you turn up and you see the guys who turn up. And so from that point of view, it's very much lower stress. The days are much longer but again, because you are sitting there waiting for who comes in the door. And despite the fact that I have chronic fatigue syndrome and I do need to rest a lot. My colleagues were very understanding and it was very rare that I ever had appointments back to back and wasn't able to get a rest. So that was- that was really great. And it meant that I didn't need to worry about the wheelchair because there was never a distance that I needed to walk, that I couldn't walk. And the clients were very understanding. So I said, "Yes, I can do this, I can do this, I can't do that." And there's always a way to make it work. There's always a way to ask the client, what they want, what they're looking for, and figure out a way to do that, that works with my disability. And I think it would be much more difficult to do that if I had not spent the last 10, 15 years being a fantastically prolific- a fantastically prolific slutt, and therefore having lots of experience in making sex work in many, many different ways. So there you go, sluttery as job preparation.

Quenby

I mean, I'm really glad you found that, a place of work, which- I mean, it sounds like they do more to make your work accessible to you than the vast majority of jobs anywhere.

Charlie

Yes. And my colleagues were really helpful as well, part of the work is obviously changing sheets after appointments, and most of the girls there would, would do that on their own. And the, the laundry baskets, and the clean washing was upstairs. But there was never an occasion where one of my colleagues wasn't willing to go upstairs and do and, you know, drop off and collect new sheets for me, and help me put them on the beds. And yeah, they were just really, really lovely, helpful, ladies.

Quenby

Yeah, I mean- I- I hope you can get back to that soon.

Charlie

Me too. I really miss having colleagues and I really missed the work as well. I think there's a tendency within activist spaces, to look at the state of toxic masculinity, and to write off a whole section of men. And it is true that quite a number of the clients that I had, through the brothel are men that I would likely not want to hang around with, in a social capacity outside of work. But the fact is, they are seeking out this company and this intimacy for a reason. They feel that it's something that they lack.

And these are the sorts of men who would never go to therapy. These are the sorts of men who feel that there are things they cannot ask of their wives and girlfriends, and things that they cannot say. And the exchange of money. And the fact of the status means that they feel able to say things to express things, to ask for things that they wouldn't in any other context, things that they need. And it may well be that they have a very long way to go. Before they understand that, you know, the way that they speak about women is not necessarily the best way to speak about women. But I think the first step along that road, is to meet them where they are, and to give them what they need. Because it's like how you can't go to the supermarket and expect to have a healthy trolley full of food, if you're hungry when you go because you're going to pick out the things that are going to satisfy you the quickest. You need to meet that immediate need before people are able to think about why they have that need.

Quenby

Yeah, because of course there's there's so many issues around men's mental health and intimacy stuff and like, obviously, toxic masculinity hurts women, but it does also do a huge amount of damage to men living under that system as well. It's an idea that also comes up when you look at things like care work and support work. It's like- it's not about like, "Oh, you're a good person. So you deserve help" Or "Oh, you're a bad person. So fuck you." It's- it's like you said it's meeting people where they are, and doing what you can to help them.

Charlie

I mean, don't get me wrong, I would not do this work if I was not getting paid.

Quenby

Oh yeah

Charlie

It is work, it is emotional labour. And it would be very nice if the government would acknowledge it as such, and, you know, enable us to get worker protections.

Quenby

It's kind of a case of making space for complexity, making- making space for like, nuanced understanding of these people who you might not like them as people but recognising that they are people, and they have this emotional, intimate need.

Charlie

Yeah, I think men are the forgotten victims of patriarchy. And I think that feminism has done a very good job of advancing the understanding that women are hurt by patriarchy. And I think the next big frontier, and this relates to the crisis of the rise of transphobia, is recognising that men are also victims of patriarchy. Not as much as women. But there needs to be an understanding that patriarchy hurts more than just women. Because once you cross that bridge, it becomes less important, you know, who meets the technical definition of being a woman, because we can understand that patriarchy and its complexity hurts those who are oppressed by patriarchy, and those who are part of the mechanisms of oppression. And that women may be complicit in their own patriarchal oppression. And that men may be upholding the structure of patriarchy without realising the ways in which it limits their ability to feel and relate to other people. And that's something that I come across a lot in my work.

Quenby

So if there's one thing that you could get everyone to understand about disabled people's sexuality, what would it be?

Charlie

Disabled people have as much right as anyone else to have a one night stand, and wake up, hung over, covered in body fluids, and go, "Oh, my goodness, I'm not sure that was the right thing to do. But hey, I had fun" without their friends, and the people who help on an everyday basis, deciding that this was a mistake, and they should never have the freedom to do that ever again. Because there is, I think, very much a sort of undercurrent when talking about disabled people, that they should be protected from making mistakes. And I don't know about you, but some of the best sex I've ever had has turned out to be with people who were massive mistakes. And that doesn't mean that the sex wasn't fun, I am still glad that I had it. And that is both before and after I acquired my disability. But having that kind of sex after I acquired my disability was very much more difficult. And there have been multiple occasions where I have been talking to someone really sexy. And then I have disclosed that I use a wheelchair and that there will be access needs that I have if we're hooking up, and all of a sudden they just disappeared, or they've said, "Oh my goodness, are you sure you should be on here?" And started talking to me in a very childish way. And in a couple of instances, having previously expressed no interest in it, they want me to start calling them daddy. And it's like- I've got no objection necessarily to have a thinking dynamic in which I call someone daddy. However, if the only reason that you've suggested it is because I'm in a wheelchair and therefore you think of me like a child. I'm not okay with that.

Quenby

Fetishize me on my terms, not on the wheelchairs terms.

Charlie

Exactly. I'm entirely okay with being fetishized for my questionable gag reflex and massive tits, but not as a pseudo-child because I'm in a wheelchair. That's not my kink.

Quenby

That's a really good point. I would like to say that currently nobody should be going out and having one night stand covered in body fluids there's a fucking pandemic on.

Charlie

Yes, that is a very good point. However, as soon as it is not medically contraindicated, I have several exciting liaisons lighted up,

Quenby

I can relate.

Charlie

Yes, I cannot wait to get back to being a messy slutty queer

Quenby

Oh God

Charlie

That happens to be disabled.

Quenby

I'm writing so much gangbang erotica and I think it's just cos I miss my friends.

Charlie

I feel like Boris Johnson is metaphorically standing in the way of all of this just by how shitty he responded to the pandemic this time last year. I am not okay with Boris Johnson, either actually or metaphorically standing between me and my partners

Quenby

There's that thing of like people who are "Boris Johnson is trying his best" like, Yeah, he probably is. That's the issue. If this- if this is your best, then why the fuck do you want to be Prime Minister? Thank you so much for joining me today Charlie before you go. I'm going to ask you a question. I asked everyone. If you were stranded on a desert island with an electricity supply specifically for sex toys, and lube and condoms to your heart's content. What sex toy would you want to be stuck on a desert island with?

Charlie

Well, this is a sex toy that I- I am very proud of how I acquired this sex toy. I applied for PIP twice the first time I got zero points. The second time nothing had changed. And I got the higher level for both components. And when I got the lump payment at the beginning, I decided that it was a necessary disability adaptation that I buy myself a fucking machine. So I have a fucking machine. And that would be my desert island sex toy. I love it. It's brilliant. It means that even when all of my muscles are hurting and my joints are aching, I can still give myself an orgasm which is- given that my pain cannot be treated by standard painkillers. an orgasm is by far the best painkiller and soporific I have thus far found. So that would be my desert island sex toy. A fucking machine paid for by disability benefits.

Quenby

That's a pretty good answer. I'm Quenby. If you want to follow me, you can find me @quenbycreatives on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. You can follow Desert Island Dildos @DIDildos on Twitter. Charlie, where can people check you out?

Charlie

Hi, I've been Charlie I am @fearlesskits, as in knitting socks on Twitter, and there's a link there to my blog, which is chronicallysexy. And I like to talk a lot about disability and politics on there. And occasionally, a little bit of TMI on my sex life as well.

