

# *Desert Island Dildos Transcripts*

## **EPISODE 5: AMY NORTON – ABUSE IN KINK AND POLYAMORY**

### **Quenby**

Hello and welcome to Desert Island Dildos, your friendly neighbourhood podcast about sex and sexuality. Joining me today is Amy. Amy, tell us about yourself.

### **Amy**

Hello. Yes, I am a sex blogger I blog at Coffee and Kink which is [coffeandkink.me](http://coffeandkink.me). I write about kink and BDSM and consensual non monogamy, and abuse and trauma which is connected with what we're talking about today. I am also a queer bisexual polyamorous ethical slut, swinger sort of. All of the sex things that's me. And I don't actually sound like this, Quenby has run my voice through a voice changing thing.

### **Quenby**

So, what would you like to talk to us about today?

### **Amy**

Yeah, so when, when you first approached me on the podcast I was like, I want to talk about kink and polyamory and abuse. Then I was like "oh shit that's really heavy isn't it. Is that going to be too much for a podcast about dildos?"

### **Quenby**

Well, obviously this isn't a podcast specifically focused on trauma, but I did want it to be a space where we could talk about this because trauma informs so many people's experiences of sex and sexuality and, in, in another project I run Cocktails and Fuck Tales, that is a space where I made a very specific choice where I didn't want to talk about trauma and sex, because I think it's important to have those spaces but when someone talks about trauma, in that context it very quickly dominates that entire space so this I think there's much more freedom to talk about these difficult topics and brings light on them in a way which doesn't force someone to listen to it if they're

not comfortable. So yeah, I think it's a really important topic, um, I'm very happy to have you on to talk about it.

## **Amy**

Thank you. Yeah, I need, I need to give a little disclaimer upfront, like I am, I am a survivor and I talk about this stuff a lot I write about this stuff a lot. I'm not a trained trauma specialist and I'm not a mental health professional, so I just have to put that disclaimer in there that anything, anything I say is my experience and possibly based on my research and things I've read and things but it's not, it's not coming from a professional perspective.

## **Quenby**

Also there are, this should have been posted with content warnings,. But just to reiterate, we're going to be talking probably fairly explicitly about abuse and trauma. If you're not in a place to listen to that please be kind to yourself and maybe give this one a miss for now. What do you want to talk about? Would you like to start with your experiences around this?

## **Amy**

Sure, yeah, I mean, I have many, unfortunately, which is what it is. So, I've been in two abusive relationships. I tend to talk a lot more about the second one. The first guy I was with long term, I mean I was 15 when I, no I was 14 when we got together, we were together for six years. He was sexually abusive basically pressuring me into things I didn't want to do, starting obviously when I was under age. He was a few years older. And that sucked, we had a really messy breakup and it turned very kind of emotionally abusive I suppose towards the end. But it was really, it was really the second one, but really like fucked me up. There was this guy I was with from we met when I was 19 we were together for 5 and a half years. When I was 24 he was 15 years older than me. He pretty much from the beginning systematically made me feel like I was going insane. It was, it was classic gaslighting psychological manipulation. Making me doubt my own reality, making me doubt my own perceptions. He was. He was never physically violent, and he was never, saying he was never sexually violent is complicated because I never felt at the time like I was being forced or pressured into anything, because there was so much, so many deep, deep layers of psychological manipulation and gaslighting going on. Looking back, I'm actually not sure quite what extent I was equipped to fully consent to what was happening in that relationship. But it was really the emotional and psychological stuff that was the biggest part of it. He was very very clever, the most brilliant mind intellectually of anyone I've ever met and that meant that when it came to psychological manipulation he was fucking good at it.

So yeah that was when I was 24. I am now almost 31 and I am still in recovery. I've been through a lot of therapy I've been on a lot of medication and did a hell of a lot of work myself. I'm very very fortunate right now to have two very supportive, and wonderful partners. Yeah, but I'm still, I'm still recovering from it and honestly I think I might always be in some way because I think abuse changes, permanently. And I kind of try to be okay with that. So yeah, that's my, that's that's my kind of experience.

### **Quenby**

Thank you for sharing. I know it's, it's hard to talk about these things, but I think it's so important that we do have these stories out there that we do start to destigmatise it, because I think it's such an important, it's such an important resource to help other people recognise these patterns. And also, it can be really helpful to like talk about it and work through it. So, again, just thank you for talking about it,

### **Amy**

And that's, that's, that's why I talk about it more than anything it's like, Yes, I partly talk about it because talking about it and being open about it and kind of owning those experiences is, is part of my healing process but much, much more than that I talk about it because I want other people to see, this happens like maybe some other, you know, 18/19 year old girl will read something I read and recognise her, you know, much older very charismatic, very manipulative boyfriend and be like, "oh shit". You know, if one person reads something and it resonates and it helps them to get out of a bad situation before it gets that bad, I've done my job.

### **Quenby**

It's something I think about a lot is whether we always have to carry this trauma with us. Because I've not been in your situation but I've got my own. I've got my own shit. And it's, I think this is always going to be a struggle trying to reconcile. "I don't want to be defined by this awful person, this awful thing that happened to me. But like there's no undoing it, learning to live with those scars.

### **Amy**

That's it exactly, I think that, something- I've been on the BDSM and polyamory scenes in some kind of- since I was 18 in some kind of way, and I love a lot of things about those communities and those spaces. But there's also a very real, very insidious dark side to those communities and those spaces they're breeding grounds for abuse if the wrong kinds of people get involved in them. So something, something I've said for a long time is that we- In BDSM in particular we are so

hellbent on saying kink is not the same as abuse. We don't wanna talk about the times when it is.

### **Quenby**

Yeah, absolutely.

### **Amy**

Yeah, and that's that that's the thing I'm all about kind of, I want to I want to rip the masks off these ideologies and say look, you know. No, these things are not inherently abusive Of course they're not, buy there are some things about these ideologies that allow anusers to act and be shielded and we need to talk about that.

### **Quenby**

Absolutely, and I think often there's kind of a mindset of "the whole world against us, the whole world doesn't want kink or swinging or whatever. So we need to close ranks and defend one another." And that can be a really dangerous thing in a community, and you see so much of the broken step, idea of- For anyone not familiar like it's the idea that you're walking up the staircase, and there's a broken step which if you tread on will snap and you'll break your leg, and it's like oh well, we just tell everyone to avoid the broken step and that's like. Well, maybe you should replace the broken step. So you know, you're noy putting people in danger by pretending the problem doesn't exist.

### **Amy**

Absolutely, absolutely

### **Quenby**

or not, not being unwilling to address the problem face on.

### **Amy**

Yeah so much. Looking back actually thinking about it. My ex was a real. He was, he was a missing step in some of the spaces that we were in together and I've actually recently, as in the last few months, reconnected with a bunch of people from the community that we used to be part of, that I used to be part of with him in the US that I essentially distanced myself over the years, until someone reached out to me and pretty much said "hey, we, we all know what he is and we believe you." There's this real sense of "Okay, everyone knows. Then okay, what do we do with that

knowledge?" And I see it so much on the kink scene, years ago in the city where I used to live there was a there was a guy who, as soon as I met him. I got the vibe, and anyone else who's, who's a survivor, or indeed who is, as a woman or is read as female by society will understand The Vibe. I got it. I know lots of other people did one of my friends had a bad experience with this guy that was like it was bad but it wasn't like actionable bad, and a couple of years later he ended up in prison for a very, very serious physical assault with his girlfriend. Everyone was going "oh my god who would have known?" and all the women in this community were like " hi we did. you just didn't listen"

### **Quenby**

it's the classic thing of like as soon as one person calls someone out, suddenly you get just a flood of people who are like, Oh well, actually this sort of thing happened to me. I didn't feel like I could talk about it, or even like didn't recognise it for what it was, because you know you're in a space where everyone's like, "Oh, he's such a good guy, he's such a good guy." It's a weird thing of your gut feeling is not infallible and it is not proof of anything, but it can be surprisingly helpful.

### **Amy**

Absolutely. And it is that, it's that intuition and I know what you said of course it's not perfect but it's, you have a response for a reason, and it's usually based on cues that tie into other experiences that you had, and we learn so early to discount our own intuition to discount our own discomfort, and to push that down and push that down and make others, comfortable, and that's where it gets really dangerous because it's almost like some something terrible and, like, undeniable has to happen before people will listen and even then they often don't. So yeah, that's sort of why- partly why I think it's so important that we, we have these open conversations in our communities. And a lot of the time we we just, we just don't. And it's to the point where people are silenced and incidents are brushed under the carpet, and it ends up as the whisper network is the only thing that you've got to protect people

### **Quenby**

and, often, as is the case of anytime you call anything out. Often you're given the sense of, oh, if I speak out, then I'm ruining this

### **Amy**

yes

## **Quenby**

ruining the good times for everyone else. No, the person who does this is ruining it for anyone else. You like drawing attention to the problem is not the same.

## **Amy**

Absolutely yeah we live in. We live in a culture often where it's not the person who perpetuates the abuse or the harm that is - hesitate to use the word punished because that sounds like punitive but that's not the way that I mean it - the consequences come down on the person who speaks out and reports it not the person who does it. And that's so pervasive and it's so harmful, and even, even in situations where, you know, best case scenario, people do believe you when they do listen, you still get this, this sort of constant stream of. "What could you have done differently?. You know, did you say no clearly enough?" The one I always get with my exes, "Well why didn't you just leave?" And I wrote a blog post about this about how it wasn't all bad because it's all bad you would leave. If it's, if it's just a relentlessly terrible all the time you would leave, but it doesn't work that way. Sometimes it's the opposite. And sometimes it's amazing, and sometimes they - and abusers, they know how to reel you back in and they know how to- and I was so off balance and so like not trusting my own perceptions and so convinced that I was crazy, of course, I wasn't going to stand up and just leave, and that's the problem

## **Quenby**

another factor which is often overlooked is literal fear of like "if I leave, what they fucks he going to do?."

## **Amy**

And statistically it's the most dangerous time. The most dangerous time in an abusive relationship is when you leave

## **Quenby**

I think another thing about the kink community that can lend itself to that is the way it's organised, it can you often end up with these sort of charismatic people in positions of power

## **Amy**

Yes

## **Quenby**

so people who organise events or a big issue that happens in rope is you get these big name rope teachers

## **Amy**

Yes

## **Quenby**

who have these huge reputations. I mean putting aside any conversation around power exchange in a kink context, that's just such a huge power imbalance

## **Amy**

Right absolutely

## **Quenby**

It is sadly it is is very often abused and when you're going up against someone with that level of social status. I mean, for anyone not familiar - some of these people. They're almost like cult leaders. They do have people who will just blindly follow them, regardless of what they do and, yeah,

## **Amy**

there's a person I'm thinking there's many, there's a there's a person I'm thinking of in particular within kink who I was warned about. "This person is dangerous" 11 years ago, give or take. Still around, was around for a long time before that, probably been doing this probably been doing this shit for like a decade and a half plus. The cult leader analogy is really good there's still this rabid following of people who just believe that this person can do no wrong. It really frightens me that these, these people have the ability to brainwash others. So effectively, that they can get them to just defend them and defend and defend them in the face of all evidence. To use another example, to take it completely out of the out of kink take it more towards the sort of polyamory non monogamy side of things so I feel I feel happy kind of naming this because this has been, this has been made very public. Franklin Veaux. Big, big name polyamory leader writer teacher educator, whatever. But now all of these people have come forward and shared the stories about the ways that he abused them and the ways that he harmed them. There's still, there's still people saying all "they're all, they're all liars, they're all crazy. They're all delusional" and that's frightening to me, in many ways, but it's particularly frightening that these, as I said that these these people have the ability to get others, not just their partners but their

community. So effectively, under their thumb that they just have people defend them, even in the face of all evidence to the contrary. And to go back to something said earlier, I think I think as well. There's a real problem in some of these communities that some of the some of the ideologies and some of the some of the accepted messaging that take hold within these communities are not necessarily abusive in and of themselves but can easily be weaponized in polyamory and in non monogamy, for example there's this real. There's been a real push in last few years for "you are responsible for you own your own shit. Do your work on yourself" which is fine and I think it's a decent message to a point, but in reality it's been taken by many people, not not just by abusers, by many people it's been taken to such an extreme. Now I read some of the polyamory, how to guide books that I read, you know, five years ago or 10 years ago, and i thought were brilliany. I read them now and what I see is a gaslighting manual. What I see is- what I see is an abuse manual because it's like you "you're not responsible for your partner's feelings they're responsible for their feelings if you're the one who's finding something hard but it's your it's your responsibility essentially to just squash your emotions until you feel okay with that." And I find that terrifying, and I've had that weaponized against me and I know so many people who've had it weaponized against. It's, it sucks

### **Quenby**

I think that connects to a really important point that these are subcultures with their own set of rules for our own set of norms and expectations, and when you're coming in as a new person. And this is very much a gendered thing, and not just a gendered thing if you are a pretty young woman, then you are in a huge amount of danger, almost, because you are coming into a place where you don't really know the rules you don't know your boundaries particularly well it's new and exciting. It's very easy to get caught up and stuff. And there are people who can take that excitement and that naivety and use it to gaslight, to use it to condition you to accept whatever they do, oh this is, how poly is done or this is how kink is done or this is how swinging is done.

### **Amy**

Absolutely. And I often tell the story when I think about this stuff because I think, I think it's relevant. So, when I was, I must have been 19 I went to my first munch with my boyfriend at the time, and a couple of friends, a couple of who were older and had been on the scene for a bit longer but but we kind of we kind of end up splitting up and talking to different people at this munch as you know, as you do. I got chatting to this guy who was probably, I don't know 45/50 Give or take i'm bad at guessing ages, middle age guy anyway. He was a very, anyone who's been on the scene will know what i mean, he was a domly dom. He cornered me in this, at this munch and just telling me all the stuff in explicit detail that I have not asked for about his like stable of slaves to use the language that he used. And essentially telling me but like he could teach me and train me, train me, teach me things and train me and



how I was new so I had to like learn about how it all worked. And I just remember looking around and like trying to, like my boyfriend was like at the other end of the pun, i remember just like trying to catch his eye. But, yeah, and later I later I kind of ran this past some friends who'd been on the scene a little longer like is that normal? is that okay. Is that how it is. They were like "No, that's what he did was really creepy. The way that he described behaving in his relationship sounds like super not okay. I was lucky in some ways that I had older, wiser, friends to turn to, people I could ask. but it's one example there were so many. I encounter them a lot less now, I mean I'm, I'm not meek and 19 anymore, I'm 30 and tell people to fuck off now. But I still see it, you know, people's people see a woman or someone living as a woman who is relatively young, and whatever and they're like, "oh, sub" they see the label on you and they're like, "oh you are obviously this", and like yes, I am submissive, as it happens ... mostly it's complicated. These communities still play out these patriarchal norms in so many ways, there's still this real assumption that if you're a woman if you're a young woman you are a submissive and if you're not that's still really subversive. And it's dangerous and I see it all the time with people who are new when you don't have the luxury of the sounding boards that I had that saved me from getting burned worse in that situation. Because I know there's so many young women, people of all genders, women in particular, coming into the scene and they're getting, they're getting hurt and they're getting burned and then and then leaving. And I don't blame them.

### **Quenby**

Yeah, when people come in as a shiny new thing. You can kind of see it sometimes it's just this fucking, there's almost a feeding frenzy of everyone who wants to, you know, be the one to introduce the new person to kink or to claim them

### **Amy**

And it's really scary, but actually, ironically, that psychologically abusive partner that I talked about was sort of one of those people in a strange way. Like when, when he met me. He very much told me that I was the exception, he was, he was in his mid 30s he was like, "I don't date teenagers, you know you're an exception, you're, you're special you're different - this that and the other". But actually, I wasn't at all, because in the end that it turned out that what he wanted was a steady stream of women, and he wanted them as young as possible as inexperienced as possible. I remember him I remember him like kind of scolding me because he was he was the second systmonline had sex with him like scolding me and I wasn't a virgin, because he really wanted to take someone's virginity and I was like the youngest person he'd ever been with. So I was like, the best chance he has like, "Oh, I'm really sorry I slept with someone 3 years before I met you

**Quenby**

That's a fucking red flag.

**Amy**

No kidding! And now I look back and I'm like, it's so obvious, but it's so obvious at the age of 30, with years of experience, it's not obvious when you're frankly very naive 18 year olds

**Quenby**

Yeah

**Amy**

But this charismatic older guy is telling you that you're special.

**Quenby**

There's a phrase from Terry Pratchett I love "Wisdom is gained from experience experience is often caused by lack of wisdom."

**Amy**

Absolutely. That's so good. So yeah that's that's really, that's really where I'm coming from with all of this, it's super complicated super nuanced there's no, there's barely any easy answers to it. And it's particularly complicated because abusers don't abuse everyone they meet, obviously, they don't always they don't, they don't start straightaway, they don't. I mean, maybe there's red flags from the beginning, but it doesn't get really awful from the beginning because we've got really awful from the beginning, no one would get invested enough to stay,

**Quenby**

Something I think is connected, there's a philosophy in kink. "Your kink is not my kink and that's okay". Again, I agree with the principle like there are things I am not into. Not many things I'm not into. There are some things which I'm not into. I'm not going to judge people for enjoying them. But what it's often used to do, is often used as a way of saying, "nobody can criticise me ever. anything I do is fine because it's my kink." I do not agree with that, I mean if you fetishize trans people, then your kink is not my kink and actually your kink is problematic. Or if you were into race play that's like, that happens in the context of the racist society. That's not as simple as your

kink is not my kink and that's okay. It's your kink is not my kink and that's problematic.

### **Amy**

Yeah, it's so true though like I broadly I subscribe to the whole your kink is not my kink but that's ok but actually, sometimes I don't think all kinks are okay I think there are some that are not okay. Or that at least can be engaged in in ways that are not okay

### **Quenby**

it's a case of you have to engage with this critically like, you can't just explain everything away by your kink is not my kink and that's okay like there is- you do actually need to fucking think,

### **Amy**

yeah, absolutely. and it's something that I've really, I mean, before we before we started recording. We were funnily enough, we were talking about discourses that come around again and again and again and one of the, one of the discourses that I'm so fucking bored of is can you be a feminist and a submissive. Obviously yes.

### **Quenby**

Uggggggghhhh

### **Amy**

But also, it's. But my actual answer is yes, but. And I'm saying this as a woman who is submissive, and is a feminist, that I feel like you have to engage with those things critically you have to- consciously, maybe it's what I mean. I'm very aware that some of the things I am into when it came to in a kink context as a submissive woman, are mimicking of problematic patriarchal structures. But the difference is the difference is consent the difference is informed. Informed Consent risk aware practices also engagement with them with. I mean I play with people of all genders but my, my primary partner is, a cis man, engaging with someone who also was willing to critically examine and critique those structures. At this point I just won't submit to anyone who isn't a feminist, it has to be so clear that it's almost like the line between reality and pretend - I fall very strongly on the kink is fundamentally a game of pretend for adults side of things, but for me the line between reality and pretend has to be so bright and glowing that I know that the other person is not going to use kink to justify shitty behaviour in real life.

## **Quenby**

Is there anything else you'd like to say about this?

## **Amy**

What I want to leave people with is, first of all trust your gut. Believe survivors, please believe survivors. And actually, not being abusive isn't enough, I think, as humans in society but as, as people engaging in subculture, and kind of alt sex communities like like BDSM or polyamory and swinging or any of any of those things. I think we actually all have a responsibility to make sure- to do what we can to make sure that those spaces are actively anti-abusive and that they do not- that we're not creating a space that enables abuse to thrive. Even if we would never perpetuate it ourselves, because creating a space where it can survive and fly under the radar and be excused is almost as bad as perpetuating it.

## **Quenby**

I think the only thing I'd add to that is, be aware of these communities you want to join are, they're not perfect, they're not utopias, they are made of people and people are fallible and we have all of the same issues that the wider world has. So don't get caught up. Try not to get too caught up in the hype,

## **Amy**

Yeah they exist within subcultures exist within the wider context of rape culture and patriarchy. And misogyny, racism, transphobia, homophobia and all of those, all of those structures they don't exist outside of that because they can't. Yeah, so any, any person or any space that claims to be a utopian place to be free to post things, be very, very sceptical of.

## **Quenby**

And often what but what they mean by that is, people know to keep quiet about this, because this is not a safe place to critically talk about it. I mean, I've written about transphobia in sex blogging and one of the common responses was. "Oh, we didn't have transphobia in sex blogging before you wrote these articles" no we fucking did. But like the weight was on trans people to shut up and not ruin the illusion that this was a utopia. So when you see someone saying, Oh, we don't have an issue of this. That's not true. It exists within the context of broader society. It exists within the context of the issues within broader society.

**Amy**

Yeah, absolutely, that's, that's it, we have to we have to engage with our subcultures, with an understanding of those power structures, those problems, not by trying to say that we exist outside of them because we can't

**Quenby**

thank you so much for coming on and talking about. Before you go, I'm gonna ask you the question I asked every guest. If you were stuck on a desert island with an electricity supply specifically set up for a sex toy. Plenty of lube and condoms, something to keep the sand out of the lube and condoms. What would you bring and why?

**Amy**

this is a very well equipped Island, very impressed.

**Quenby**

It's a very specifically equipped island,

**Amy**

it is my- this is such an easy question for me my desert island sex toy is the Doxy original, because it's just the best. I don't know what else to say because it's- because it's, it's, it's super powerful, and I love it.

**Quenby**

I am honestly amazed it's taken us till the fifth episode to get someone saying they'd bring their Doxy

**Amy**

Has no-one said the Doxy yet? There's me thinking, i'm being terribly unoriginal.

**Quenby**

I was really surprised. I was, I was thinking I might have some point institute a no more Doxies rule, just to keep it original but no suprisingly you're the first one, who wants to bring that.

**Amy**

But it's just, it's so it's so good. I'm going to be stuck on this island for a while right I might as well have a lot of orgasms?

**Quenby**

thank you so much for joining us. Where can people find you online?

**Amy**

You can find me at [coffeandkink.me](http://coffeandkink.me), and I'm also @coffeandkink on Twitter. I am -coffeandkink- on FetLife

**Quenby**

You can find me @quenbycreatives on social media, or you can follow the podcast @DIDildos on Twitter. Thank you so much for listening. We'll be back in a couple of weeks, until then, stay safe.

